

# Issues Up Front

## Veteran Vote 'Key to Victory'

The battle for the presidency could be decided by veterans (24% of adult men) in a handful of hotly contested states this November.

Polls in early August showed President Obama and former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney in a virtual dead heat heading into November's general election.

One voting group—comprising vets, active-duty troops, military retirees, civilians working for the Defense Department and their families—could determine the winner of the 2012 presidential election.

"Veterans are a constituency that both President Obama and Gov. Romney want on their side, as well as candidates for the House and Senate," said Bob Wallace, executive director for VFW's Washington Office. "Both presidential campaigns have

stated that the veteran and military vote is key to victory."

Veterans alone make up some 13% of the population and historically they register their opinions at the ballot box. In 2008, they accounted for 15% of all voters, a bloc larger than single men (14%), blacks (13%) or Hispanics (9%).

Active-duty troops, though, were less likely to vote. Only 29% of them cast ballots in the 2010 midterm elections, compared to 46% of eligible voters.

Veterans and their supporters, which the *Army Times* called the "military" vote, are a big presence in five "swing" states—Colorado, Florida, North Carolina, Ohio and Virginia—

that could tip the election in either direction. Military voters make up sizeable blocs in each of these states, ranging from 17.1% of the electorate in Virginia to 10.8% in Ohio.

These five states represent 84 electoral votes—about one-third of what's needed to win, according to the *Times*.

In 2004, veterans voted for former President George W. Bush by 57% to 41% over Sen. John Kerry, a Vietnam War veteran. In 2008, they voted for Sen. John McCain, a Vietnam War POW, by 54% to 44% over Obama.

The veteran vote in 2008 was most sharply divided by age categories. The Edison/Mitofsky exit poll that year showed 61% of vets older than 60 voted for McCain. Of those under 45, 51% voted for Obama, while 53% of vets between the ages of 45 and 59 voted for Obama.

But in 2012, according to the Gallup Poll, "age makes little substantive difference" in the veterans vote. Vets across all age brackets seemed to be leaning in one direction.

"In a [general] population that is currently evenly split in its preferences for Barack

Obama or Mitt Romney for president, veterans stand out for their 24-point preference for Romney," wrote Frank Newport, Gallup's editor-in-chief.

"About a fourth of men are veterans, and it is their strong skew toward Romney that essentially creates the GOP candidate's leading position among men today. Among non-veteran men, Obama and Romney are essentially tied."

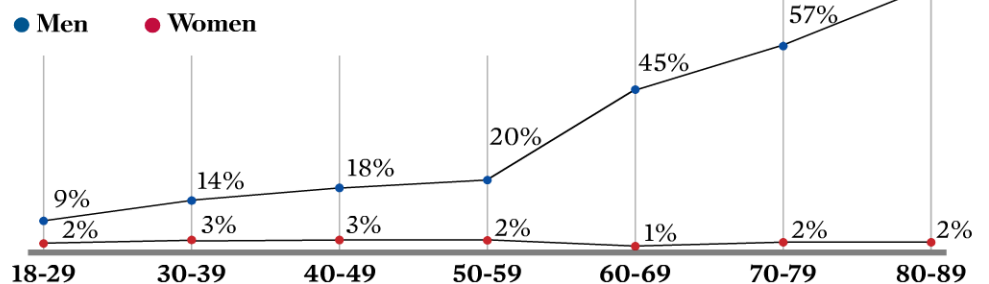
Veterans, in reality, don't vote as a "bloc." They tend to vote for candidates who represent their positions on issues. Policy stances are of foremost importance to veterans groups. Issues like treatment of PTSD and traumatic brain injuries, proper VA care for all eligible veterans, reducing VA's claims backlog and protecting the current military retirement system are what concerns VFW.

VFW believes that as long as the nation continues to create veterans, the organization's members must ensure that elected officials take care of these veterans when they return home. Wallace says that in order to get it done, members must get involved, and he encourages veterans to exercise their right to be heard.

"Remember, VFW cannot endorse candidates for public office, but as individuals, you can and are encouraged to do so," Wallace said. "Our membership needs to ask the tough questions about what the candidates are going to do for veterans, troops and their families if they are elected or re-elected." ★

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## Percentage of Current U.S. Population Who Are Veterans, by Age



Data compiled April 11-May 24, 2012: Gallup