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What Americans Think About Veterans and Military Service

Findings from a Nationally Representative Survey



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About This Report

This report provides nationally representative estimates of U.S. adults' perceptions of the U.S. military and veterans based on surveys administered in February and June 2022. The results presented are intended to inform national discourse and policy decisions about public perceptions of veterans and how those perceptions shape Americans' willingness to encourage military service. The surveys were conducted through the American Life Panel, a nationally representative panel of U.S. adults (Pollard and Baird, 2017). This report also draws on data described in an earlier report, *American Perspectives on Veterans: A July–September 2021 American Life Panel Survey About Americans' Support for Veterans' Benefits and Services* (Coe et al., 2021).

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Summary

Fiscal year 2022 was one of the worst U.S. military recruitment years on record, with all services apart from the Space Force failing to meet recruitment goals. Fiscal year 2023 saw similar shortfalls. The U.S. public's overall confidence in the military is likewise declining. Although the public still holds the military generally in high esteem compared with other major institutions, that esteem is wavering, influenced by such factors as the end of the war in Afghanistan, the increased polarization of the public, and heightened politicization of the military.

How do these trends in recruitment and confidence reflect public perceptions of the U.S. military? Do public perceptions of veterans and the U.S. military influence young people's decisions to join the military? We examined a selection of findings from 2022 American Life Panel (ALP) surveys to gather insights into how Americans think about these issues. The ALP is a nationally representative, probability-based panel of more than 6,000 members ages 18 and older who are regularly interviewed over the internet.¹ This report primarily presents findings from two surveys of the ALP: #586, conducted in February 2022, which asked about the U.S. military, and #591, conducted in June 2022, which asked about perceptions of veterans.

Key Findings

This report details public perceptions of veterans and the military and public willingness to encourage a young person to join the military. Public perceptions of veterans are overwhelmingly positive. Approximately 30–80 percent of respondents endorsed positive stereotypes, and only 3–20 percent endorsed negative stereotypes of veterans. Perceptions of veterans differ by respondents' age, political party identification, prior military service, family members' service, and race/ethnicity. Nearly one-quarter of adults believe that most Americans look up to members of the military, and only 4 percent believe that most Americans look down on the military. A majority of Americans (54.4 percent) would discourage a young person close to them from enlisting in the military, but a majority of Americans (61.2 percent) would encourage a young person to join the military via Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) or a service academy (i.e., as an officer). Nearly one-third (31 percent) of those who would discourage enlisting in the military would encourage joining via ROTC or a service academy. Holding more negative veteran stereotypes is associated with a lower probability of encouraging a young person to join the military and with a higher probability of believing that most Americans look down on the military. Democrats are

¹ For additional information about the ALP, see RAND Corporation, undated. Additional technical documentation about the ALP is available in Pollard and Baird, 2017.

less likely than Republicans to encourage enlistment but are no different from Republicans in encouraging joining the military via ROTC or a service academy. Americans who have served in the military themselves are more likely than those who have not served to believe that most Americans look down on the military.

Contents

About This Report	iii
Summary	v
Figures	ix
Tables	x
CHAPTER 1	
Introduction	1
Data and Methods Used.....	2
CHAPTER 2	
Public Perceptions of U.S. Veterans	5
Stereotypes About Veterans.....	6
Competing Stereotypes: Veteran Dichotomies.....	13
Summary.....	16
CHAPTER 3	
How U.S. Adults View the Military	17
Looking Down On or Up To the Military.....	17
Connections to Military Members.....	18
Military Connections and Perceptions of How Americans View the Military.....	20
Encouraging a Young Person to Join the Military.....	21
Summary.....	23
CHAPTER 4	
Relationships Between Veteran Stereotypes and Perspectives About the Military	25
Stereotypes About Veterans in Relation to Encouragement to Join the Military.....	25
Views of Veterans in Relation to Perceptions of How the Military Is Viewed by Most Americans.....	27
Summary.....	33
CHAPTER 5	
Implications for Research and Policy	35
APPENDIX A	
Supplementary Analyses	37
Abbreviations	43
References	45

Figures

2.1.	Percentage of Respondents Endorsing a Specific Veteran Stereotype	7
2.2.	Agreement with Positive Stereotypes, by Political Party Identification (%)	11
2.3.	Agreement with Negative Stereotypes, by Political Party Identification (%).....	11
2.4.	Agreement That Veterans Are More Reliable and More Hardworking Than the Rest of Society (%).....	12
2.5.	Likelihood That a Veteran Would Do Something Violent Toward Themselves (%).....	12
2.6.	Dichotomy Average Score (Scale of 1–10)	13
3.1.	Perceptions of Whether Most Americans Look Up To or Down On People Who Served in the Military (%)	18
3.2.	Frequency of Own Military Service (%)	19
3.3.	Frequency of Friends’ Military Service (%)	19
3.4.	Frequency of Family’s Military Service (%).....	20
3.5.	Likelihood that Respondents Would Encourage a 17-Year-Old Relative to Join the Military (%)	22
4.1.	Predicted Probability of Encouraging Enlistment, by Veteran Stereotype Scores	26
4.2.	Predicted Probability of Encouraging Joining the Military as an Officer, by Veteran Stereotype Scores	26
4.3.	Marginal Effects Estimates on Probability of Encouraging Enlistment	28
4.4.	Marginal Effects Estimates on Probability of Encouraging Officer Pathway	29
4.5.	Predicted Probability of Different Views of the Military, by Positive Veteran Stereotype Scores	30
4.6.	Predicted Probability of Different Views of the Military, by Negative Veteran Stereotype Scores	31
4.7.	Marginal Effects Estimates on Probability of Different Views of the Military	32
A.1.	Kernel Density Plots of Distribution of Dichotomy Responses	37

Tables

1.1.	Maximum Sample Sizes Available When Linking Across ALP Waves.....	3
2.1.	Agreement with Positive Stereotypes, by Group (%).....	7
2.2.	Agreement with Negative Stereotypes, by Group (%)	9
2.3.	Dichotomy Average Score, by Subgroup (Scale of 0–10)	14
3.1.	Respondents’ Perceptions of How Most Americans Feel About the Military, by Connection to the Military (%)	21
3.2.	Willingness to Encourage Different Pathways into Military Service (%).....	23
A.1.	Logistic Regression Estimates Predicting Encouragement to Join the Military via Officer, Enlisted, or Either Pathway (Odds Ratios)	38
A.2.	Multinomial Logistic Regression Results Predicting How Most Americans View the Military (Relative Risk Ratios)	40

Introduction

The 50th anniversary of the all-volunteer force (AVF), which was established in 1973, coincides with one of the worst years on record for military recruitment. After having missed fiscal year (FY) 2022 recruitment goals, most of the services experienced shortfalls again in FY 2023, realizing some of the main concerns of early opponents of the AVF (Beynon, 2023; Rostker, 2007).¹ At the same time, military propensity—the likelihood that young Americans will enlist in the military—and general confidence in the military are declining just as the number of veterans dwindles (Seyler, 2022; Kennedy, Tyson, and Funk, 2022).² More than two years out from the end of the longest war in U.S. history, these trends raise important and pressing questions about public perceptions of the military and uniformed service (White House, 2021). Based on newly gathered survey data, this report provides up-to-date insights into how Americans think about these issues. The results are intended to inform national discourse and policy decisions about public perceptions of veterans and how those perceptions shape Americans’ willingness to encourage military service.

This report is broken into three sections. We first explore the extent to which Americans hold positive and negative stereotypes about veterans and whether different subgroups in the population differ in their perceptions of veterans. We then present data on Americans’ views of the military and military service, specifically whether they would encourage a young person to join the military and how they think most Americans view the military. Finally, we present the results of analyses that examine the association between perceptions of veterans and views about the military.

¹ Aside from being staffed primarily through Air Force transfers, the Space Force is the smallest service branch and has an accessions goal of only 270 in the first six months of FY 2022, compared with the Army’s goal of 21,984 over the same period (Department of Defense, undated).

² It is important to note that the majority of those who do join the military come from the nonpropensed group. Propensity does not set the upper limit of the recruiting pool, but low levels of propensity may mean that the challenge of recruiting from the nonpropensed pool is greater (Ford et al., 2014).

Data and Methods Used

This report presents a selection of findings from multiple American Life Panel (ALP) surveys conducted in 2022. RAND researchers designed a set of questions asking U.S. adults about their perceptions of U.S. veterans and about their views of the U.S. military. The ALP is a nationally representative, probability-based panel of more than 6,000 members ages 18 and older who are regularly interviewed over the internet.³ We primarily rely on two surveys of the ALP: #586, conducted in February 2022, which asked about the U.S. military, and #591, conducted in June 2022, which asked about perceptions of veterans.

In the first survey (ALP #586), respondents were asked about their willingness to encourage a relative to join the military via enlistment (question 1) or via a service academy (e.g., West Point or the Naval Academy) or an ROTC program (question 2). They were also asked about how many close friends served in the military and whether they felt that most Americans looked up to or down on people who served in the military. Of the 4,587 people who were invited to take the survey, 2,463 people took the survey, for a 53.7-percent completion rate. In the second survey (ALP #591), respondents were asked about a set of 13 stereotypes (e.g., self-disciplined, aggressive, responsible)⁴ and whether they associated each one with veterans. They were specifically asked to select all of the characteristics from the list of 13 that they believed to be characteristics of someone who had previously served in the U.S. military (i.e., a veteran). They were also presented with ten semantic differential scales with dichotomous words at either end of the spectrum (e.g., villain and hero) and asked to rate where veterans fall. In addition, they were asked whether veterans were more hardworking and more reliable than the rest of society and how likely veterans were to do something violent to themselves. Of the 4,709 people who were invited to take the survey, 2,362 people took the survey, for a 50.1-percent completion rate.

For some analyses, we also linked these data with additional data captured in previous ALP surveys. Data from ALP #566 ($N = 3,088$) capture respondents' political party identification, and data from ALP #574 ($N = 2,038$) capture whether respondents ever served in the military or have a family member who has served. Table 1.1 provides a summary of the available sample size when linking these ALP waves. The cumulative linked sample size (n) listed across the top row in the table reflects the total sample when linking each data wave in sequence, using wave #591 as the initial wave and adding linkages to #586, #574, and #566, in that order. There were a total of 1,141 observations that were available in all four ALP waves. The values in the bottom triangle in the table reflect the pairwise linked sample sizes. For

³ For additional information about the ALP, see RAND Corporation, undated. Additional technical documentation about the ALP is available in Pollard and Baird, 2017.

⁴ The 13 stereotypes used in this survey were adapted from Latter, Powell, and Ward, 2018.

TABLE 1.1
Maximum Sample Sizes Available When Linking Across ALP Waves

ALP Wave	#591	#586	#574	#566	
#591		1,938	1,273	1,141	Cumulative linked sample <i>n</i>
#586	1,938				
#574	1,447	1,569			
#566	1,642	1,810	1,775		Cross-linked <i>n</i>
Total <i>N</i>	2,362	2,463	2,038	3,088	

example, there were 1,938 observations with survey responses to both ALP waves #586 and #591, and there were 1,810 observations in both waves #586 and #566.⁵

⁵ The sample size for the ALP is in line with, and even slightly larger than, other frequently conducted national panels. For example, Gallup uses samples of around 1,000 national adults (Gallup, 2010).

Public Perceptions of U.S. Veterans

Veterans have long been understood in symbolic terms: as model citizens, selfless heroes, or scarred survivors of war. These symbolic understandings, once institutionalized, can become mental scripts or stereotypes that shape perceptions, interactions, and even government policy.

Negative stereotypes can lead to stigma and discrimination, which is the behavioral manifestation of such beliefs. For example, if veterans are thought to suffer from war-induced mental illness, then individuals might avoid interactions with them.¹ But stereotypes do not merely shape the perceptions and behaviors of those who hold them; they can also affect the stereotyped themselves, culminating most problematically in self-stigmatization (Corrigan et al., 2002; Dickstein et al., 2010). Among veterans, the internalization of stereotypes can lead to alienation, mistrust, and suspicion (Ben-Zeev et al., 2012; Tanielian and Jaycox, 2008). Ultimately and especially worrisome, veterans might withdraw altogether from social relationships and suffer an increased risk of suicide (Wastler et al., 2020). Yet positive stereotypes might redound to their benefit. There is a general feeling of deservingness of respect and policy support from the public and government among the public when it comes to veterans, stemming from perceptions of sacrifice (Kleykamp, Hipes, and MacLean, 2018; Levy, 2007). Government programs are often couched in these very terms of sacrifice and deservingness of support, and the U.S. public is generally supportive of these programs (Coe et al., 2021). So, if veterans are understood to be a group with justified needs, public support to pay for programs and services will likely follow (Kleykamp and Hipes, 2015). Stereotypes, in other words, can have broad consequences.

Views of veterans are likely mediated by the institution that conferred the status on them: the military. It is often claimed, for example, that veterans of the Vietnam War were treated poorly and even neglected because of the unpopularity of the war, though the more recent experiences of Iraq and Afghanistan seem to challenge the general nature of this latter causal mechanism, perhaps because the Vietnam experience taught Americans to differentiate those

¹ There is substantial evidence of a public stigma against mental illness (Corrigan et al., 2002). While there is evidence that the stigma of mental illness leads to labor market discrimination (Hipes et al., 2016), the evidence is somewhat to the contrary with veterans specifically (see MacLean and Kleykamp, 2014, and Parrott, Albright, and Eckhart, 2022).

who make policy from those required to enact it.² The extent to which veterans represent and reflect the military and support its ongoing policies, meanwhile, is an open empirical question. One example of potential divergence between veterans and the military institution can be found in military families increasingly expressing concern about their own children enlisting rather than continuing to support the institution by encouraging them to join (Kessling, 2023). Despite the lack of clear and definitive conclusions, it is evident that the military and veterans are interconnected to some degree, so it is crucial to understand how Americans view both. The research in this report offers evidence and insights relevant to recruitment and retention of military personnel, to the postservice employment outcomes of veterans that are affected by the perceptions of hiring agents and employers, and to the perceptions of veterans by the public that shape their social interactions in ways that might aid or hinder their mental and physical well-being.

Stereotypes About Veterans

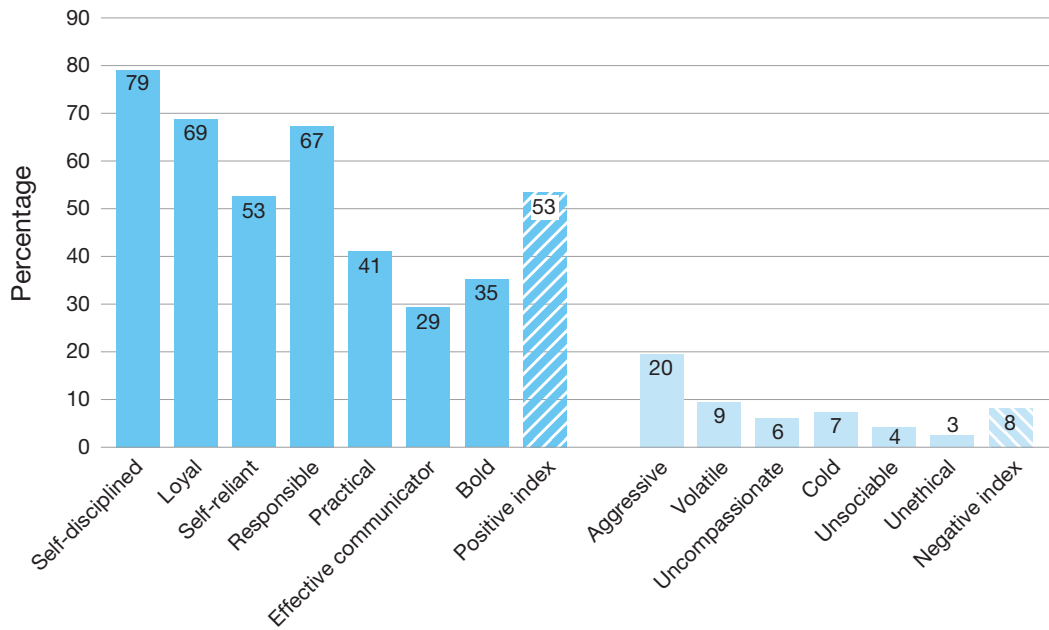
The ALP asked respondents which of the 13 listed stereotypes they considered to be characteristics of someone who previously served in the military. The seven positive attributes were *self-disciplined*, *loyal*, *self-reliant*, *responsible*, *practical*, *effective communicator*, and *bold*. The six negative attributes were *aggressive*, *volatile*, *cold*, *uncompassionate*, *unsociable*, and *unethical*. Respondents selected all of the characteristics that they believed to be applicable, and these responses were recorded into 13 separate binary variables coded as 1 if the characteristic was selected and 0 if it was not. We also constructed indices of positive and negative stereotypes, computed as the mean of each respondent's agreement with the positive and negative characteristics.

Figure 2.1 shows the extent of agreement with these stereotypes. Most respondents (approximately 50–80 percent, depending on the attribute) associate veterans with the positive traits of being self-disciplined, loyal, self-reliant, and responsible. There is more-moderate belief—between 30 percent and 40 percent of respondents—that veterans are practical, effective communicators, or bold. When it comes to negative stereotypes, 20 percent of respondents consider veterans to be aggressive. Less than 10 percent of respondents agreed with the negative traits of being volatile, cold, uncompassionate, unsociable, or unethical. Overall, the data suggest that there is relatively little support for most of the negative stereotypes about veterans and fairly widespread belief in most positive stereotypes about them.

These statistics might mask differences in stereotype endorsement among different subgroups in the respondent population. Views of veterans plausibly differ by sex, age, race/ethnicity, region of the country, political ideology, or personal connections to the military and/or service members or veterans. Table 2.1 presents average endorsement of each of the

² The debate here remains unsettled. For both viewpoints, see Greene, 1989, and Lembcke, 1998.

FIGURE 2.1
Percentage of Respondents Endorsing a Specific Veteran Stereotype



SOURCE: ALP #591.

NOTE: All estimates are weighted.

TABLE 2.1
Agreement with Positive Stereotypes, by Group (%)

	Self-Disciplined	Loyal	Self-Reliant	Responsible	Practical	Effective Communicator	Bold
Sex							
Female	80.4	68.0	50.5	67.2	36.8	29.0	36.9
Male	77.9	69.8	54.8	67.2	45.4	29.5	33.6
Age							
18–24	86.2	41.6	56.4	45.0	58.1	36.4	32.8
25–34	78.8	64.1	31.4	54.1	32.6	27.8	36.4
35–44	72.2	70.1	54.8	63.1	31.8	30.8	43.1
45–54	77.8	72.5	51.2	73.3	37.8	28.0	37.2
55–64	85.2	73.7	59.1	73.1	40.8	30.1	31.8
65–74	79.4	72.6	60.3	77.8	48.2	25.0	31.5
75+	78.3	76.7	69.8	82.0	61.3	34.7	29.6

Table 2.1—Continued

	Self-Disciplined	Loyal	Self-Reliant	Responsible	Practical	Effective Communicator	Bold
Race							
White	82.6	71.5	58.4	72.4	48.8	28.2	35.9
Black	71.4	62.2	44.6	62.8	20.7	26.8	27.8
Hispanic	71.8	58.5	42.9	55.8	28.0	31.7	37.7
Asian	77.8	72.3	40.6	47.3	22.1	34.3	43.1
Other	74.7	86.9	27.5	69.3	46.5	36.5	20.6
Residence							
North	74.4	70.0	45.6	65.9	30.8	24.9	30.0
South	82.0	69.1	55.9	67.0	41.7	36.4	36.5
Midwest	84.7	77.4	55.5	77.6	46.5	23.0	33.9
West	74.0	62.2	49.7	61.7	43.1	24.0	37.9
Veteran							
Yes	89.1	86.3	69.8	87.2	63.3	47.5	40.2
No	76.9	69.0	51.0	68.8	39.3	22.1	36.0
Military family							
Yes	80.7	72.6	59.1	74.3	44.1	26.0	36.7
No	74.4	68.4	43.5	65.3	38.7	23.5	36.2
Political party identification							
Republican	90.9	83.4	64.7	86.5	47.9	35.8	43.2
Democrat	72.4	61.5	47.1	61.1	34.8	18.9	24.7
Independent	74.7	73.1	57.4	67.7	47.0	27.6	39.9
Other	66.2	37.5	40.9	41.4	44.4	15.2	26.2
Not sure	77.1	67.9	55.8	69.0	43.7	27.5	46.9

SOURCES: Merged ALP #591 and #586 (sex, age, race, residence), $n = 1,931$; merged ALP #591 and #574 (veteran status, military family status), $n = 1,266$; merged ALP #591 and #566 (political party identification), $n = 1,425$.

NOTE: All estimates are weighted. Results in bold represent statistically significant differences across categories at $p < 0.05$, based on Pearson's χ^2 test statistic.

TABLE 2.2
Agreement with Negative Stereotypes, by Group (%)

	Aggressive	Volatile	Cold	Uncompassionate	Unsociable	Unethical
Sex						
Female	17.1	6.5	5.5	4.2	4.8	1.3
Male	22.4	12.5	6.7	10.4	3.4	3.9
Age						
18–24	48.8	31.5	8.0	31.5	2.8	5.0
25–34	23.2	12.3	12.0	10.9	8.9	3.3
35–44	23.3	15.4	6.4	7.2	4.6	6.5
45–54	14.3	3.5	7.1	4.3	4.2	1.6
55–64	16.7	4.5	2.5	3.6	2.6	0.2
65–74	11.8	3.3	3.1	2.2	1.5	1.1
75+	11.3	4.3	1.2	1.7	1.4	0.4
Race						
White	16.2	8.6	4.1	6.2	2.2	1.5
Black	27.1	5.6	7.0	5.8	7.5	1.3
Hispanic	28.2	16.9	13.5	13.9	9.7	5.7
Asian	24.3	3.5	5.1	2.0	1.8	10.1
Other	13.3	8.1	7.3	6.5	8.7	0.0
Residence						
North	22.9	7.5	8.1	6.3	4.3	2.2
South	21.4	10.3	4.8	7.7	2.9	1.6
Midwest	8.3	5.2	3.4	4.5	6.2	1.1
West	21.9	11.8	8.6	8.9	4.8	5.5
Veteran						
Yes	12.8	3.6	3.4	1.0	1.0	0.5
No	17.1	6.7	5.0	5.9	4.2	2.8
Military family						
Yes	14.6	5.7	3.5	4.5	3.0	3.0
No	19.8	7.5	7.0	6.7	5.2	1.7
Political party identification						
Republican	9.8	1.7	0.8	0.7	1.1	0.2
Democrat	20.8	8.0	6.9	8.6	5.6	2.1

Table 2.2—Continued

	Aggressive	Volatile	Cold	Uncompassionate	Unsociable	Unethical
Independent	17.1	9.2	8.5	8.1	1.8	3.9
Other	20.7	12.7	2.1	5.8	4.8	10.0
Not sure	13.5	5.6	12.6	2.7	6.8	0.0

SOURCES: Merged ALP #591 and #586 (sex, age, race, residence), $n = 1,931$; merged ALP #591 and #574 (veteran status, military family status), $n = 1,266$; merged ALP #591 and #566 (political party identification), $n = 1,425$.

NOTE: All estimates are weighted. Results in bold represent statistically significant differences across categories at $p < 0.05$, based on Pearson's χ^2 test statistic.

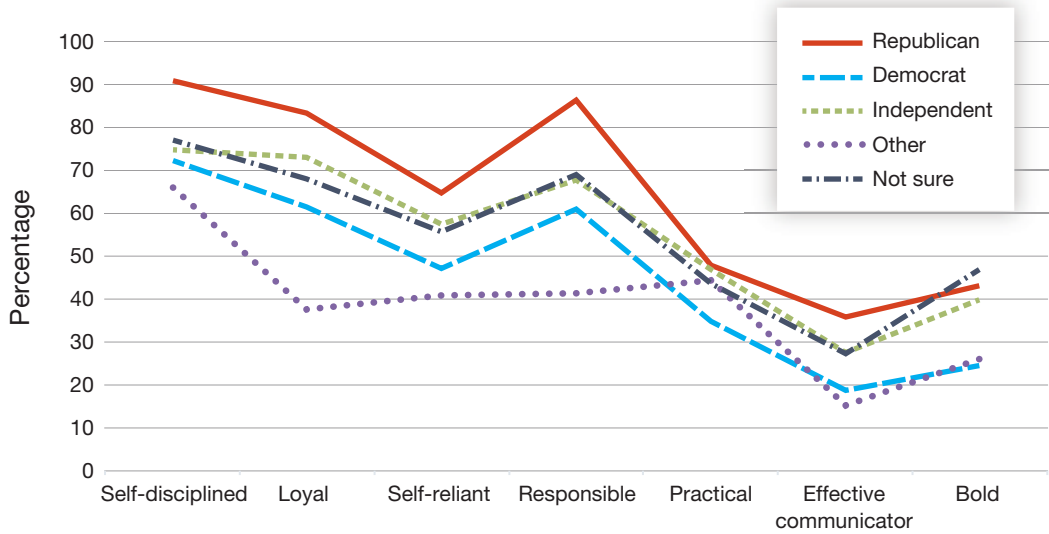
positive stereotypes broken out by subgroups, and Table 2.2 presents these same results for the negative stereotypes.

Group differences were not consistent for all stereotypes. The most-consistent and most-notable group differences are presented in Tables 2.1 and 2.2. In reading these tables, note that bold numbers indicate that a group (e.g., age) was a statistically significant factor in whether people had differing opinions about that particular stereotype (e.g., responsible). In other words, people of different age groups were statistically significantly likely to differ in their beliefs about whether service members were responsible, but age made no difference in whether people believed service members were self-disciplined.

Differences were found by age, with older respondents tending to endorse the positive stereotypes at higher rates than younger respondents and to endorse the negative stereotypes less frequently than younger respondents. Those who were themselves veterans endorsed the positive stereotypes more frequently and the negative stereotypes less frequently than nonveterans across most attributes. Political party identification displayed the most consistency: Republicans held more-positive and less negative views of veterans, and Democrats and those with other party affiliations held the least positive and most-negative views. As shown in Figure 2.2 and Table 2.1, Democrats were about 20 percentage points lower than Republicans in their endorsement of positive stereotypes, such as self-disciplined (90.9 percent versus 72.4 percent), responsible (86.5 percent versus 61.1 percent), and effective communicator (35.8 percent versus 18.9 percent). Democrats still viewed veterans largely positively on most of these dimensions. Differences in endorsement of negative stereotypes were smaller, as shown in Figure 2.3 and Table 2.2: 6.9 percent of Democrats and 0.8 percent of Republicans endorsed veterans as cold, and 20.8 percent of Democrats see veterans as aggressive versus 9.8 percent of Republicans.

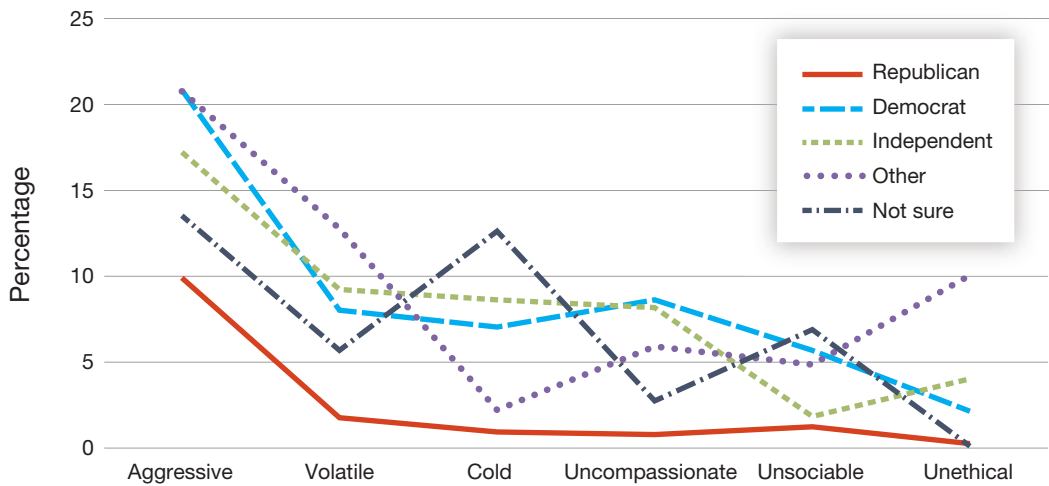
In addition to being asked to select from the list of 13 stereotyped characteristics, respondents were separately asked whether they thought veterans were more reliable and more hard-working than the rest of society and how likely a veteran was to do something violent toward themselves. The first issue reflects a typical claim in making the “business case” for hiring veterans, whom some argue may be better employees than nonveterans (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, undated-b; Davis and Minnis, 2017). The second reflects the concern that suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) might raise the risk of veteran suicide,

FIGURE 2.2
Agreement with Positive Stereotypes, by Political Party Identification (%)



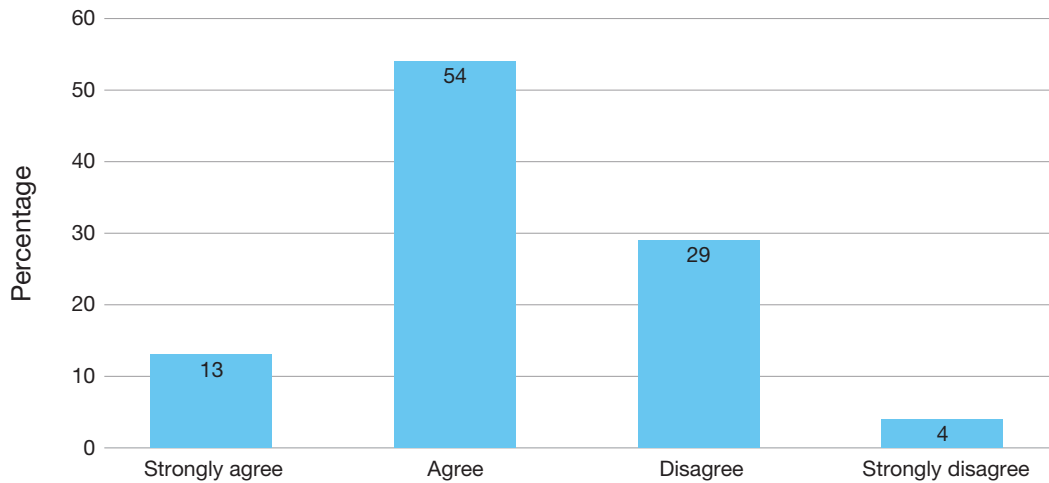
SOURCES: ALP #591, ALP #566.
 NOTE: All estimates are weighted.

FIGURE 2.3
Agreement with Negative Stereotypes, by Political Party Identification (%)



SOURCES: ALP #591, ALP #566.
 NOTE: All estimates are weighted.

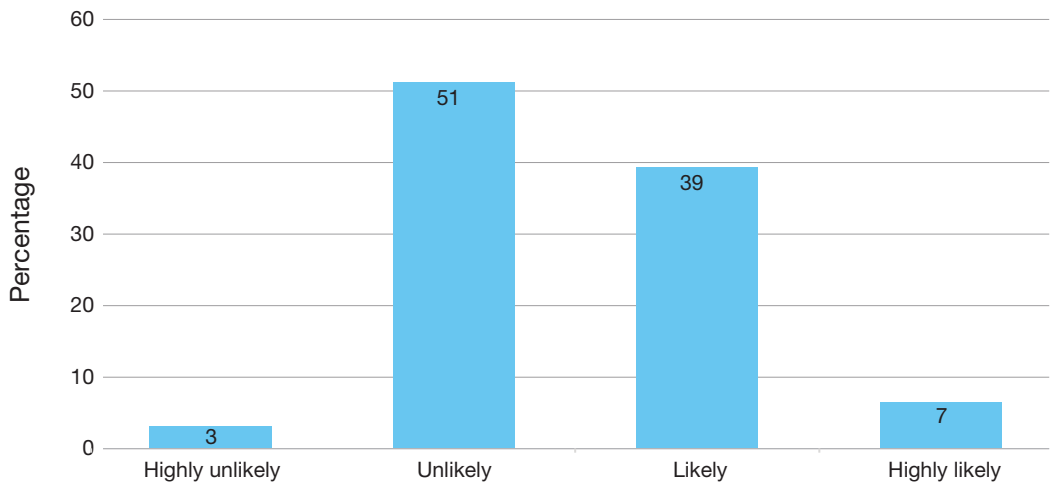
FIGURE 2.4
Agreement That Veterans Are More Reliable and More Hardworking Than the Rest of Society (%)



SOURCE: ALP #591.

NOTE: All estimates are weighted.

FIGURE 2.5
Likelihood That a Veteran Would Do Something Violent Toward Themselves (%)



SOURCE: ALP #591.

NOTE: All estimates are weighted.

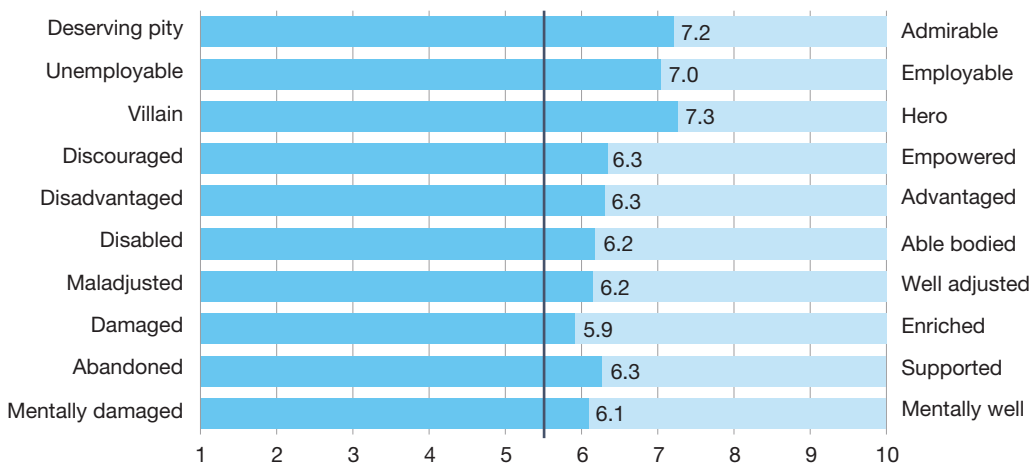
self-harm, or violence against others (Hipes and Gemoets, 2019). Approximately two-thirds of the public views veterans as more reliable and more hardworking than the rest of society (Figure 2.4). But more than 40 percent also think it is likely that a veteran would do something violent toward themselves (Figure 2.5).

Competing Stereotypes: Veteran Dichotomies

Veterans are sometimes subject to competing stereotypes, which we refer to as *dichotomies*. The ALP posed a series of ten dichotomies and asked respondents to rank where veterans fell on a 1–10 scale, with 1 representing the more negative side of the dichotomy and 10 representing the more positive side. Figure 2.6 reveals that respondents, on average, identified veterans on the more positive side of all dichotomies. The dichotomies of villain versus hero, unemployable versus employable, and pity versus admirable elicited the most-positive responses, averaging above 7 (out of 10).³ The least positive evaluations came from items asking about mentally damaged versus well and about damaged versus enriched, with averages right around 6. In both cases, however, the averages were higher than the midpoint.

Averages tell one story, but the distributions might tell another. Figure A.1 in the appendix presents kernel density plots of the distribution of responses to each item. These represent where respondents fall along the whole range. There are very few responses in general at the most negative extreme across all the dichotomies, indicating negligible endorsement of the

FIGURE 2.6
Dichotomy Average Score (Scale of 1–10)



SOURCE: ALP #591.

NOTE: All estimates are weighted.

³ The midpoint between the negative and positive ends is 5.5.

most-extreme negative views. Several measures, however, appear to have some bi- or multimodality, meaning that there might be clusters of responses right around and just above neutral. The measures with the highest averages (hero, employable, and admirable) tend also to show more uniformly positive responses with a relatively higher fraction at the most posi-

TABLE 2.3
Dichotomy Average Score, by Subgroup (Scale of 0–10)

	Pity– Admirable	Unemployable– Employable	Villain– Hero	Discouraged– Empowered	Disadvantaged– Advantaged	Disabled– Able Bodied	Maladjusted– Well Adjusted	Damaged– Enriched	Abandoned– Supported	Mentally Damaged– Mentally Well
Age										
18–24	6.5	5.7	6.9	5.3	4.9	5.3	5.6	5.1	6.3	5.8
25–34	6.6	6.1	6.6	6.0	5.9	5.4	5.4	4.9	5.5	4.9
35–44	6.7	6.6	7.2	5.9	6.0	5.8	5.8	5.5	6.0	5.2
45–54	7.7	7.5	7.7	6.7	6.6	6.4	6.5	6.3	6.4	6.5
55–64	7.5	7.5	7.4	6.7	6.7	6.5	6.4	6.4	6.5	6.6
65–74	7.7	7.8	7.5	6.6	6.7	6.9	6.7	6.6	6.7	7.0
75+	8.0	8.1	7.8	7.0	7.0	6.9	6.9	6.8	7.3	7.6
Race										
White, non-Hispanic	7.5	7.5	7.5	6.5	6.4	6.3	6.4	6.1	6.5	6.4
Black/African American	6.8	6.1	6.7	6.6	6.8	6.3	6.0	6.0	6.6	6.1
Hispanic	6.6	6.1	6.7	5.8	6.0	5.5	5.5	5.2	5.5	5.4
AI/AN/Asian/PI	6.9	6.6	7.0	6.3	6.0	6.4	5.8	5.8	6.0	5.6
Other, non-Hispanic	6.9	6.2	6.2	5.7	5.4	5.6	5.1	5.3	5.6	5.3
Veteran										
Yes	7.8	7.9	7.4	7.2	6.9	7.0	7.1	7.1	7.0	7.7
No	7.3	7.1	7.3	6.4	6.3	6.2	6.1	6.0	6.2	6.1
Military family										
Yes	7.4	7.4	7.4	6.6	6.5	6.4	6.4	6.3	6.4	6.6
No	7.2	6.9	7.1	6.3	6.3	6.2	6.0	5.9	6.1	5.9

Table 2.3—Continued

	Pity– Admirable	Unemployable– Employable	Villain– Hero	Discouraged– Empowered	Disadvantaged– Advantaged	Disabled– Able Bodied	Maladjusted– Well Adjusted	Damaged– Enriched	Abandoned– Supported	Mentally Damaged– Mentally Well
Political party identification										
Republican	8.1	7.9	8.2	7.0	7.0	6.9	7.0	6.9	7.2	7.1
Democrat	7.0	6.9	6.8	6.2	6.3	6.1	5.8	5.7	6.1	6.0
Independent	7.4	7.4	7.3	6.5	6.5	6.4	6.3	6.1	6.3	6.5
Other	6.4	6.5	6.7	4.9	4.9	4.9	4.9	4.6	4.5	4.6
Not sure	7.2	6.9	7.3	6.2	6.3	5.7	6.1	5.9	5.9	5.9

SOURCES: ALP #591 (dichotomies), #574 (military connection), #566 (political ideology).

NOTE: All estimates are weighted. Results in bold represent statistically significant differences across categories at $p < 0.05$, based on Pearson's χ^2 test statistic. AI = American Indian; AN = Alaska Native; PI = Pacific Islander.

tive extreme. Items with the lowest averages have peak densities just at or below the midpoint or neutral point of the scale. These were items centered around mental, physical, and social injury (damaged, mentally damaged, disabled, and maladjusted).

Table 2.3 reports each dichotomy item average by respondent subgroup. Generally, the same conclusions hold. There are significant differences across age categories across all dichotomies, with older respondents averaging more positive evaluations across all dichotomies. There were significant differences across groups on nine of the ten dichotomies, with Hispanic and other non-Hispanic respondents averaging lower than White, Black, and/or Asian respondents. White and Black respondents generally held similar average views, with averages within 0.4 points of each other. However, White respondents held especially positive views on hero, employable, and admirable relative to other groups, differing from other groups by 0.7–1.4 points.⁴ Veterans reported higher averages than nonveterans on all but two dichotomies, pity versus admirable and villain versus hero. The latter lack of statistical difference is worth noting, as there is a narrative in the veteran and advocacy community about how the media contributes to a hero-versus-villain narrative (Brooks, 2013). Military family members reported significantly different views from those without a family member in the military on four of the ten items, making this the least consistent correlate of views of the dichotomy measures.

⁴ As a reminder, *race* refers to the race of the respondent; veterans were referenced as a group without race being specified, and, therefore, these data do not tell us whether veterans from different racial or ethnic backgrounds are perceived differently from one another.

Summary

Taken together, these results reveal several important points about perceptions of veterans by the U.S. public.

- Perceptions of veterans by the public are overwhelmingly positive.
 - Approximately 30 percent to 80 percent of respondents endorsed positive stereotypes (across seven different measures), and only 3 percent to 20 percent endorsed negative stereotypes of veterans (across six different measures).
 - Average perceptions of veterans fell on the positive side across ten different dichotomies.
- Two-thirds of respondents believed that veterans were more hardworking and more reliable than the rest of society.
- However, 46 percent of respondents believed it was likely or highly likely that a veteran would do something violent toward themselves.
- Perceptions of veterans vary systematically by age, political party identification, own military service, family members' military service, and race/ethnicity, although family military service was statistically associated with only four of the ten dichotomies.

How U.S. Adults View the Military

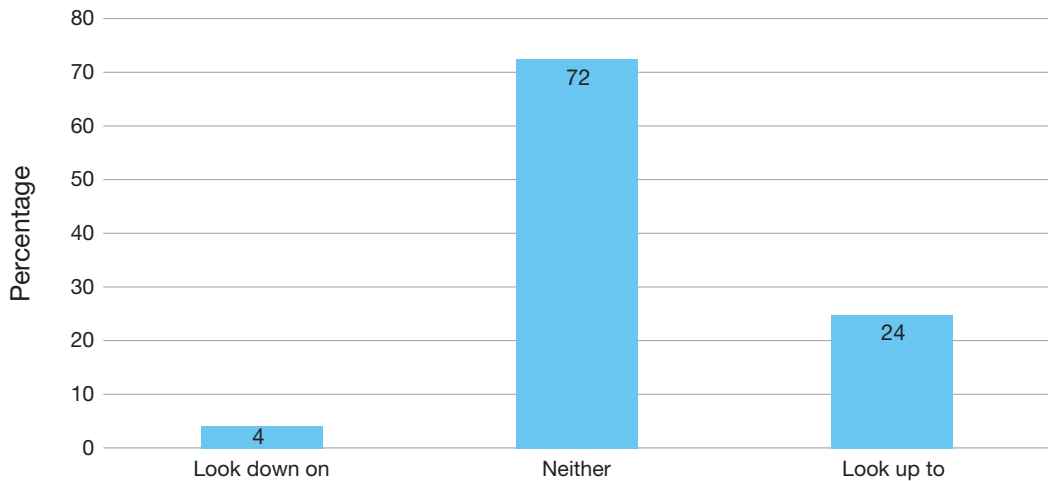
Because veterans are former military members, it seems plausible that stereotypes about veterans are linked with views about the military. In this case, how people perceive veterans might in part depend on how they perceive members of the military or the experiences of serving in uniform. It might also influence willingness to serve or to recommend military service to others. While the ALP did not ask about the same stereotypes about officers and enlisted personnel, it asked about overall sentiments about the military; personal, family, and friends' connections to it; and inclination to encourage someone to join up.

Looking Down On or Up To the Military

Confidence in all major institutions, including the military, was down in 2022. However, the military is still one of the most trusted institutions, second only to small businesses (Jones, 2022; Anderson et al., 2022). As Feaver (2023) notes, public confidence in the military is shaped by multiple factors related to the institution, including patriotism, performance by the military in its missions, its professional ethics, the political party in power, personal contact with members of the military, and public pressure. Dynamics around each of these factors have been shifting with the end of the war in Afghanistan, the increased polarization of the public, and heightened politicization of the military. So while the military is generally held in high esteem, that esteem is wavering.

Military personnel, as individual representatives of the institution, may elicit higher or lower levels of public trust, esteem, or respect depending on public perceptions of the institution they serve. As shown in Figure 3.1, nearly one-quarter of respondents believe that members of the military are looked up to by the population, and only 4 percent believe they are looked down on. More than 70 percent believe that military personnel are neither looked up to nor looked down on. There is no evidence to suggest that there is widespread negative sentiment toward those who serve. Whether these results are interpreted positively or negatively depends on expectations of how military personnel *should* be seen by the public. The majority of the public believes that there is little difference in how the public views the military and how they view the rest of the population.

FIGURE 3.1
Perceptions of Whether Most Americans Look Up To or Down On People Who Served in the Military (%)



SOURCE: ALP #586.

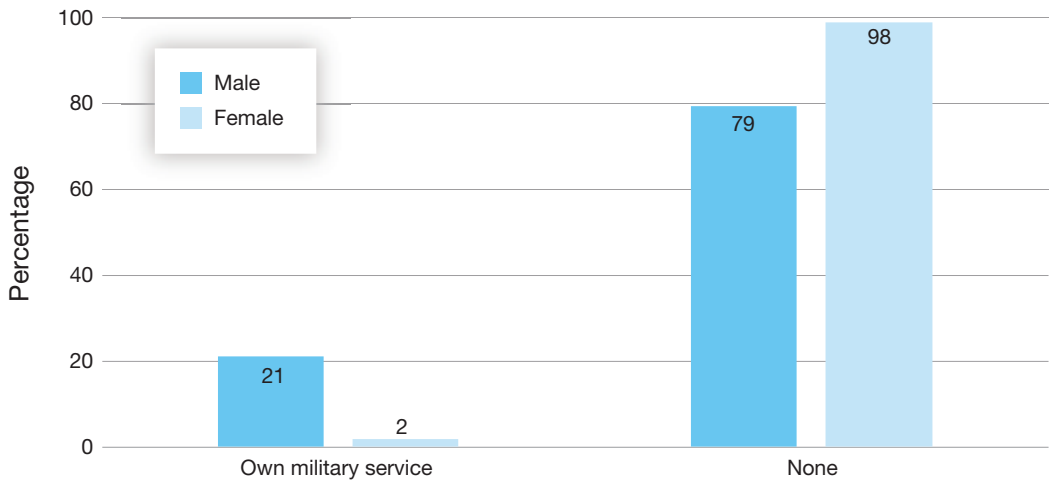
NOTE: All estimates are weighted.

Connections to Military Members

There is evidence to suggest that connections to the military influence one’s views of it (Feaver and Gronke, 2001; Margulies and Blankshain, 2022). With the AVF, military service is a more limited experience and not shared widely by the public; only approximately 7 percent of the U.S. adult population are veterans (Robinson et al., 2023). The ALP measured connections to military service in three ways across different datasets: whether the respondent (1) had served (ALP #574; Figure 3.2), (2) had friends who had served (ALP #586; Figure 3.3), and (3) had family who had served (ALP #574; Figure 3.4).

Although the number of women who serve has been rising, the military remains a predominantly male force, and, consequently, far more men report having served than do women (Robinson et al., 2023). In this sample, approximately 21 percent of men reported having served compared with less than 2 percent of women. It is not surprising that men are also more likely to have friends who served in the military given the gender differences in rates of service. Men were twice as likely as women to report that most of their friends had served; almost 11 percent of men and 5 percent of women indicated that most friends had served. However, nearly 30 percent of men and 36 percent of women did not have any friends who had served, suggesting some degree of interpersonal isolation from military members and veterans. Men and women reported similar rates of family military service; approximately 60 percent had a family member who served.

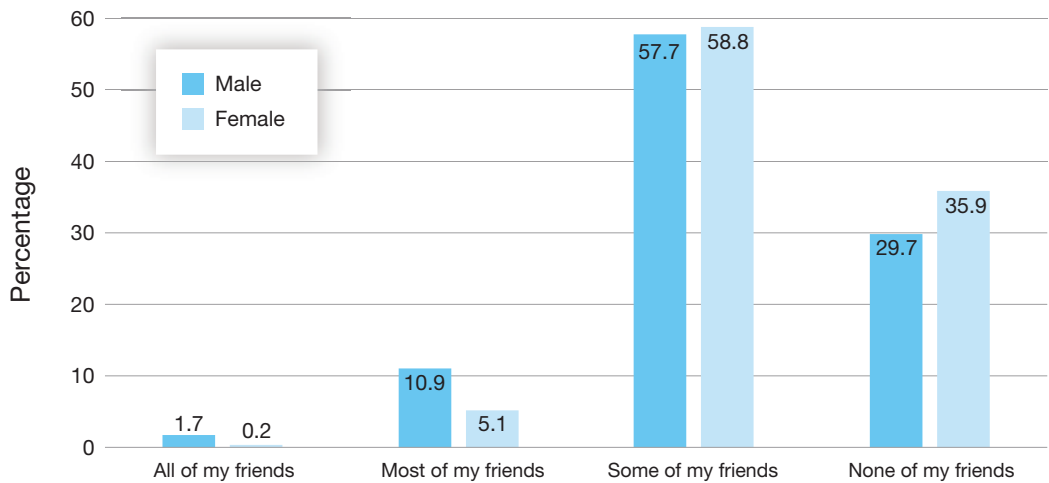
FIGURE 3.2
Frequency of Own Military Service (%)



SOURCE: ALP #574.

NOTE: All estimates are weighted.

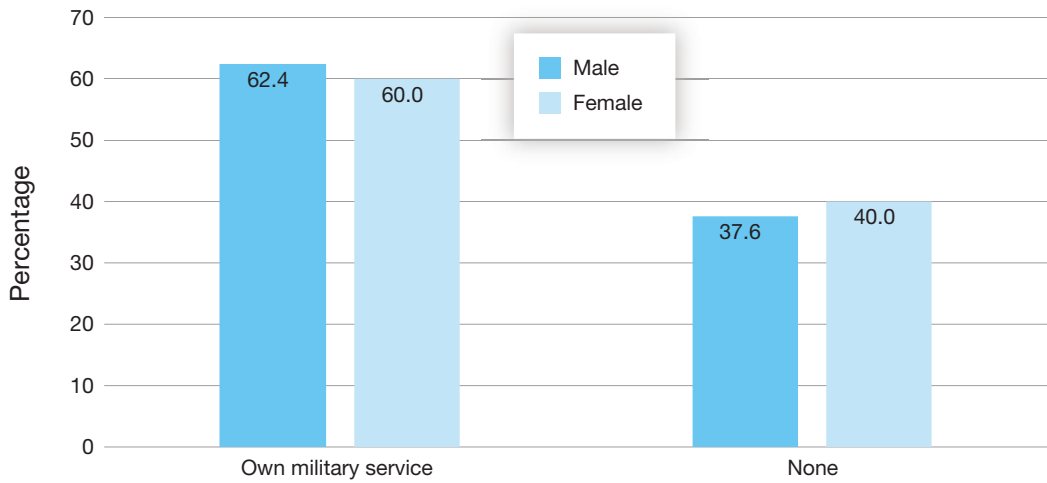
FIGURE 3.3
Frequency of Friends' Military Service (%)



SOURCE: ALP #586.

NOTE: All estimates are weighted.

FIGURE 3.4
Frequency of Family's Military Service (%)



SOURCE: ALP #574.

NOTE: All estimates are weighted.

Military Connections and Perceptions of How Americans View the Military

One's personal connection to and familiarity with military service and service members may shape one's perceptions of how Americans view the military, although these perceptions may vary based on topic, as evidence about views of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan did not differ much for family members (Pew Research Center, 2011). Table 3.1 shows respondents' perceptions of how most Americans view the military (not how they themselves view the military) according to the respondents' connections to military members. Those respondents who had family who served in the military were more likely than those who did not to believe that Americans looked up to the military and were less likely to believe that people were neutral in their views of the military. These differences were statistically significant. Finally, there was a curious pattern in the relationship between number of friends who had served in the military and perceptions. Those who reported that most of their friends had served were most likely to report that most Americans looked down on the military, but those who reported that all of their friends had served were least likely to do the same. Perhaps, those who reported that all of their friends had served were more likely to have served themselves, whereas those who reported that most of their friends had served had not served themselves. Those with most of their friends having served and those with none of their friends having served were least likely to think that Americans looked up to the military and were most likely to perceive most Americans as neither looking down on nor looking up to the military.

TABLE 3.1
Respondents' Perceptions of How Most Americans Feel About the Military, by Connection to the Military (%)

	Look Down On	Neither	Look Up To
No prior military service	2.7	22.2	75.1
Prior military service	8.3	15.4	76.3
No family military service	3.6	27.2	69.2
Family military service	3.1	17.8	79.1
All friends served	1.9	18.4	79.7
Most friends served	8.0	29.0	63.0
Some friends served	2.6	18.8	78.7
None served	4.2	33.3	62.5

SOURCES: ALP #586, #574.

NOTE: All estimates are weighted. Results in bold represent statistically significant differences across categories at $p < 0.05$, based on Pearson's χ^2 test statistic.

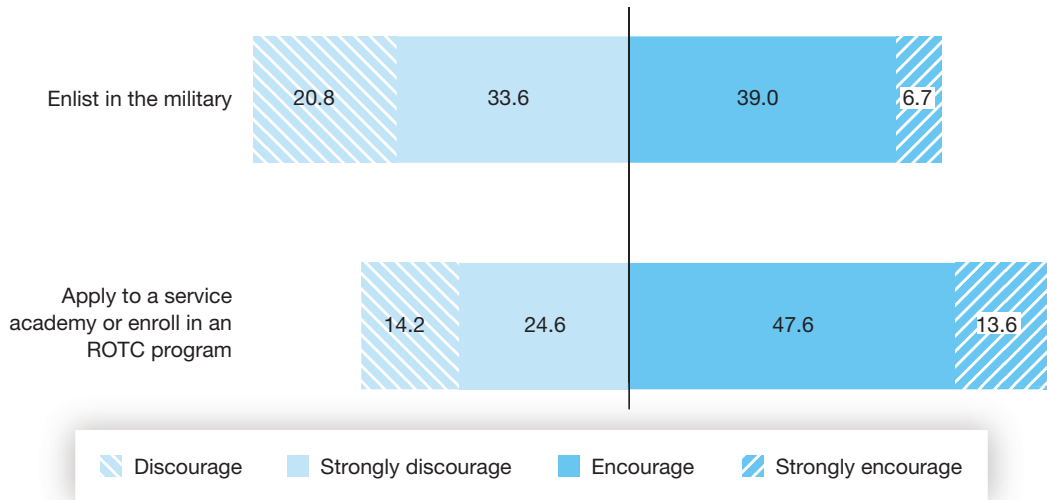
Encouraging a Young Person to Join the Military

It is one thing to hold military members in high esteem in the abstract, but it is something altogether different to recommend military service as a career path. Having an AVF means that serving is an occupational choice, one that fewer and fewer Americans appear to be willing to make. To gauge the public's willingness to recommend military service, the ALP asked Americans whether they would encourage a 17-year-old relative to join the military through enlisting or through a service academy or an ROTC program.

Figure 3.5 reports the relative frequency of responses. More people would encourage military service via the officer path (61.2 percent)—i.e., through a service academy or an ROTC program—than via the enlistment path (45.7 percent). This distinction is worth noting because it is not always made in other surveys.¹ This distinction between paths might be obscured depending on how the question is asked in other surveys, but it is critically important, as the differences we identify make clear. Approximately one-third of Americans would strongly discourage enlisting, and one-quarter would strongly discourage joining via a service academy or an ROTC program.

¹ For example, the JAMRS Influencer Poll asks, "Suppose [youth] asked for your advice about various post-high school options. How likely is it that you would recommend joining a Military Service such as the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, or Space Force?" (Office of People Analytics, undated-a), while the Pew Research Center reports on the "% saying they would/would not advise a young person close to them to join the military" (Taylor et al., 2011). More research is needed to better understand (1) what the public understands about the distinction between enlisting and joining via a service academy or ROTC and (2) whether the public generally understands the difference between officer and enlisted career paths.

FIGURE 3.5
Likelihood that Respondents Would Encourage a 17-Year-Old Relative to Join the Military (%)



SOURCE: ALP #586.

NOTE: All estimates are weighted. Percentages might not add to 100 because of rounding.

Given that there are higher levels of support for the officer pathway, we examined the intersection of these survey items on willingness to recommend service via enlistment or via the officer path to gauge whether different people would encourage one path but not the other. As Table 3.2 shows, among those who supported enlisting, 96.9 percent also supported joining via the officer route. Of those who would encourage enlisting, 3.1 percent would discourage the officer path. However, of those who would *discourage* enlisting, 31.1 percent would encourage the officer path and 68.9 percent would discourage the officer path. The ALP data did not provide any additional items to further illuminate why the officer path was preferred—whether it was to secure a free or subsidized college education or to incur a military service obligation after college completion or whether it was about the different career implications or quality of life during service. More research is needed to understand these distinctions between career pathways, as well as the distinctions among different service branches and the implications for how to sustain recruitment.

TABLE 3.2
Willingness to Encourage Different Pathways into
Military Service (%)

	Respondents Who Would Not Encourage Enlistment	Respondents Who Would Encourage Enlistment	Total
Respondents Who Would Not Encourage Officer Path	68.9	3.1	38.8
Respondents Who Would Encourage Officer Path	31.1	96.9	61.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

SOURCE: ALP #586.

NOTE: All estimates are weighted. Results are statistically significant at $p < 0.001$, based on Pearson's χ^2 test statistic.

Summary

Taken together, these results reveal several important points about perceptions of the military by the U.S. public.

- Nearly one-quarter of adults believe that most Americans look up to members of the military, and only 4 percent believe that most Americans look down on the military.
- Most American adults—62.4 percent of men and 60.0 percent of women—report having a family member who served in the military.
- Approximately one-third—29.7 percent of men and 35.9 percent of women—report having *no* friends who served in the military. However, nearly 60 percent of respondents had some friends who had served.
- Closeness to military service through one's own service, or family or friends' service, shapes perceptions of how most Americans are thought to view the military, although not always in the same direction.
- Most Americans (54.4 percent) would discourage a young person close to them from enlisting in the military, and 45.7 percent would encourage it.
- Most Americans (61.2 percent) would encourage a young person close to them to join the military via a service academy or an ROTC program, and 38.8 percent would discourage it.
- Nearly one-third of Americans (31.1 percent) who would discourage enlisting in the military would encourage joining via a service academy or an ROTC program.

Relationships Between Veteran Stereotypes and Perspectives About the Military

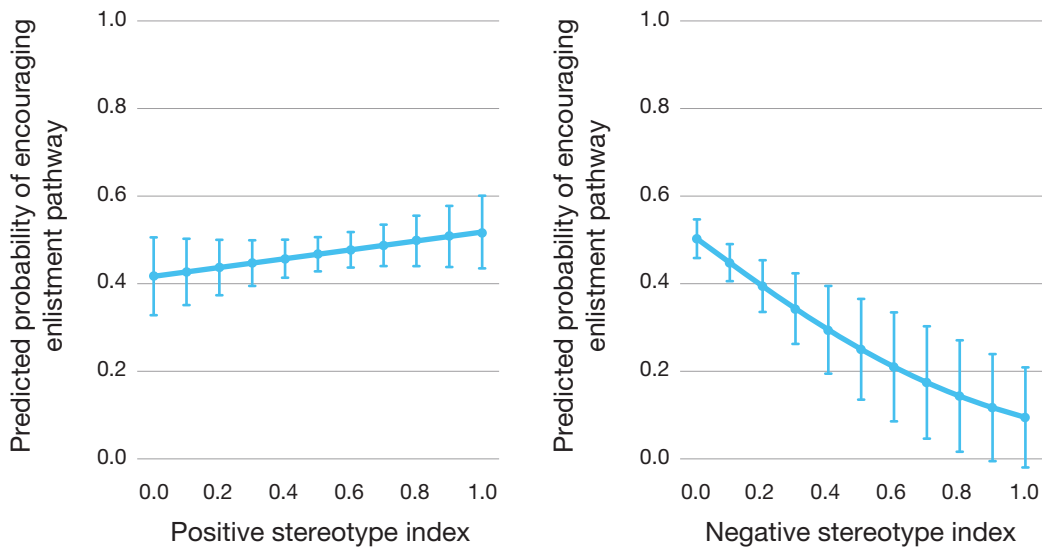
As concerns about military recruitment grow, it is natural to wonder about the role of two decades' worth of media coverage about veterans' challenges with PTSD, traumatic brain injuries, and challenges receiving adequate care from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Although the ALP surveys do not include detailed questions directly asking about this relationship, we examine associations between veteran stereotypes, willingness to encourage military service, and perceptions of how the military is viewed by most Americans, so as to motivate future research.

Stereotypes About Veterans in Relation to Encouragement to Join the Military

Table A.1 in the appendix shows the results of three logistic regressions of encouragement to join the military via an officer path (O), an enlistment path (E), and any (A) pathway. For each of the three outcomes, two models were run: One included only the positive and negative veteran stereotype index score, and the other added several social and demographic covariates that might be related to willingness to encourage military service and veteran stereotype endorsement. These covariates include sex, age, race/ethnicity, geographic residence, educational attainment, family income, own and family prior military service, and political party identification. Estimates are reported as odds ratios, with odds greater than 1 indicating a positive association with encouraging military service and those less than 1 indicating a negative effect on encouraging service. After these additional factors are held constant, the relationships between positive and negative veteran stereotypes and encouragement to join the military are weakened but remain statistically significant for encouraging military service via any path and via an officer path specifically. These relationships fail to reach statistical significance in encouraging enlistment as a specific path. Those who expressed greater endorsement of negative veteran stereotypes were less likely to encourage a family member to join the military via any pathway.

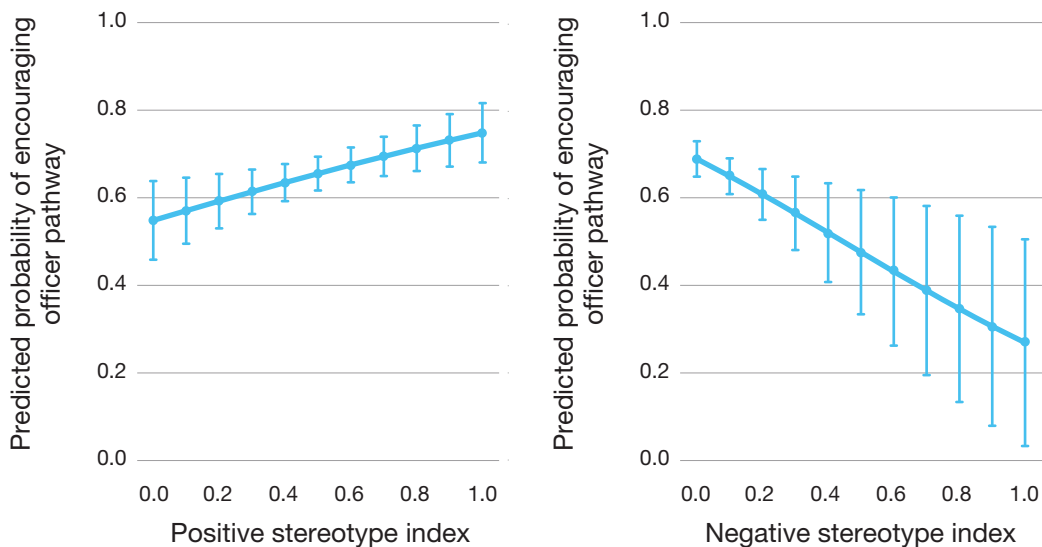
For ease of interpretation, Figures 4.1 and 4.2 visually represent the predicted effects of positive and negative veteran stereotype endorsement values on encouragement for joining

FIGURE 4.1
Predicted Probability of Encouraging Enlistment, by Veteran Stereotype Scores



NOTE: Each plot holds the other variable at its mean.

FIGURE 4.2
Predicted Probability of Encouraging Joining the Military as an Officer, by Veteran Stereotype Scores



NOTE: Each plot holds the other variable at its mean.

the military via enlistment and via the officer pathway, respectively. These predicted values hold the other variables, including demographic controls, at their means. Negative perceptions of veterans have a larger effect on likelihood to encourage military service than do positive perceptions, as evidenced by the slight positive slope in the relationship between encouragement for enlistment and positive veteran stereotype endorsement but the much steeper negative slope for negative veteran stereotypes. For example, increasing the positive stereotype score from the mean of 0.5 by one standard deviation to 0.8 would be predicted to increase enlistment encouragement only from 46 percent to 49 percent. However, increasing the negative veteran stereotype from 0.1 to 0.3, an increase of one standard deviation, would decrease enlistment encouragement from 45 percent to 34 percent.

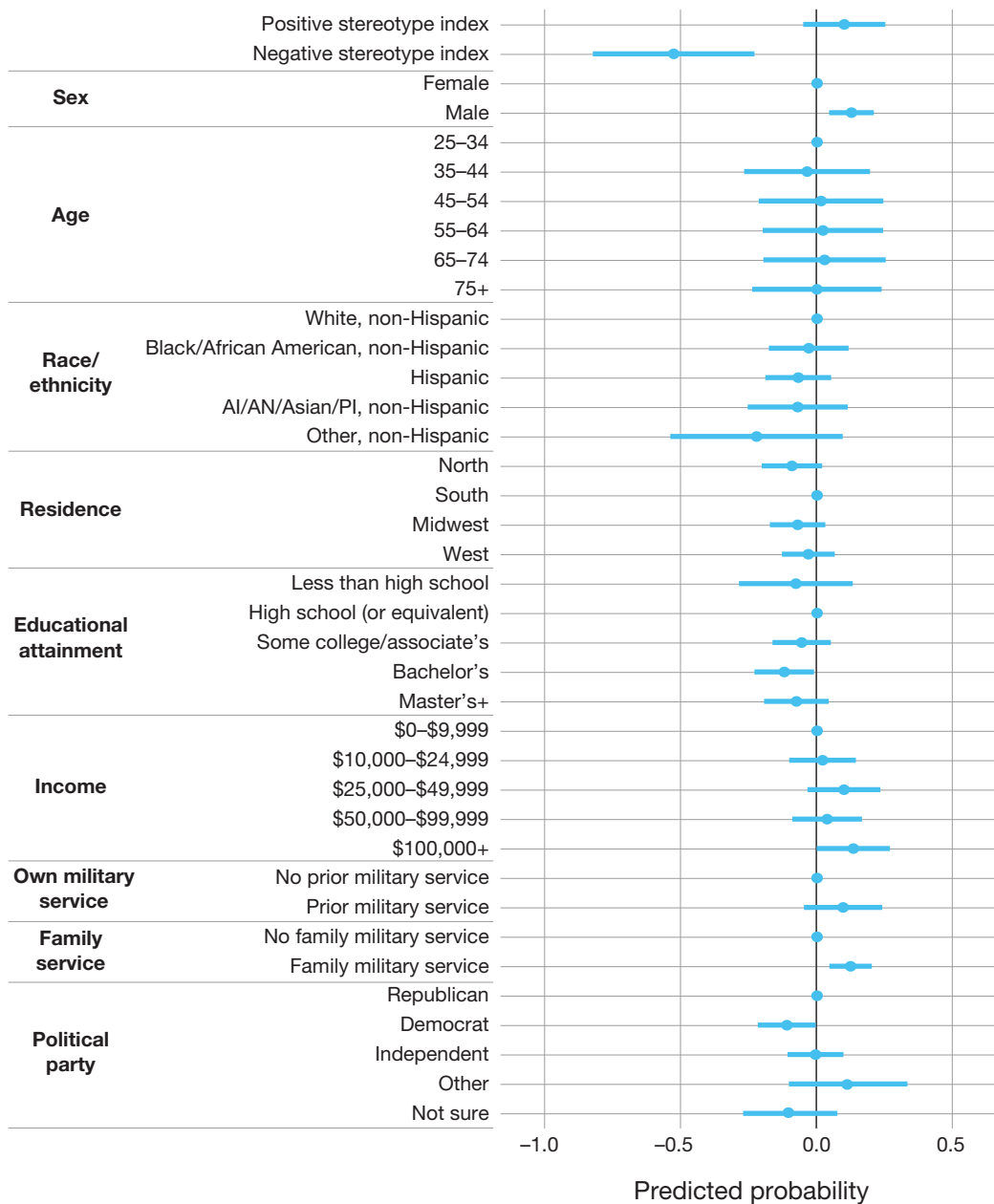
Following the same logic, models predicting encouragement for the officer pathway reveal similar findings. Increasing the average positive veteran stereotype score from the mean of 0.5 by one standard deviation to 0.8 would be predicted to increase enlistment encouragement from 66 percent to 72 percent. However, increasing the negative veteran stereotype score by one standard deviation, from 0.1 to 0.3, would decrease enlistment encouragement from 65 percent to 57 percent.

Of the sociodemographic controls, only gender and having a family member who served were consistently identified as statistically significant correlates of willingness to encourage military service via the enlisted or the officer pathway. Figures 4.3 and 4.4 present the estimated effect of each of the covariates on probability of encouraging enlistment (Figure 4.3) or encouraging joining as an officer (Figure 4.4). Men have nearly twice the odds of encouraging military service compared with women. (Unfortunately, we did not ask whether adults would respond differently about encouraging young adult men versus young adult women to enlist or join as an officer, though we hope to do so in future surveys.) Those with military or veteran family members had 1.7–1.8 times the odds of those without family military service experience of encouraging military service. Notably, veterans themselves were not statistically more likely to encourage military service than nonveterans once attitudes toward veteran stereotypes were held constant. Democrats were less likely to encourage enlistment than Republicans but were not different from Republicans on encouraging the officer path into military service.

Views of Veterans in Relation to Perceptions of How the Military Is Viewed by Most Americans

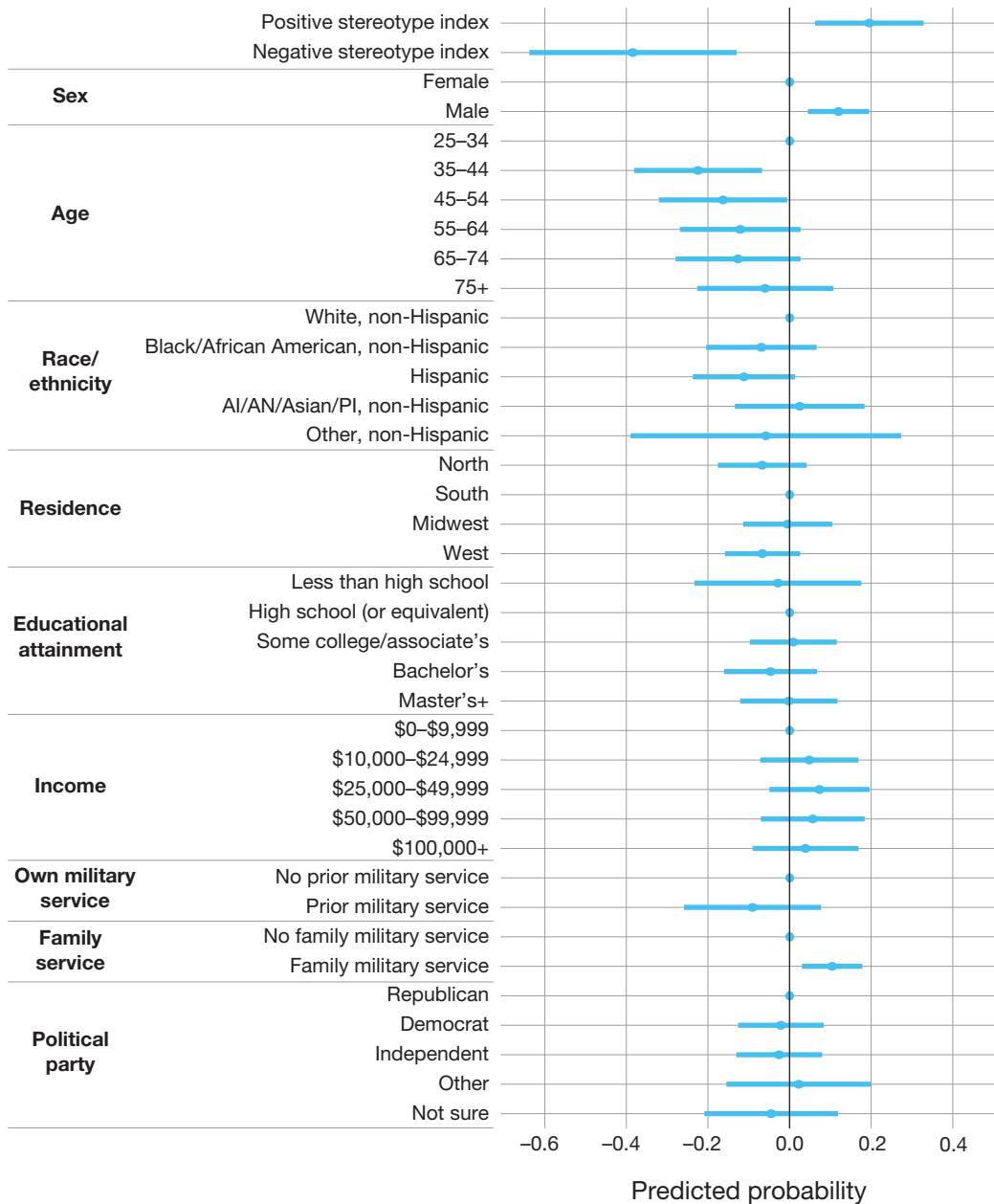
Table A.2 in the appendix reports the results of a single multinomial logistic regression model that predicts how the respondent thinks most Americans view the military based on the two veteran stereotype index scores and the same sociodemographic controls used in the prior analysis. Multinomial logistic regression is similar to logistic regression, except that it models an outcome with more than two categorical outcomes. The outcome response categories are *look down on the military*; *neither look down on nor look up to*; and *look up to the military*. The

FIGURE 4.3
Marginal Effects Estimates on Probability of Encouraging Enlistment



NOTE: The average effect on probability of encouragement relative to the baseline category is indicated by the dots, and the range of plausible values is reflected by the lines. Any lines that cross the line at 0.0 reflect results that do not meet statistical significance. That is, the effect of that variable could be zero. AI = American Indian; AN = Alaska Native; PI = Pacific Islander.

FIGURE 4.4
Marginal Effects Estimates on Probability of Encouraging Officer Pathway

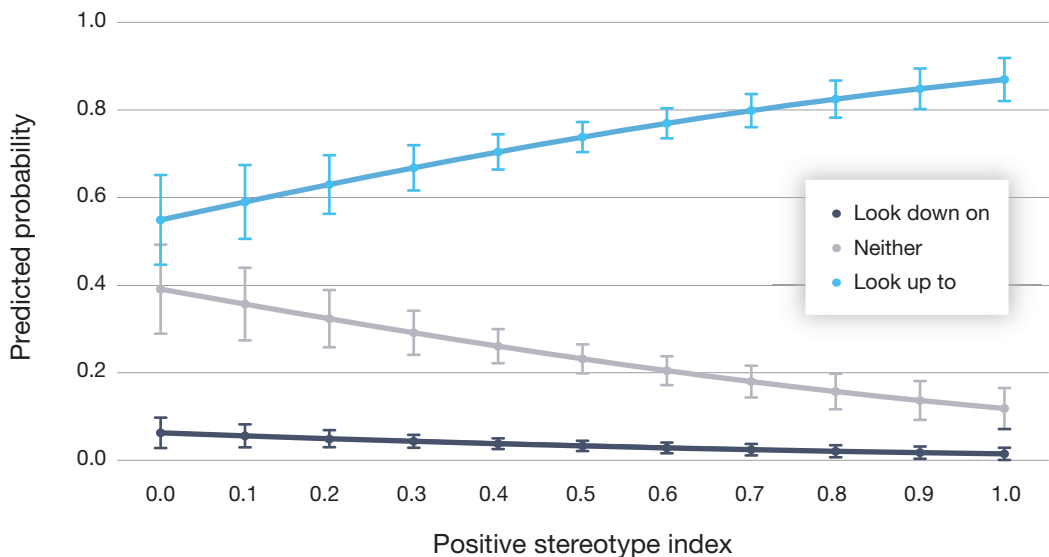


NOTE: The average effect on probability of encouragement relative to the baseline category is indicated by the dots, and the range of plausible values is reflected by the lines. Any lines that cross the line at 0.0 reflect results that do not meet statistical significance. That is, the effect of that variable could be zero. AI = American Indian; AN = Alaska Native; PI = Pacific Islander.

tabular results present relative risk ratios (similar to odds ratios) of each outcome relative to choosing “neither,” which we refer to as being neutral.

For example, Americans with higher endorsement of positive veteran stereotypes are more likely to report that most Americans look up to the military relative to being neutral. Those with higher endorsement of negative veteran stereotypes are more likely to report that most Americans look down on the military, relative to being neutral, once other characteristics are controlled. Of those controls, older respondents are less likely to believe that most Americans look down on or up to the military and are more likely to believe that they are neutral. Those who are themselves veterans are more likely to believe that most Americans look down on the military relative to being neutral. This last finding is noteworthy and is suggestive of a civil-military divide in perceptions and meaning-making around those perceptions. That is, those who have closer connections to the military institution may have experienced some form of negative engagement with the public, leading to a belief that the public looks down on the military, or may have had both positive and negative interactions and responded more strongly to the negative ones. Or it may be that those closest to the military have inflated perceptions of how much the public ought to look up to the military and perceive the public’s views to be more negative as a result. Or there may be different political or social cultures not shared between military-connected and civilian populations in the United States that require more research to understand.

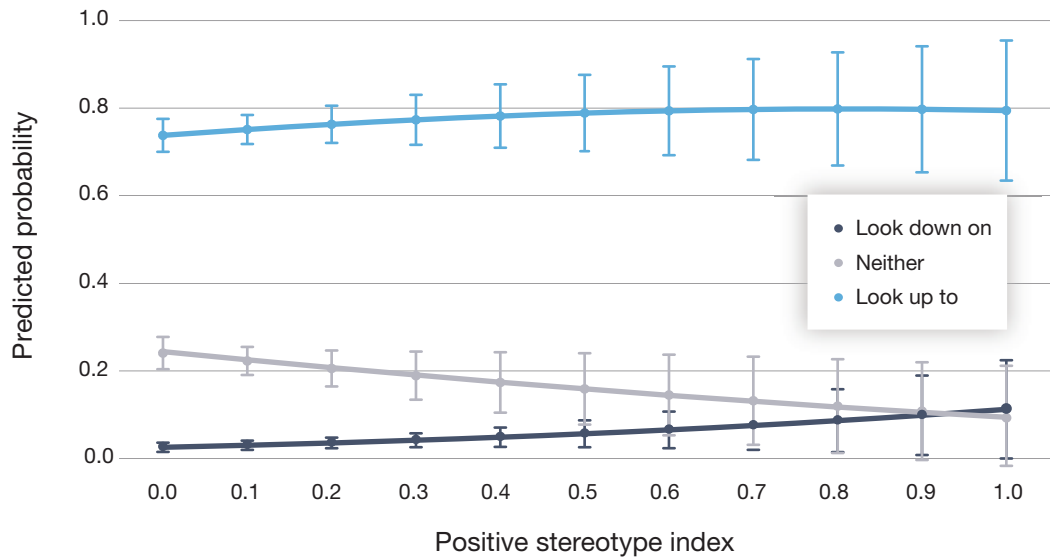
FIGURE 4.5
Predicted Probability of Different Views of the Military, by Positive Veteran Stereotype Scores



NOTE: The figure shows the probability that survey respondents (1) view most Americans as looking down on the military, (2) view most Americans as neither looking down on nor looking up to the military, or (3) view most Americans as looking up to the military.

FIGURE 4.6

Predicted Probability of Different Views of the Military, by Negative Veteran Stereotype Scores

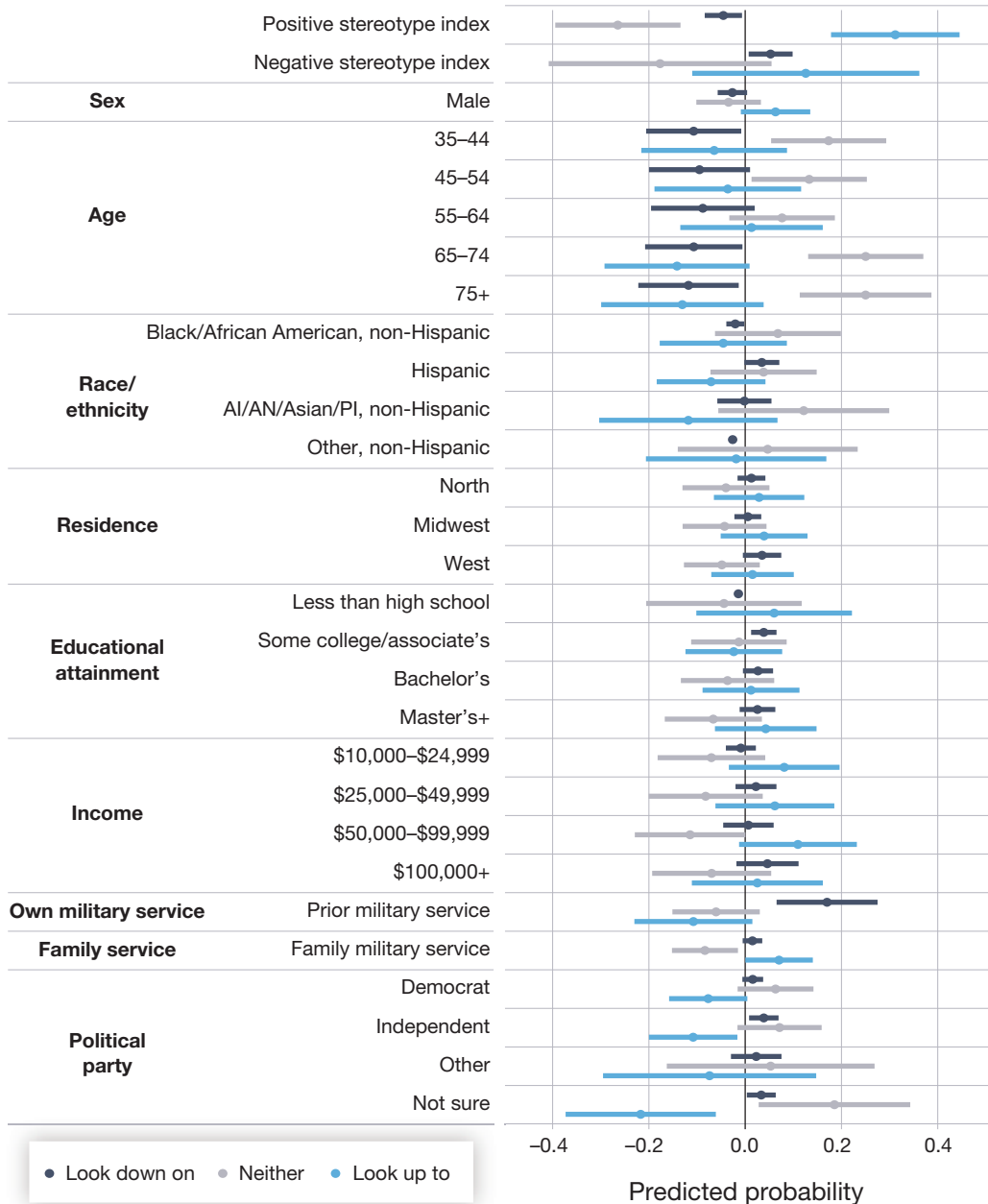


NOTE: The figure shows the probability that survey respondents (1) view most Americans as looking down on the military, (2) view most Americans as neither looking down on nor looking up to the military, or (3) view most Americans as looking up to the military.

For ease of interpretation, Figures 4.5 and 4.6 present the effect of a change in positive and negative stereotype scores on views of how Americans see the military. These figures can be interpreted similarly to Figures 4.1 and 4.2. Higher positive veteran stereotype beliefs are associated with increased probability of believing that most Americans look up to the military. Positive stereotypes of veterans have little effect on perceptions that Americans look down on the military. Higher negative stereotype beliefs are associated with an increased probability of believing that most Americans look down on the military. But it is still the case that, despite that relationship, even those with very negative stereotypes about veterans overwhelmingly believe that most Americans look up to the military.

Finally, relative risk ratios are not an easily interpreted quantity. We visually represent the estimated effects of each of the covariates on the probability of believing each of the three outcomes: that most Americans look up to the military, look down on the military, or neither (Figure 4.7). Most covariates are not statistically associated with beliefs about the military. However, older respondents are more likely to think that the public is relatively neutral on the status of the military.

FIGURE 4.7
Marginal Effects Estimates on Probability of Different Views of the Military



NOTE: The figure shows the probability that survey respondents (1) view most Americans as looking down on the military, (2) view most Americans as neither looking down on nor looking up to the military, or (3) view most Americans as looking up to the military. The average effect on probability of encouragement relative to the baseline category is indicated by the dots, and the range of plausible values is reflected by the lines. Any lines that cross the line at 0.0 reflect results that do not meet statistical significance. That is, the effect of that variable could be zero. AI = American Indian; AN = Alaska Native; PI = Pacific Islander.

Summary

- Holding more-positive stereotypes of veterans is associated with having a higher probability of encouraging a young person to join the military via enlistment or as an officer and with believing that most Americans look up to the military.
- Holding more-negative veteran stereotypes is associated with a lower probability of encouraging a young person to join the military via enlistment or as an officer and with a slightly higher probability of believing that most Americans look down on the military.
- Men and people with family who served in the military are more likely to encourage a young person to enlist or join as an officer.
- Democrats are less likely to encourage enlistment but are no different from Republicans in encouraging joining as an officer.
- Younger adults are less likely to encourage someone to enlist or become an officer.
- Those who have served in the military themselves are more likely to believe that most Americans look down on the military.

Implications for Research and Policy

The relationship between public opinion and attitudes and public policy is complex. But the views held by the American people about veterans and the military have the potential to shape the policy arena for years to come. Veterans are understood as a deserving target of public policies,¹ and how the public understands veterans today could sustain levels of deservingness, shape interest group advocacy, and ultimately affect policy choices into the future.

Veterans and their advocates rightfully express concerns about how military and veteran populations are portrayed in the media or in public discourse and have voiced concerns about negative stereotypes about veterans. The ALP survey data we examined suggest that fears about the public holding outsize negative stereotypes about veterans are unwarranted, and most stereotypes held are in fact overwhelmingly positive. To the extent that the public has some beliefs in negative stereotypes around aggression and self-harm, these coexist alongside the overwhelmingly positive perceptions held about veterans. Perceptions of veterans as potentially damaged physically or mentally by their service highlight that nearly 20 years of war have led to widespread familiarity with the wounds of war; currently, the top two reasons youth report for not wanting to join the military are “possibility of physical injury/death” and “possibility of PTSD or other emotional/psychological issues” (Office of People Analytics, undated-b).

What is less well understood is how any of these stereotypes and beliefs translate to actions, interactions, and behaviors. Do these stereotypes lead to stigmatized or biased treatment? In what direction? More research needs to connect attitudes with behaviors, such as through experimental studies, including audit studies or survey experiments. Stereotypes also can lead to interpersonal interaction frictions, sometimes experienced as microaggressions. The transition from a military culture back to a civilian culture means that veterans often experience these microinteractional frictions, although not all of them result from stereotyping. Veterans are also understood by a complex set of binaries—victim versus hero, damaged versus enriched—and their interactions with others are complex and may be confusing to make sense of.

¹ For theoretical development of the idea of deserving target populations, see Schneider and Ingram, 2005. For more-recent empirical evidence of veterans’ perceived deservingness, see MacLean and Kleykamp, 2014.

As former members of the military, veterans serve as ongoing representatives of the institution in their communities. The public's willingness to consider joining the military or recommending that others join is likely to be influenced to some degree by how they think of veterans. Holding more-positive stereotypes toward veterans is associated with higher probability of recommending joining the military, and holding more-negative stereotypes reduces the probability of encouraging joining the military. After two decades of war, it is encouraging that endorsement of negative stereotypes is low. However, any potential increase in endorsement of negative stereotypes would be expected to have a larger negative influence on recommendation of military service to others than would the same level of increase in positive stereotype endorsement. Put another way, the public's willingness to encourage others to join the military is more sensitive to negative veteran perceptions than positive ones. In addition, the public is more supportive of joining the military via ROTC or a service academy than via enlistment. More research is needed to understand why this difference exists, such as whether the public has a preference for an officer versus enlisted military career, because the choice reflects a college-first or college-second path for young people, or for other reasons entirely.

The public appears to be familiar with the struggles that veterans disproportionately experience in terms of mental health challenges, combat trauma, physical injuries, and more, having reported beliefs that veterans may be damaged and that they may be likely to harm themselves. Having a public aware of the full spectrum of sacrifices asked of and made by veterans is vital to ensuring that policies provide veterans with access to programs and services needed to assist with recovery. But this awareness does come with its own challenge: ensuring that the real challenges that *some* veterans experience do not become stereotypes applied to *all* veterans. While some veterans have been injured physically and/or mentally by their service, not all have. For example, approximately 15 percent of post-9/11 veterans had PTSD in the past year, and 29 percent had PTSD at some point in their lives (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, undated-a). And, more importantly, beliefs about negative stereotypes must be monitored to ensure that they do not translate to negatively biased interactions with or treatment of veterans. The challenge remains of maintaining the right balance in drawing attention to and raising awareness of the difficulties veterans experience without perpetuating negative stereotypes about them.

Supplementary Analyses

Appendix A reports supplementary figures and tables related to those presented in the main report body. Figure A.1 presents kernel density plots of the distribution of responses to individual dichotomy items measured on a 1–10 scale. These figures show the distribution of individual responses to supplement the reporting of means in Figure 2.6.

FIGURE A.1
Kernel Density Plots of Distribution of Dichotomy Responses

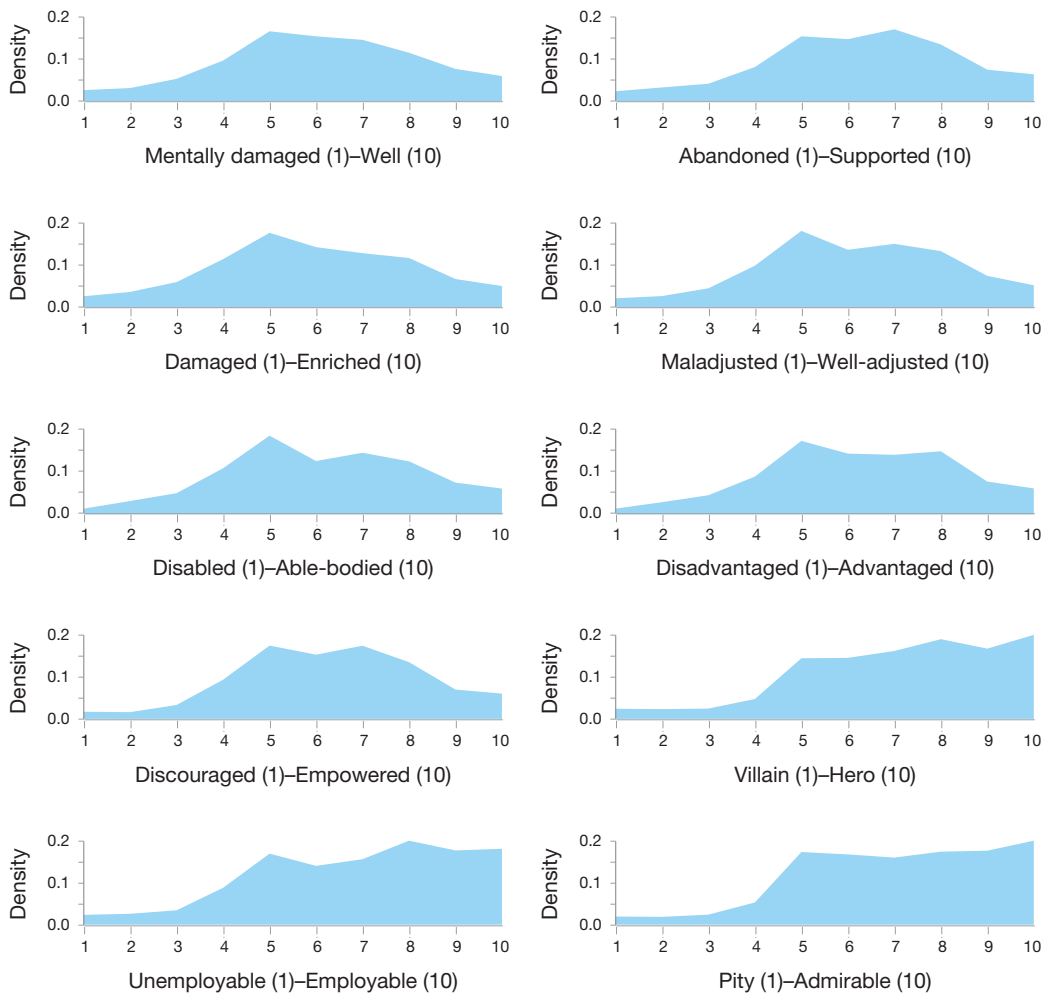


Table A.1 reports the full set of logistic regression coefficient and standard error estimates for the model results summarized in Figures 4.1 through 4.4.

TABLE A.1
Logistic Regression Estimates Predicting Encouragement to Join the Military via Officer, Enlisted, or Either Pathway (Odds Ratios)

	Encourage Officer O1	Encourage Officer O2	Encourage Enlistment E1	Encourage Enlistment E2	Any A1	Any A2
Positive stereotype index	4.130***	2.771**	3.531***	1.619	4.282***	3.150**
	(1.270)	(0.996)	(1.050)	(0.605)	(1.300)	(1.131)
Negative stereotype index	0.110**	0.134**	0.112**	0.0796***	0.0967**	0.122**
	(0.078)	(0.094)	(0.078)	(0.060)	(0.070)	(0.087)
Male		1.861**		1.816**		1.911**
		(0.380)		(0.360)		(0.397)
Age 35–44		0.295*		0.840		0.287*
		(0.147)		(0.475)		(0.145)
Age 45–54		0.396+		1.074		0.427+
		(0.198)		(0.599)		(0.216)
Age 55–64		0.490		1.109		0.456
		(0.245)		(0.597)		(0.229)
Age 65–74		0.476		1.142		0.448
		(0.244)		(0.624)		(0.228)
Age 75+		0.684		0.998		0.655
		(0.380)		(0.578)		(0.362)
Black/African American		0.705		0.866		0.633
		(0.238)		(0.306)		(0.216)
Hispanic		0.576+		0.721		0.599+
		(0.174)		(0.211)		(0.178)
Asian/Pacific Islander		1.141		0.714		1.107
		(0.507)		(0.320)		(0.502)
Other, non-Hispanic		0.744		0.327		0.677
		(0.613)		(0.301)		(0.596)

Table A.1—Continued

	Encourage Officer O1	Encourage Officer O2	Encourage Enlistment E1	Encourage Enlistment E2	Any A1	Any A2
North		0.706 (0.202)		0.642 (0.175)		0.605+ (0.172)
Midwest		0.972 (0.292)		0.710 (0.178)		0.818 (0.246)
West		0.709 (0.174)		0.859 (0.203)		0.598* (0.148)
Less than high school		0.861 (0.457)		0.694 (0.349)		0.959 (0.493)
Some college/ associate's		1.047 (0.300)		0.767 (0.198)		0.896 (0.254)
Bachelor's		0.787 (0.236)		0.566* (0.150)		0.728 (0.223)
Master's+		0.987 (0.315)		0.700 (0.200)		0.928 (0.306)
Family income \$10,000–\$24,999		1.274 (0.398)		1.104 (0.333)		1.295 (0.419)
Family income \$25,000–\$49,999		1.457 (0.469)		1.606 (0.527)		1.560 (0.509)
Family income \$50,000–\$99,999		1.333 (0.442)		1.196 (0.376)		1.557 (0.498)
Family income \$100,000+		1.215 (0.405)		1.894+ (0.625)		1.308 (0.451)
Veteran		0.630 (0.263)		1.578 (0.551)		0.837 (0.342)
Military family		1.689** (0.320)		1.786** (0.334)		1.812** (0.349)

Table A.1—Continued

	Encourage Officer O1	Encourage Officer O2	Encourage Enlistment E1	Encourage Enlistment E2	Any A1	Any A2
Democrat		0.892 (0.251)		0.592* (0.150)		0.828 (0.236)
Independent		0.873 (0.246)		0.975 (0.239)		0.797 (0.219)
Party—Not sure		1.127 (0.561)		1.739 (0.970)		1.030 (0.522)
Party—Other		0.790 (0.335)		0.630 (0.263)		0.639 (0.271)
Constant	0.915 (0.169)	2.012 (1.423)	0.483*** (0.0914)	0.603 (0.405)	0.953 (0.175)	2.332 (1.633)
Observations	1,931	1,133	1,930	1,132	1,931	1,133

SOURCES: ALP #591 (dichotomies), #574 (military connection), #566 (political ideology).

NOTE: All estimates are weighted. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$.

Table A.1 reports the full set of logistic regression coefficient and standard error estimates for the model results summarized in Figures 4.1-4.4.

TABLE A.2
Multinomial Logistic Regression Results Predicting How Most Americans View the Military (Relative Risk Ratios)

	Look Down On	Look Down On	Look Up To	Look Up To
Positive stereotype index	0.411 (0.282)	0.524 (0.541)	3.405*** (1.158)	6.012*** (2.667)
Negative stereotype index	3.153 (3.408)	24.54** (29.41)	0.332 -0.356	2.963 (2.285)
Male		0.390 (0.234)		1.306 (0.296)
Age 35–44		0.0173*** (0.0190)		0.260+ (0.190)
Age 45–54		0.0428** (0.0510)		0.330 (0.249)

Table A.2—Continued

	Look Down On	Look Down On	Look Up To	Look Up To
Age 55–64		0.0800*		0.498
		(0.0927)		(0.376)
Age 65–74		0.0130***		0.169*
		(0.0157)		(0.124)
Age 75+		0.00315***		0.173*
		(0.00521)		(0.131)
Black/African American		0.118+		0.676
		(0.149)		(0.263)
Hispanic		2.484		0.750
		(1.500)		(0.264)
Asian/Pacific Islander		0.516		0.492
		(0.775)		(0.240)
Other, non-Hispanic		0.000000748***		0.771
		(0.000000878)		(0.442)
North		2.424		1.273
		(2.009)		(0.379)
Midwest		1.680		1.311
		(1.505)		(0.375)
West		5.641*		1.309
		(4.770)		(0.341)
Less than high school		0.000000182***		1.362
		(0.0000003)		(0.748)
Some college/associate's		6.072*		1.033
		(4.749)		(0.319)
Bachelor's		4.688+		1.226
		(3.936)		(0.381)
Master's+		5.366+		1.515
		(5.196)		(0.506)
Family income \$10,000–\$24,999		0.719		1.541
		(0.726)		(0.509)

Table A.2—Continued

	Look Down On	Look Down On	Look Up To	Look Up To
Family income \$25,000–\$49,999		3.607 (3.754)		1.599 (0.575)
Family income \$50,000–\$99,999		2.397 (3.320)		2.050* (0.729)
Family income \$100,000+		6.383+ (6.881)		1.424 (0.533)
Veteran		43.67*** (36.71)		1.184 (0.431)
Military family		2.910* (1.520)		1.667* (0.352)
Democrat		1.948 (1.562)		0.638 (0.181)
Independent		4.507+ (3.721)		0.589+ (0.180)
Party—Not sure		2.851 (3.906)		0.675 (0.489)
Party—Other		2.382 (2.117)		0.315** (0.139)
Constant	0.159*** (0.0578)	0.0158* (0.0279)	1.817** (0.359)	2.333 (2.208)
Observations	1,930	1,133	1,930	1,133

SOURCES: ALP #591 (dichotomies), #574 (military connection), #566 (political ideology).

NOTE: This table shows the probability that survey respondents view most Americans as looking down on the military or view most Americans as looking up to the military. All estimates are weighted. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$.

Abbreviations

ALP	American Life Panel
AVF	all-volunteer force
FY	fiscal year
PTSD	posttraumatic stress disorder
ROTC	Reserve Officers' Training Corps

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Fiscal year 2022 was one of the worst U.S. military recruitment years on record, with all services apart from the Space Force failing to meet recruitment goals, and fiscal year 2023 saw similar shortfalls. The U.S. public's overall confidence in the military is likewise declining.

Although the public still holds the military generally in high esteem compared with other major institutions, that esteem is wavering, influenced by such factors as the end of the war in Afghanistan, the increased polarization of the public, and heightened politicization of the military.

How do these trends in recruitment and confidence reflect public perceptions of the U.S. military? Do public perceptions of veterans and the U.S. military influence young people's decisions to join the military? RAND researchers examined a selection of findings from 2022 American Life Panel surveys to gather insights into how Americans think about these issues. The researchers found that the public thinks very highly of U.S. veterans, endorsing positive stereotypes about veterans at a high rate and endorsing negative stereotypes at a very low rate. However, a majority of Americans would discourage a young person close to them from enlisting.

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