# Counting Women Veterans: Sources of Data from the U.S. Census Bureau

Kelly Ann Holder U.S. Census Bureau Housing and Household Economics Division

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This report is released to inform interested parties of ongoing research and to encourage discussion of work in progress. The views expressed on statistical, methodological, technical, or operational issues are those of the author and not necessarily those of the U.S. Census Bureau.

#### Introduction

This paper accompanies a slideshow presentation prepared for the Department of Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee on Women Veterans. The objective of the presentation is to introduce sources of veterans' data available from some of the household surveys administered by the U.S. Census Bureau. It includes a discussion of the history of questions from the decennial census, changes expected in Census 2010, and the recent content changes to the American Community Survey. The American Community Survey is highlighted as the source of the most current subnational statistics on veterans' status as well as a variety of social, demographic, and economic topics relevant to the study of women veterans.

This presentation also includes a short graphical analysis of women veterans using data from the 2007 American Community Survey. The analysis compares various characteristics of women veterans and nonveterans. Variables used in this analysis include age, marital status, educational attainment, current residence, class of worker, industry, occupation, employment status, and earnings.

# A Short History of the Veteran Status Questions

The first data on veterans to be published by the U.S. government were based on an inquiry in the 1840 census which asked the name, age, and place of residence of pensioners of the Revolutionary War. Prior to the Civil War, most interest in the number of veterans was for pension purposes. It was the expansion of veterans benefits in the early 1900s and the huge influx of veterans at the end of WWII that increased the importance of decennial census data on veterans. Veterans' questions have appeared on every decennial census form since 1910, with the exception of 1920 (Cowper, Heltman, and Dienstfrey, 1994). The 1980 decennial census marked the first time that information on women veterans had ever been gathered in a national survey. At the time of the 1980 census, women made up less than 3 percent of the total veteran population; today they make up about 8 percent.

Figure 1 shows the exact wording of the veterans' questions from 1960 to 1990. The 1960 and 1970 questions were virtually identical. They asked: "If this is a *man*: has he ever served in the Army, Navy, or other Armed Forces of the United States?" In the 1980 census question, the wording was changed to "is this *person* a veteran of the Armed Forces."

Another change in 1980 was the modification of the veteran status question to indicate that its intended goal was to count only veterans who had served on "active duty." It specifically excluded those who served only in the National Guard or Reserves. The periods of military service question was also expanded to include the Vietnam and post-Vietnam eras.

The veteran status question was revised again in 1990 by expanding the question to separate current active duty, past active duty, service in the National Guard or Reserves

only, and no military service. This change was meant to lessen confusion for the respondent.

Figure 1. Decennial Census Questions, 1960 to 1990

Attachment 1: Census Questions Pertaining to Veteran Status, 1960 to 1990						
1960	1970	1980	1990			
P35. If this is a man-Has he ever served in the Army, Navy, or other Armed Forces of the United States?  Yes No  If Yes, Was it during:  Korean War Y N World War II Y N World War I Y N Any other time Y N	P26. If this is a man- a. Has he ever served in the Army, Navy or other Armed Forces of the United States?  Yes No b. If Yes, was it during: O Vietnam Conflict O Korean War O World War II O World War I O Any other time	P18a. Is this person a veteran of active-duty military service in the Armed Forces of the United States?  If service was in National Guard or Reserves only, see instruction guide.  Yes No  b. Was active-duty military service during:  O May 1975 or later O Vietnam Era O Feb 1955-July 1964 O Korean Conflict O World War II O World War II O Any other time	P17a. Has this person every been on active-duty military service in the Armed Forces of the United States or ever been in the United States military Reserves or the National Guard?  If service was in the Reserves or National Guard only, see instruction guide.  O Yes, now on active duty in past but not now O Yes, service in Reserves or National Guard only O No  b. Was active-duty military service during:  O Sept 1980 or later O May 1975-Aug 1980 O Vietnam Era O Feb 1955-July 1964 O Korean Conflict O World War II O Any other time			

The period of service category "Sept 1980 or later" and a question about number of years of service (which is not shown in this table) were added in 1990 to provide information related to a new VA benefit eligibility requirement of 24 months of service.

### **Census 2000**

In the Census 2000 long-form questionnaire, the questions on veterans status, period of military service, and length of service were asked of both men and women 15 years and older (Figure 2). The decennial long form was distributed to 1 out of every 6 households in the United States. The main difference from the 1990 questionnaire was the addition of period of service categories to break out the Gulf War and post-Gulf War eras.

Figure 2. Census 2000 Questionnaire Image of Veteran Status, Period of Military Service, and Length of Service Questions

20	a. Has this person ever served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces, military Reserves, or National Guard? Active duty does not include training for the Reserves or National Guard, but DOES include activation, for example, for the Persian Gulf War.
	Yes, now on active duty
	Yes, on active duty in past, but not now
	No, training for Reserves or National Guard only → Skip to 21
	$\bigcirc$ No, never served in the military $\rightarrow$ Skip to 21
	b. When did this person serve on active duty In the U.S. Armed Forces? Mark (x) a box for EACH period in which this person served.
	April 1995 or later
	August 1990 to March 1995 (including Persian Gulf War)
	September 1980 to July 1990
	May 1975 to August 1980
	Vietnam era (August 1964—April 1975)
	February 1955 to July 1964
	Korean conflict (June 1950—January 1955)
	World War II (September 1940—July 1947)
	Some other time
	c. In total, how many years of active-duty military service has this person had?
	Less than 2 years
	2 years or more

#### **Census 2010**

The Census Bureau is currently preparing for the next decennial census. The 2010 decennial census is expected to count an estimated 310 million people and to collect information from approximately 130 million housing units. It will cover all 50 states and the District of Columbia. It will also cover Puerto Rico and the Island Areas—Guam, U.S. Virgin Islands, Northern Mariana, and American Samoa. There are more than 50 languages spoken in the U.S. and so the challenge of gathering information about all households is even greater because of the need to communicate, no matter which language the householder speaks.

The 2010 census will have one of the shortest census questionnaires in the history of the United States, dating back to the nation's first census in 1790. The 2010 census form will only ask for name, age, sex, race, ethnicity, relationship, and whether you own or rent your home and will take about 10 minutes on average to complete. Veteran status will no longer be collected on the decennial census questionnaire, except in the Island Areas.

# **The American Community Survey**

One of the innovations for the 2010 Census was to replace the long form with a continuous survey called the American Community Survey, or ACS. This change has resulted in improved data for communities and reduced burden for respondents.

The ACS lets communities see how they are changing every year by filling in the gaps between each 10-year census. The ACS is an annual survey sent to three million household addresses and group quarters on a rotating basis. It is conducted in Puerto Rico as the Puerto Rico Community Survey. It is similar to the decennial long form which was previously sent to one in six households.

Currently, the Census Bureau releases social and economic profiles based on ACS data of areas with at least 65,000 people and of people living in group quarters. Over the next few years, areas with smaller populations will be described using three- and five-year period estimates to maintain validity and confidentiality. The latest data from the ACS also include profiles of more than 100 race and ethnic group iterations. At the end of 2008, the first 3-year estimate products were available, covering the years 2005, 2006, and 2007.

With the release of the first set of three-year data, about 95 percent of the nation's population live in a county that is covered by American Community Survey data. The number of counties that have data increased from 783 in 2006 for one-year estimates to about 1,800 for three-year estimates. Approximately 14,500 distinct geographic areas are included in the three-year estimates — more than twice the number of areas included in the one-year estimates in the 2006 release.

ACS data can be accessed via American FactFinder from the Census Bureau's homepage at <a href="https://www.census.gov">www.census.gov</a>. Additional information on the ACS sample design and accuracy of the data may be found at <a href="http://www.census.gov/acs/www/UseData/Accuracy/Accuracy1.htm">http://www.census.gov/acs/www/UseData/Accuracy/Accuracy1.htm</a>.

### **Veterans Questions on the ACS**

Figure 3 shows the current veteran status and periods of military service questions on the ACS. One more category was added to the veteran status question since 2000. The "Yes, on active duty in the past, but not now" category was split into two categories. Veterans are now asked whether or not their service ended in the last 12 months.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is the major stakeholder for data about veteran status from the ACS. The current question is intended to satisfy the VA's need for two kinds of estimates. The first is to provide baseline figures for a model-based estimation system which counts civilian veterans. The second is to aid migration studies by specifically identifying recent veterans who served on active duty in the past 12 months.

The period of service categories have also evolved since 2000. The most recent changes were made in 2003 when the "April 1995 or later" category was changed to "September 2001 or later" to reflect the era that began after the events of September 11, 2001. Additional changes were made to reflect the revised dates of war-time periods.

Figure 3. ACS Questionnaire Image of Veteran Status and Period of Military Service Questions

Has this person ever served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces, military Reserves, or Nationa Guard? Active duty does not include training for the Reserves or National Guard, but DOES include activation, for example, for the Persian Gulf War.  Yes, now on active duty  Yes, on active duty during the last 12 months, but not now  Yes, on active duty in the past, but not during the last 12 months  No, training for Reserves or National Guard only → SKIP to question 27a  No, never served in the military → SKIP to question 28	active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces?
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New content was added to the ACS questionnaire in 2008 (Figure 4). The objective of including a question on service-connected disability ratings was to enable the VA to cross-classify information on this topic by other demographic characteristics—such as income—to guide them in estimating the demand for health care services.

Administrative data on veterans by their ratings is available from the VA's Compensation and Pension database but these data do not provide the additional demographic detail that is available in the ACS.

Figure 4. ACS Questionnaire Image of Service-Connected Disability Status and Ratings Questions

Ø	a. Does this person have a VA service-connected disability rating?  ☐ Yes (such as 0%, 10%, 20%,, 100%) ☐ No → SKIP to question 28
	<ul> <li>b. What is this person's service-connected disability rating?</li> </ul>
	0 percent
	10 to 20 percent
	30 to 40 percent
	50 to 60 percent
	70 percent or higher

Because of space constraints on the paper questionnaire, this new question replaced the length of service question from previous years. An analysis of prior research on the testing of these questions is available on the Census Bureau's veterans'statistics webpage: <a href="http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/laborfor/veterans/veterans.html">http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/laborfor/veterans/veterans.html</a>

### The Current Population Survey

The Current Population Survey (CPS) is a monthly survey of about 50,000 households that is sponsored jointly by the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The survey has been conducted since 1940.

The CPS is the primary source of information on the labor force characteristics of the United States, including the national unemployment rate. To be eligible for participation in the CPS, individuals must be 15 years and older, not currently in the Armed Forces, and not currently living in an institution such as a prison, long term care hospital, or nursing home.

Questions pertaining to veterans have been included in the CPS since the 1940s, however the CPS did not begin to collect data on the veteran status of women until 1984. The CPS asks respondents if they have ever served in the Armed Forces and, if so, in which periods they served.

The Census Bureau also conducts a biennial CPS supplement on veterans. All veterans 17 years and older are asked questions pertaining to topics such as specific types of service in Vietnam; service-connected disability status, ratings, and compensation; and use of workforce training and employment services. The most recent Veterans Supplement was administered in 2007.

# The Survey of Income and Program Participation

The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) is designed as a continuous series of national panels with sample sizes ranging from 14,000 to 36,700 interviewed households. The first SIPP panel began in 1983.

The purpose of the SIPP is to collect the source and amount of income, labor force information, program participation and eligibility data, and general demographic characteristics in order to: (1) measure the effectiveness of federal, state, and local programs and (2) provide statistics on the economic well-being of the country. Although the SIPP design allows for both longitudinal and cross-sectional data analysis, it is meant primarily to support longitudinal studies.

Veteran status questions have been asked of everyone 15 years and older since the 1983 panel of the SIPP. The SIPP asks respondents if they have ever served in the Armed Forces and, if so, in which periods they served.

#### Profile of Women Veterans: 2007

The following analysis of women veterans highlights the kinds of information that are available from the ACS. While this presentation shows only national level estimates, one

of the advantages of using data from the ACS is the availability of estimates at sub-state geographic levels.

In 2007, the ACS estimated there were 1.6 million women veterans 18 years or older. This represents about 8 percent of the total population of civilian veterans in the United States. The large sample size and the demographic, social, and economic detail available from the ACS allow for in-depth analysis of the differences between women veterans and their nonveteran counterparts.

Tables 1 and 2 show the percent distributions of various characteristics of all women 18 years and older by their veteran status. All comparisons between veterans and nonveterans have undergone statistical testing at the 90-percent confidence interval and statistically significant differences are denoted in the tables with an asterisk.

### Age

Women veterans were more likely to be between the ages of 35 and 54 years while nonveteran women were more evenly distributed across age groups. However, their median ages are quite similar, 47 years for veterans and 46 years for nonveterans. The age distribution of women by veteran status reflects two things: (1) Women in the youngest age group have not yet become veterans and (2) There was a dramatic increase in the number of women entering the military after 1973.

There should be fewer women veterans in the older age groups by virtue of military restrictions which limited women to 2 percent of the military population from the mid-1940s to the early 1970s. Not until the end of military conscription that the decision was made to increase the proportion of women in the military (Binkin and Eitelberg, 1986). Today about 14 percent of the active duty military population are women. Women veterans younger than the age of 52 in 2007 would have turned 18, thus old enough to enlist in the military, after the inception of the All-Volunteer Force<sup>1</sup> in 1973.

### Marital Status

A higher percentage of women veterans were divorced compared with nonveteran women (22 percent and 12 percent respectively). There is very little literature to suggest how military service may affect the divorce rates of women veterans. However, similar results have been found using other data sources.

Because women veterans were more likely to have ever married, and subsequently divorced, this resulted in a lower percentage who have never married—or remained single—(18 percent of women veterans compared with 24 percent of nonveteran women).

<sup>1</sup> The All-Volunteer Force (AVF) began in 1973 with the end of military conscription (also called compulsory military service or the draft).

The difference in the percentage of women veterans and nonveterans who were never married could also be a reflection of their age since there were more nonveteran women between the ages of 18 and 24.

#### Educational Attainment

In 2007, women veterans 18 years and older had higher levels of educational attainment than nonveteran women. A lower percentage of women veterans had only a high school diploma or less education (26 percent compared with 45 percent of nonveteran women). In the population as a whole, about 45 percent of people 18 years and older had only a high school diploma or less.

The 19-percentage-point difference between women veterans and nonveterans can be partly explained by the military's enlistment requirement of a high school diploma or GED. A large part of this difference can be contributed to the percentage with less than a high school diploma—3 percent of women veterans had less than a high school diploma compared with 15 percent of nonveteran women.

This distribution is also somewhat affected by the age of these women. A larger percentage, twelve percent, of nonveteran women were between the ages of 18 and 24, and they may not yet have had time to complete their post-secondary educations.

Forty-five percent of women veterans had attended some college or completed an associate's degree, while 29 percent of women veterans had a bachelor's degree or higher. This could be an indication that women veterans are taking advantage of their GI Bill benefits although data to support this are not available in the ACS.

#### Region

The ACS allows an analysis of women veterans at many levels of geography. Looking at women's veteran status by the region in which they currently live, the highest percentages were in the South—45 percent of women veterans compared with 37 percent of nonveteran women. This is not too surprising since more people in general live in the South than any other region. It is the difference between veterans and nonveterans that is most striking.

According to Department of Defense data, the South continues to be overrepresented among military recruits. This is sometimes referred to as the "Southern Military Tradition" (Kane, 2005). There are also several large military bases in the South and veterans, particularly younger veterans, tend to live near bases. The South is also one of the fastest growing regions in the country, which may explain the concentration of both veterans and nonveterans in the region.

# Place of Birth

The ACS also allows for an analysis of a person's place of birth versus their current state of residence. Given that moving from place to place is part of military life for many servicemembers, it seems reasonable that veterans might end up living in a state other than the one in which they were born. This was the case for women veterans in 2007. Sixty-three percent of them lived somewhere other than their state of birth, compared with 48 percent of nonveteran women.

Table 1 shows simple frequency distributions that do not take into account the other characteristics of these women, such as whether or not their movement was within the same region. A more complicated migration study could be done using ACS data.

# **Employment Status**

Employment status relates to a "reference week" (or the week prior to a respondent's completion of the questionnaire or interview) and refers to whether or not a person had a job and either worked or was temporarily absent, was on layoff and available to work, was looking for and available to work, or was not part of the labor force.

In 2007, the civilian labor force participation rate for women veterans 18 years and older was 65 percent. This means 65 percent of women veterans were either employed or unemployed (but able and willing to work) during the reference week, compared with 59 percent of nonveteran women.

### Work Status

Work status relates to the number of weeks and hours a person worked per week in the past 12 months (or "reference year"). Adding the percentage of people who did not work in the past year to the percentage of people who participated in the labor force in the past week, does not equal 100 percent because of the difference in reference periods between these two concepts.

Table 2 refers only to the people who worked in the past 12 months. Among workers 18 years and older, 61 percent of women veterans were fully engaged in the labor force, meaning they worked full time (35 or more hours per week) and year round (50 to 52 weeks per year). The remainder of women veterans worked some combination of part-time hours and either year-round or part-year weeks.

### Kinds of Work

Women veterans and nonveterans also differed in the kinds of work they did in 2007. "Class of worker" categorizes people according to the type of ownership of the employing organization. Thirty-one percent of women veterans worked for the government, either local, state, or federal in 2007.

"Industry" relates to the kind of business conducted by a person's employing organization. Women veterans were underrepresented in the wholesale, entertainment, and the education and health care industries compared to nonveteran women. Because they are more likely to work for the government, women veterans were overrepresented in the public administration industry compared to nonveteran women.

"Occupation" describes the kind of work the person does on the job. Forty-three percent of women veterans held management and professional positions compared with 37 percent of nonveteran women. Lower percentages of women veterans had service and sales and office positions than nonveteran women.

# **Earnings**

Overall, women veterans had higher personal earnings than nonveteran women. The median earnings of women veterans were \$31,340 in 2007, compared with \$23,673 for nonveteran women.

In previous work done on the earnings differentials between veterans and nonveterans, the results suggested that the reason women veterans earn more than nonveteran women is that they work more hours per year (Holder, 2007).

# Other Topics Available from ACS

This profile presents a brief overview of women veterans. It is by no means a comprehensive analysis of all the topics measured in the ACS. Here is a short list of other items on the current ACS questionnaire: income in the past 12 months; disability status; fertility in the past 12 months; means of transportation to work; school enrollment; migration; homeownership; property values; housing costs. In 2008, we also added questions about health insurance coverage and marital history. To view the entire questionnaire, go to: http://www.census.gov/acs/www/SBasics/SQuest/SQuest1.htm

The variety of topics, the large sample size, and the availability of small geographic areas make the ACS a powerful resource for any study of women veterans.

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Table 1. Characteristics of Women Veterans and Nonveterans					
	Ī	Margin of		Margin of	
Characteristic	Veterans	Error	Nonveterans	Error	Sig.
Total female population, 18 years and older	1,557,614	20,763	115,241,061	30,318	*
Age					
18 to 24 years	5.0	0.3	12.4	0.1	*
25 to 34 years	16.7	0.6			
35 to 44 years	22.8	0.5			*
45 to 54 years	25.0			_	*
55 to 64 years	12.6				*
65 years and over	18.0	0.4			*
Race and Hispanic Origin <sup>1</sup>					
White alone, not Hispanic	72.1	0.7	69.0	0.1	*
Black alone, not Hispanic	17.8	0.7	11.9	_	*
Some other race alone, not Hispanic	4.4	0.0			*
Hispanic	5.7	0.3	12.4	_	*
·	0.7	0.0	12.1	0.1	
Marital Status					
Married	48.0	0.6		0.1	*
Divorced	21.8	0.5	12.2	0.1	*
Separated/Widowed	12.3	0.4	13.1	0.1	*
Never married	17.9	0.6	23.8	0.1	*
Educational Attainment					
Less than high school graduate	3.1	0.2	15.0	0.1	*
High school graduate or equivalent	23.1	0.5			*
Some college or associate's degree	44.9	0.6			*
Bachelor's degree	17.9	0.5		_	*
Advanced degree	11.0	0.4			*
School Enrollment					
Not currently enrolled	87.8	0.4	88.8	0.1	*
Enrolled	12.2	0.4		0.1	*
Disability Cost					
Disability Status	70.0	0.5	04.0	0.1	*
Not disabled Disabled	78.0 22.0	0.5 0.5		0.1 0.1	*
Region					,
Northeast	12.6	0.4			*
Midwest	18.9	0.4		0.1	*
South	45.1	0.6			*
West	23.5	0.6	22.5	0.1	*
Current Residence					
Lives in state of birth	37.1	0.7	52.3	0.1	*
Lives in different state	62.9	0.7	47.7	0.1	*
Employment Status					
Labor force participation rate	64.6	0.6	59.4	0.1	*

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2007.

For more information on ACS see http://www.census.gov/acs/www/UseData/Accuracy/Accuracy1.htm.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The ACS allowed respondents to identify themselves with multiple race categories, but respondents to the CPS chose one race only. In this report, "White alone" refers to people who reported White and no other race. Likewise, "Black alone" refers to people who reported Black or African American and no other race. People of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Characteristic	Veterans		Margin of Error	Nonveterans	Margin of Error	Sig.
Total female population who worked in the past 12 months, 18 years and older	1,081,2		17,589		85,151	*
Work Status						
Full-time year-round worker Less than full-time year-round worker	_	0.6 9.4	0.8 0.8	-	0.1 0.1	*
Class of Worker						
Private wage and salary workers	6	2.9	0.7	74.8	0.1	*
Government workers	_	1.0	0.6		0.1	*
Self employed workers		5.9	0.4	-	0.1	*
Unpaid family worker, unemployed		0.2	0.1	0.3	0.1	*
Industry						
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, mining		0.7	0.1	0.8	0.1	*
Transportation, warehousing, utilities		2.0	0.2	_	0.1	*
Construction		6.6	0.4		0.1	*
Manufacturing		1.7	0.2	-	0.1	*
Wholesale trade		8.9	0.5		0.1	
Retail trade		4.7	0.3	_	0.1	*
Information Finance, insurance, real estate, rental, leasing		2.2 6.4	0.2 0.3		0.1 0.1	*
		0.4	0.0	0.4	0.1	
Professional, scientific, management, administrative and waste management services Educational services, health care, social	1	0.4	0.4	9.6	0.1	*
assistance	3	0.4	0.8	33.5	0.1	*
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation,		- 0	0.0	40.4	0.4	_
food services		5.9 3.1	0.3 0.3	-	0.1 0.1	
Other services, except public administration Public administration		3. i 6.4	0.3	-	0.1	*
Military		0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	*
Occupation						
Management, professional, and related	4	3.3	0.8	36.8	0.1	*
Service		5.8	0.6		0.1	*
Sales and office		0.8	0.8		0.1	*
Farming, fishing, forestry		0.2	0.1	0.4	0.1	*
Construction, extraction, maintenance, repair		2.7	0.3	0.7	0.1	*
Production, transportation, material moving		6.7	0.4	6.5	0.1	
Military		0.5	0.1	0.0	0.0	*
Annual Earnings						
Less than \$10,000	1	5.0	0.5	23.2	0.1	*
\$10,000 to \$14,999		7.3	0.4		0.1	*
\$15,000 to \$24,999		6.5	0.6		0.1	*
\$25,000 to \$34,999		7.3	0.7			*
\$35,000 to \$49,999		8.7	0.6		0.1	*
\$50,000 to \$74,999		5.8	0.6		0.1	*
\$75,000 or more		9.5	0.5	6.7	0.1	*
Median earnings (in 2007 inflation-adjusted dollars)	\$ 31,3	40	\$ 339	\$ 23,673	\$ 41	*

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2007.
For more information on ACS see http://www.census.gov/acs/www/UseData/Accuracy/Accuracy1.htm.