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## FOCUS GROUP REPORT

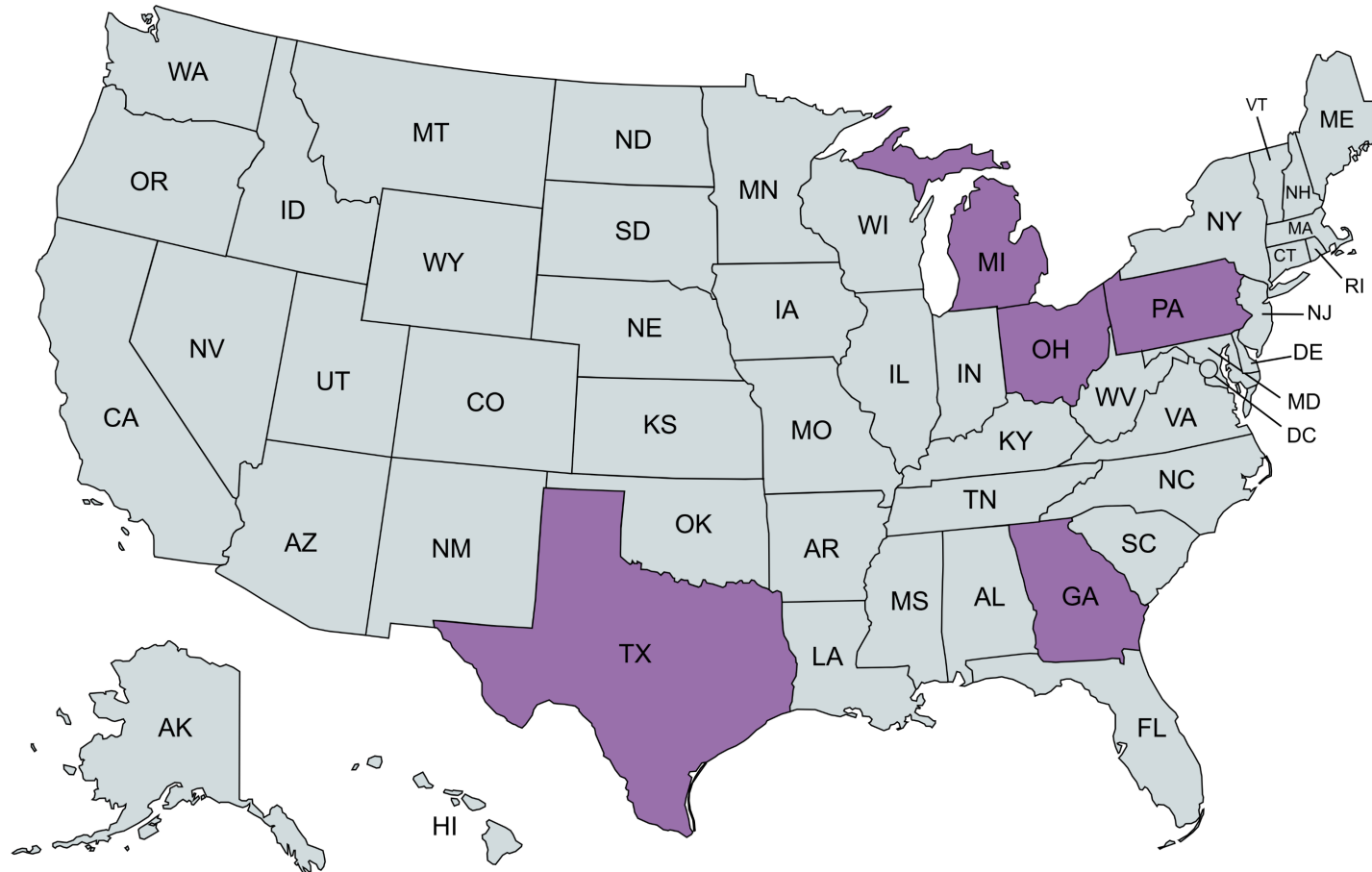
Tuesday, June 30, 2026

Veterans on America at 250



# Methodology

On June 3, 2026, GBAO conducted one online focus group with military veterans from battleground presidential and Senate states.\* The group was part of Navigator's exploration of America at 250.



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\*GA, MI, OH, PA, TX

# Key Takeaways

- Many veterans see America as the greatest country on earth, with some concern about a decline in our standing and values
- The flag is generally viewed fondly, representing Americas, strength, promise and hope
- Many – even those who faced challenges – are proud of their service and feel it shaped them into the people they are today
- There is a widespread desire for better days, less struggling, and fewer divisions

# Being An American Means Embracing Personal Liberties And Freedoms

Moderator: What does it mean to be an American?

**“Freedom of religion and education and opportunity...other than extremists that want to kill us, they're free to practice whatever religion they choose. Education, everybody's guaranteed in education. And for those that don't have the means, there's programs available to assist.”** – TX woman, white veteran weak Republican

**“Being in America, everybody has a right to do what they want and say what they want as long as it's not infringing upon anybody else. It would be boring if we were all the same, but one thing we need to do and we must do is respect each other's opinion.”** – PA man, Black veteran strong Democrat

**"I think that this country started with us trying to get out from under a king. I think this is a good appeal to our history, our shared history, our shared values. I think that we have been talking about a lot of the things that make us different. And I think that it is important to remember that the government is designed to be a little inefficient."** – MI man, white veteran strong Democrat



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# Opinions Are Mixed On Whether America Is The Greatest Country On Earth

Moderator: Do you think of America as the greatest country on earth?

“As a retired military member, I'm flushed with patriotism. So when I hear being American, it's almost like I'm **a part of the winning team. I'm on the right side**....To me, it's the greatest country in the world and I am so grateful to be a part of it.” – TX man, white veteran strong Republican

“I served in the military and I have a lot of patriotism.....We're not perfect, but **we're head over heels above most every other country** in the world, at least the ones I've been to.” – PA man, Black veteran strong Democrat

“**We're the greatest country** in the world....We're not perfect but I just think we're a melting pot for everybody....There's so much beauty in this country.” – TX woman, white veteran weak Republican

“There are two categories: there's what we want to believe and what we actually do....**We've exported our culture, our values, and a whole lot of bombs.**” – MI man, white veteran strong Democrat

“**I don't see it as the greatest country** in the world and that's okay....I think there's definitely more opportunities, but that's all I see. I think our values for America is so **capitalistic**...it's all about money and what you could do for me.” – GA woman, Black veteran strong Democrat

“At one point, **I think we were the greatest country because of the values that we had**, the freedoms that we had to be able to worship the way you wanted to. We [were] able to love the people we want[ed] to....Now it's like everything is under the microscope.” – TX man, Hispanic veteran strong Democrat

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# Some See Troubling Signs Of Decline And Eroding Values

“I realize how spoiled we are, but I think recently as a group, **we've [become] too politically correct**. We have to worry about hurting everybody's feelings and you can't say this, you can't say that. It's starting to get a little bit crazy.” – OH man, white veteran strong Republican

“Our country was founded on Christian values, but we've become a melting pot for so many other religions that it's not necessarily that way anymore. **I would like to see it still based on Christian values**, but yet a lot of what the country has done in our history was not Christian at all, not God's will at all.” – TX woman, white veteran weak Republican

“I grew up reading the Bible and following these values. And I feel like today there's a lot of Americans are just not...**their morals and their values are not there like it used to be**. I still have my Christian values because of my dad, because him instilling those into me and getting me in church at an early age.” – TX man, Hispanic veteran strong Democrat

“Right now...**we've got a big ICE presence**. They're just stopping people....My wife is German... and she doesn't even feel safe here because of everything that's going on right now, as far as anything with immigrants, anything other than American....I served this country for many years and I married a woman that I loved and I brought her over here. **We did it the correct way...but it seems today that doesn't even matter anymore.**” – TX man, Hispanic veteran strong Democrat



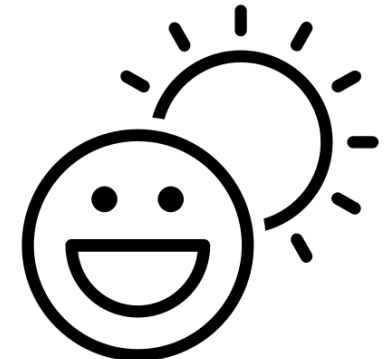
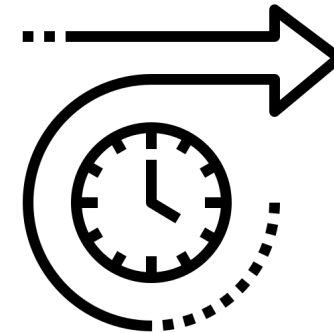
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# Some Remain Optimistic About The Future

“I know some people...say it's a little naive, but **I truly believe that because we're so young...we're judging things on a very small scale**...We have a long way to go, but again, I think we're trending in the right direction.” – PA man, Black veteran strong Democrat

“I think as divided as we are now, at the very beginning, everybody has been divided since the very beginning....I think we're making if you think about the Civil War or even some progress and **I think we're all working towards that more perfect union and that shining city on the hill**. I pray that every day we get a little bit better and that's my prayer for us all.” – TX man, white veteran strong Republican

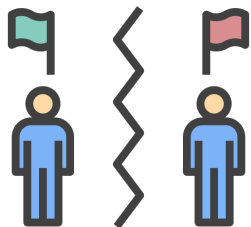
“This country's **only 250 years old**....So we have a lot of growing pains. We have a lot of issues that have not been dealt with that need to come out and need to be talked about and faced....But **I'd like to have hope** and I try to instill that in my children and grandchildren.” – PA man, Black veteran strong Democrat



“We have it better than a lot of people, but I think that it is better **because we keep trying to make it better**.” – MI man, white veteran strong Democrat

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# Many See Americans As Divided And Are Being Let Down By Politics



"[Both parties] grandstand behind American values, but looking at each party, **they're just so self-serving** for their party and not the constituents that got them where they are." – GA man, white veteran independent lean Republican

"It just seems to be where both sides are just trying to win. Their goal is to win and the people make that happen, but **once they've won, all the promises go out the window.**" – GA woman, Black veteran strong Democrat

"My dad used to tell me, being here in the South and Dallas, because I can remember as a kid in the '60s going downtown, going to department store and seeing the white restroom, Black restroom, white water fountain, Black water fountain. **That wasn't that long ago and it seems like we're going back to that again because everything now seems to be racially motivated in this country.**" – TX man, Hispanic veteran strong Democrat

"If you don't agree with [people], you're just the opposite. You're the bad person. You support Nazis, fascism. **It's just crazy how people just quickly label before they even try to hear anybody's point of view** or a different opinion than their own." – GA man, white veteran independent lean Republican

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# The 4th Of July And Reminders Of Service Bring Out Feelings Of Pride In America

Moderator: Tell me about times or a time you felt proud of being American

**“I have immense pride in the 4th of July**, the fireworks and the parades, and all the flags and the firetrucks rolling down and throwing candy out. To me, that's just American, and it's good to see that and experience that. It's just a good reminder of times of old and amazing, happy times when I was a kid.” – TX man, white veteran strong Republican

**“I've seen the flag in Afghanistan being on a forward operating base and I've seen it fly over foreign soil and protecting freedom over there.** So there's several times that I'm overwhelmed with pride going to a funeral of someone that's passed, either a veteran or a military service member that's passed. Immense pride in their sacrifice as well.” – TX man, white veteran strong Republican

**“When I came home for the first time for my first deployment,** family got together, got to see friends that I hadn't seen for years. It was nice to be home, to not worry to be about being shot” – MI man, white veteran strong Democrat

**“Every 4th of July, Veterans Day, Memorial Day, I feel patriotic** because they have the little white crosses with the American flag out there and it sinks in. It's like, ‘Yep, I was a lucky one.’ Didn't have to deploy to a war zone, just went to Korea and Germany.” – GA man, white veteran independent lean Republican

**“For 25 years, I lit off fireworks for our community.** So yeah, the **4th of July was big for me.**” – OH man, white veteran strong Republican

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# Many Have Deep Reverence For The Flag And What It Represents, Others Have Complicated Feelings Toward It

Moderator: Thinking about the American flag – what does it symbolize to you?

“It always invokes a feeling of **pride.**” – TX woman, white veteran weak Republican

“I remember pledging allegiance to the flag in elementary school and up to high school....Red for the bloodshed, white for the purity, and the blue for fidelity. So that all together **represents freedom and it always will.**” – GA man, white veteran independent lean Republican

“The way African Americans were treated and still are treated, **it's hard for me to look at something and say there's freedom** or there's pride or there's all that, especially when you see **people wrap that flag around them with such anger and vitriol** towards...not even just African Americans but people of color.” – GA woman, Black veteran strong Democrat

“The flag to me, it's **a representation of this wonderful experiment that is now 250 years old.** So when I see that, I think of what this country can be, the best of it. I think that the best is yet to come. And it just reminds me that you know what? We are still the last great bastion of hope on the earth. And I pass it and I smile, usually get goosebumps and salute it.” – TX man, white veteran strong Republican

“For me, **the flag is tied up in what we want to be.** And I think that Americans want to be kind. We want to be generous. We want to be neighborly. We want to get along with each other and we want a fair shake at providing for ourselves and our families.” – MI man, white veteran strong Democrat

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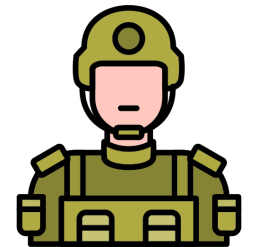
# Most Have Pride In Their Military Service And Feel It Made Them Better People

“My father told me, ‘you're getting married and you're going into the service.’ And I fought him tooth and nail. I hated him for it for a while....But at any rate, **it gave me responsibility. It taught me a lot of life lessons.** And for that, I'm grateful....It taught me about being a decent human being more than anything.” – PA man, Black veteran strong Democrat

“I **don't have anything negative about my military service.** It's all positive....Hindsight being 20/20, I would've done it at 18 and stayed in longer.” – GA man, white veteran independent lean Republican

"I **feel very respected.** Everywhere I go and anytime I've mentioned to employers, coworkers, neighbors, 'Thank you for your service. Service. Oh my goodness. Thank you so much for your service. Can I buy your meal for you?' I get it all the time. So I've always felt respected." – TX man, white veteran strong Republican

“I **wouldn't be where I am without having joined the army.** I am not entirely comfortable with how we target dumb 18-year-olds to go risk their lives and break their knees, but it worked out for me. I got four years of education that got me a computer science degree. I would not own a house without the GI bill or the home loans. And I don't know if I would've had the same chance to broaden my point of view without the military.” – MI man, white veteran strong Democrat



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# One Told A Painful Story About Her Sexual Assault During Her Service

"I was **sexually assaulted my second week of bootcamp** and that was the first of many or several. It was an ugly experience and it's left me with lifelong PTSD. And I've been involved with a lot of veterans groups, a lot of women. I've heard some horrendous stories of the attacks that women have been victimized."

"I was the only woman in a hanger that held two C130s, nose to nose. It was brutal. And I'm 65 years old and I wasn't even diagnosed [with PTSD] until I was 55. **My whole family knows the effects of the PTSD. They've lived with it.** Sucks."

"I just **wish that they had prosecuted the perpetrators.** Nobody ever got prosecuted for stuff like that, ever. Never. I don't know any of my female veteran friends who have ever had their attackers prosecuted."

"When you see a woman veteran, there's a **high, high, high percentage of women veterans who have been sexually assaulted** and you won't even know about it. You'll never hear about it, but there's a lot of them out there." – TX woman, white veteran weak Republican

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# Most–Though Not All–Would Be Happy For Their Kids To Join The Military

Moderator: How would you feel about your own children joining the military?

“My other daughter, the younger one, **I would have physically restrained her every single day the rest of her life if I'd have had to prevent her from enlisting.** And I told her that if she really, really wanted to do that, that I would move everywhere she was and be there to protect her.” – TX woman, white veteran weak Republican



"[My kids would be] **open to so many amazing things, travel and adventure,** and benefits of all kind. I think they'd be awesome if they would join [the military]....**I hope they do...I would be honored.**" – TX man, white veteran strong Republican

“I think it's something that **everybody should do...**between the ages before you go to college or just find some direction, get some discipline, experience a vast number of people in different environments.” – GA man, white veteran independent lean Republican



# Many Wish That America Would Place More Emphasis Domestically, And On Helping Veterans Post-Service

“Homeless veterans need to be taken care of instead of sending billions overseas...We have one in particular. She's missing a leg, so I'm guessing she really might have been military, but if she can't afford a house, she has to be panhandling. I think that's a crime.” – OH man, white veteran strong Republican

“I've always thought that **America is too much in other countries' business** when we have domestic issues here at home that we should really address instead of trying to be the world police.” – GA man, white veteran independent lean Republican

“We need more than thank you for your service...When I go to the VA hospital and I see all of those people out there, I'm like, **people signed up and gave their lives for this to protect this country. And then when they come back, it's like they're just thrown off to the side.**” – GA woman, Black veteran strong Democrat

“We did Afghanistan. We did Iraq. I don't want to do Iran too, guys. Come on. **Can we stop doing these dumbass wars?** What are we even doing?” – MI man, white veteran strong Democrat



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# Some Have Plans To Celebrate America 250, Or Hope We Pull Together

Moderator: What plans do you have to celebrate America 250?

“It's pride and a little bit of excitement rolled in. And I'm hoping to see basically back to the bicentennial but to a higher degree. **I hope America pulls together** and we don't have anything bad happen....**I'm hoping our Gold Wing get together is celebrating it.** It is 250 themed and it's literally the weekend before the 4th of July. So there's a lot of red, white, and blue lights getting put on the trailer.” – OH man, white veteran strong Republican” – OH man, white veteran strong Republican

“Well, **I didn't really think about it until I was at Walmart the other day and I saw a T-shirt that said ‘Happy 250th.’** So I was like, ‘wow, it's the 250th.’...I didn't really pay any attention to any big plans, but I can imagine going out to Stone Mountain again just to celebrate.” – GA man, white veteran independent lean Republican

“**I would hope that the celebration, people open their eyes and realize the road that we're going,** the path that we're going. If you think about 250 years where we were and where we're headed, I hope that the celebration could make some people look back and say, ‘you know what? We've veered off from where we started or where we wanted to go and where we wanted this country to be.’...We can't just gloss over to all the good things.” – GA woman, Black veteran strong Democrat

“I don't know. This [anniversary] **really hasn't affected me** a whole lot like when I was a teenager 50 years ago.” – TX woman, white veteran weak Republican

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## About Navigator

In a world where the news cycle is the length of a tweet, our leaders often lack the real-time public-sentiment analysis to shape the best approaches to talking about the issues that matter the most. Navigator is designed to act as a consistent, flexible, responsive tool to inform policy debates by conducting research and reliable guidance to inform allies, elected leaders, and the press. Navigator is a project led by pollsters from Global Strategy Group and GBAO.

## About the Study

On June 3, 2026, GBAO conducted one online focus group with military veterans from battleground presidential and Senate states.\* The group was part of Navigator's exploration of America at 250.

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