

Changing Veteran Status in the Post-September 11 Period

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Veterans' groups have long been considered among the most powerful special interests in Washington, as they derive legitimacy from their sacrifice for the country and widespread support among the public. The power of veterans' groups and the prominence of veterans in politics waned in the post-Vietnam era, due in part to public questions about the Vietnam conflict, the sharp decline in the number of citizens with prior military service, the end of the Cold War, and the continuing decline in the number of surviving World War II veterans. This paper examines how the power of veterans has shifted in the wake of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan by examining the size and strength of veterans' organizations, the prominence of veterans as candidates, public opinion on veterans and veterans' issues, the strength of veterans' groups in the political system and the prominent role that veterans and veterans' groups play in political campaigns.

Veterans have a history of acquiring government benefits through civic action. The first pension act was created for veterans shortly after the War of 1812 (Resch 1982) Veterans' benefits were greatly expanded after the Civil War, when Veterans began to organize in benefit groups (Holcombe 1999). In the late 1860's, veterans constituted just five percent of the total population, but were highly respected after the war and were able to earn disproportionate federal benefits because of their organization and support of the Republican Party. During the New Deal era, veterans' groups organized in opposition to substantial cuts in veteran benefits. Despite the serious economic problems facing the country at the time, veterans' groups were successful at overturning the cuts. This display of power helped to establish veterans' as a powerful special interest in Washington.

Veterans groups became particularly powerful after WWII due to the extraordinarily large number of veterans and the successful efforts of organized groups to mobilize veterans and secure benefits on their behalf. Veterans' groups successfully lobbied Congress to pass the GI Bill, which provided veterans with college grants and low interest educational loans (Mettler 2004). The GI Bill provided veterans with educational experiences that enabled veterans to move into leadership positions in business, community, and public affairs. Also, the sheer number of veterans that the war created, and the sacrifices they made, gave veterans' groups tremendous influence in the public arena.

Veterans' power waned during the Vietnam War era. The Vietnam War was unpopular and veterans of this time period tended to be more disaffected and distrustful of government than veterans from other periods (Loch 1976; Schwartz 1986). Vietnam Veterans were also less able to gain benefits from Congress than veterans of previous wars. During this period, Veterans Organizations like the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion saw a decrease in membership and a significant loss of influence in this era due to a number of factors; including the unpopularity of the Vietnam War, the aging of the World War II generation of veterans, and the declining size of the US Military that came with the end of the Cold War.

Public attention to issues of national security and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have changed the political dynamic for American veterans. In the post-September 11th era, veterans have gained considerable political clout. The wars in the Middle-East have created a new group

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of combat veterans and, though the membership of veterans' groups continues to decline, a new generation of veterans has been able to leverage media attention and strong public support to shape the public agenda and influence the political process.

Veterans and Political Power

Veterans have a long history of obtaining benefits from the Federal government. The 1818 Revolutionary War Pension Act, which offered aid to veterans living in poverty, was the first federally-provided benefit for veterans (Resch 1982). The Revolutionary War Pension Act passed Congress easily due to the public's high regard for veterans in the aftermath of the War of 1812. The increase in veterans' political power due to postwar sentiment in the 1810s is the earliest evidence that veterans' status improves after armed conflict. Although veterans supported the legislation, this act was not driven by an organized effort on the part of veterans, but by an outpouring of public support for veterans.

Future generations turned to advocacy organizations, "voluntary organizations independent of the political organization that attempt to influence the government" (Andrews and Edwards 2004) to secure benefits and achieve political objectives. The earliest veterans to organize for benefits were the Civil War veterans (Holcombe 1999).¹ Civil War Veterans were successful at gaining benefits because they were large in number and well-organized. In addition, public perceptions of the sacrifice and service made by veterans in defense of the union gave veterans additional influence. Civil War Veterans made up five percent of the US population but a much larger percentage of franchised citizens (Holcombe 1999), giving them substantial power as a voting bloc. In addition, veterans' groups like the United States Soldiers and Sailors Protective Society (USSSPS) and the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) organized veterans in pursuit of their interests (Holcombe). USSSPS was made up of veterans, but GAR included civilians as well and both groups succeeded in securing pensions and disability entitlements for Civil War veterans. In addition, GAR built close alliances with the powerful Republican Party, which allowed them to secure substantial benefits for its members (Holcombe 1999).

Veterans' groups in the post World War I era obtained benefits by threatening to vote against congressmen who would not vote for their policies. The American Legion had substantial influence in Congress, which contributed to passage of pro-veteran legislation (Key 1943). In 1933, the AL and VFW were instrumental in organizing veteran opposition to the cuts in veterans' pensions and benefits included in the Economy Act. The following year, veterans' groups successfully pressured Congress to overturn the cuts and override a presidential veto.²

World War II created millions of veterans, increasing the power and political influence of veterans' and veterans' groups. Veterans rode high on positive sentiment after the war. The GI Bill, passed in 1944, is a well-known example of the benefits veterans were able to secure during and after World War II. The GI Bill provided veterans with funding to attend college or vocational school, and millions took advantage of the benefit (Mettler 2002). According to Suzanne Mettler and Eric Welch (2004), the GI Bill increased the political power of veterans, who became educated, financially secure and politically engaged. The GI Bill, utilized by millions of

¹ The Post Civil War Veterans were the first interest group of any type that was successful at securing wealth transfers from the U.S. Treasury (Holcombe 1999).

² To be sure, there were limits to Veterans' political power. When a "bonus army" of 45,000 World War I veterans camped in Washington DC with hopes of getting a promised bonus from Congress, President Herbert Hoover mobilized the Army, which used tear gas to drive the bonus marchers out of Washington. Though the event caused national outrage and contributed to Hoover's defeat in the November election, it demonstrated that veterans' influence over political leaders had their limits (Kusmer 2007).

veterans from World War II and the Korean War, played a pivotal role in creating social capital and providing veterans the means to become more civically and politically engaged.

Waning Veteran Power in the Post-Vietnam Era

The Vietnam War was the last major conflict the United States participated in before the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The Vietnam War and the postwar period was a time of waning power for veterans. Public opinion of the military and veterans was low, and there were no new conflicts to add new veterans to the ranks, or to change public opinion. A study published in 1976, for example, found that a substantial number of Vietnam Veterans felt alienated from the political process. One survey found that 51 percent of veterans believed politics was a “corrupt business” (Johnson 1976). The same study also found that a majority of veterans did not trust the government and did not agree that the government had their best interests in mind. Indeed, according to one study, 42 percent of Vietnam Veterans felt politically alienated (Johnson, 1976).

In addition to feeling politically alienated, Vietnam vets also returned home to find the country facing a long period of financial stagnation and economic turmoil. According to one study, Vietnam veterans made comparatively less money than Korean War and World War II veterans twelve to sixteen years after their service (Schwartz 1986). Saul Swartz (1986) suggests that among other factors, the GI Bill was comparatively less generous to Vietnam veterans than previous generations of veterans. As a result of the economic environment, it was more difficult for veterans of the Vietnam era to secure government benefits.

Though there was a resurgence of public support for the military during the Reagan years, the end of the Cold War in 1989 accelerated the decline of veterans’ political influence. The US military, which during the Cold War numbered in between two and three million active duty personnel, dropped to under two million in 1992, and continued to fall for the next eight years, when it bottomed out in 2000 at under 1.4 million (Daggett 2002). The drop in troop strength meant that there were fewer new veterans joining the ranks. Furthermore, the number of total veterans decreased as World War veterans began to pass away at rates of over one thousand a day. The number of veterans fell steadily, declining from 28 million in 1980 to 27 million in 1990 and 26 million in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2003).

The steady decline of veterans in the population was paralleled by declines in the number of veterans in Congress. The 91st Congress (elected in 1968), had 398 veterans. The 96th Congress (elected in 1978) had 298 veterans. By the 111th Congress (elected in 2008), there were just 121 veterans serving in Congress. According to Raasch (2010), the influence of veterans over legislation declined because there were fewer veterans in Congress to represent their interests (Raasch, 2010). The declining number of veterans, as well as the drop in the number of veterans holding congressional seats reduced the power of veterans’ groups in Washington.

Membership in veterans’ organizations has also declined. For instance, the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) saw membership decrease from 2.5 million members in 1992 to 1.5 million in 2009. Membership in the American Legion was also down, falling from 3.3 million in 1946 to 2.6 million in 2009. Both organizations are graying, and many new veterans associate them with World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. Given that veterans’ organizations played a crucial role in organizing veterans and securing payments and wealth transfers from government on their behalf, the decreasing membership strength of these groups contributed to a decline in veterans’ political influence.

Changing Veteran Status in the Post-9/11 Era

The political influence of veterans shifted in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks and the subsequent U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. These events led to increases in the size of

the American military and created more combat veterans than any conflict since Vietnam (Iraq Veterans for Congress 2010).

The importance of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars was not lost on presidential candidates in 2004, as both John Kerry and George Bush devoted attention to national and homeland security issues.³ Both Kerry and Bush were veterans themselves; Kerry had served in Vietnam, while Bush served in the National Guard.⁴ Veterans played a key role in the campaign and Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry found himself the subject of highly-publicized and highly-effective political attacks from a group of veterans known as the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth (Dionisopoulos, 2009).

Although veterans have been featured prominently in presidential races, the number of young veterans joining the traditional veterans' organizations, the American Legion and the VFW, remains small. The VFW has been forced to close posts, reduce services, and increase dues as its membership has continued to decline, even after the influx of new veterans (USA TODAY 2009). Jim Verheyen, a VFW member, handed out 200 membership forms to Iraq war veterans at a lunch. None of the forms were filled out. Though veterans' groups were hopeful that the recession would encourage veterans to join their groups in search of affordable entertainment options, they remain worried about how they will survive after their Vietnam-era members pass away (USA TODAY 2009). Though traditional veterans' organizations are struggling, there is some evidence that newly formed veterans' groups catering to newer veterans, are doing well. For instance, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans for America, founded in 2004, has more than 125,000 members and supporters.

Politically-oriented Iraq and Afghanistan veterans' organizations have proliferated in recent years. Vets for Freedom, the largest Iraq and Afghanistan veterans' group, aims to provide support for politicians who "put long-term national security before short-term partisan political gain" (Vets For Freedom 2010). VoteVets is another group organized by Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, whose primary purpose is to get veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan elected, regardless of party affiliation or views (VoteVets, 2010). Iraq Veterans for Congress is a recently formed group that supports the election of Republican and conservative veterans. The fact that these groups are primarily political in nature and have been formed in the past eight years suggests that younger veterans could be interested in organizations that provide political action without the social support associated with the VFW and the American Legion.

Despite shrinking membership, the VFW is still relevant. The VFW-PAC, a subgroup of combat veterans in the VFW assigned to support candidates who take their view on national defense and homeland security (VFW-PAC 2010). In 2010, the VFW endorsed Senators running for reelection if they voted for the VFW-approved position seven out of nine times, and House members who voted for the VFW position ten out of thirteen times. If an incumbent candidate does not reach this criterion, the VFW-PAC will consider the opposing candidate. In the November 2010 election cycle, rank and file VFW members expressed outrage at VFW-PAC's endorsement of incumbent Senators and members of Congress who were outspoken critics of the military, including Sen. Barbara Boxer (D) and Rep. Ron Klein (D) (Shiner, 2010). In response to criticism, the President of the VFW called for the recall of the VFW-PAC's leadership. The controversy surrounding the PAC's actions demonstrated that the VFW's endorsements are significant enough to be scrutinized by the media, and that the VFW leadership is sensitive to its members' criticism. Though Senator

³ Military experience was also part of presidential biographies during the 2008 election. Republican presidential candidate John McCain was also combat veteran and prisoner of war. In addition, Joe Biden, the Democratic vice-presidential nominee, had a son serving in Iraq.

⁴ Kerry, who served in a combat zone, is a combat veteran, but Bush is considered a veteran as well, even though he did not serve in combat.

Boxer and Rep. Klein were unpopular with the VFW's core constituency, both candidates viewed the VFW endorsements as beneficial to their re-election campaigns (Shiner 2010).

Political Narrative

All candidates running for office construct an image of themselves to portray to voters. They attempt to shape the election by persuading the public to accept this narrative. One such narrative is the war hero narrative (Cornog, 2004). A candidate using the war hero narrative will use their experience and sacrifice during combat, as well as the leadership associated with the US military, in order to gain legitimacy and win over voters. For example, John Kerry used the war hero narrative during the 2004 election (Dionisopoulos 2009). Kerry, an officer during Vietnam who was awarded the Bronze Star and several Purple Hearts, highlighted his service record during the campaign by arriving at the Democratic Convention on a swift boat and announcing to the delegates that he was "reporting for duty" (Youtube.com, 2010). Use of the war hero narrative is an example of veterans' influence in politics. Public opinion of veterans is high, so it is only logical that politicians will try to attach themselves to this image.

The 2004 presidential campaign also serves an example of the use of counter-narrative by opposing campaigns to contradict or otherwise undermines the candidate's image. In this case, a non-profit group of veterans called Swift Boat Veterans for Truth launched a counter-narrative against Kerry. The narrative and counter-narrative are important when exploring the influence of veterans, because the power of veterans can be found by examining how candidates try to use the story of veterans in their campaign narrative (Dionisopoulos, 2009).

Research Question

While the end of the Cold War and the subsequent reduction in the size of the American military has reduced the number of new veterans, the September 11 attacks and the ensuing wars have altered the political climate in ways that have strengthened the political influence of veterans and veterans' groups. There have been no recent wars that have involved the conscription of Americans, and the World War II generation is passing on. This means that veterans will not be able to rely simply on their numbers in order to influence politics.

I hypothesize that, despite an overall decrease in the number of veterans, the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have increased veterans' political influence. The political power of a group is not just a function of numbers, but also the influence that groups can leverage from ordinary citizens. In addition, veterans gain added influence from the disproportionate share of governmental positions held by veterans and the organizational capabilities of veterans' groups. I believe that the change in political climate caused by September 11 and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have enabled veterans to remain politically powerful despite shrinking membership in veteran groups and continued declines in the total number of veterans in the electorate.

Research Design

This paper assesses the changes in the political influence of veterans during the post September 11 era, which began in 2001 and goes to the present. In order to determine the influence of veterans today, I will examine a variety of relevant indicators with reference to the post-Cold War era. The post-Cold War era will be defined as the time between 1996 and 2001. The start date was chosen five years after the Cold War ended because the US military was in a transition phase at this point and drawing down from the conflict.

In order to understand how veterans' influence has changed in the post-September 11 period, I will examine changes in key indicators of group political strength, including: the total number of veterans, the number of veterans participating in veterans' organizations, the number of active

veterans' organizations, the access that veterans have to the political system, the role of veterans in campaigns, and public opinion of veterans.

Veterans' organizations are important groups to examine because they have historically led veterans in petitioning governments for change. Historically, strong veterans' organizations have been successful in gaining political support and currently there are over ninety veterans' organizations that are recognized by the US Government. Some of the most distinguished of these groups are Veterans of Foreign Wars and The American Legion. These two organizations will be used to measure veterans' growth or decline during the post-Cold War period and the September 11 era⁵ (US Department of Veterans' Affairs 2010). It is expected that the numbers of members in these organizations will drop continuously from the end of the Cold War to some point in the 2000's when veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan join in numbers large enough to replace the older generations.

Group size is related to political power in a democratic system such as America simply because active and organized voters translate into elected politicians. Large groups of activists are able to gain support for themselves by promising to elect those who will best serve their interests. The total number of veterans in the United States has been declining since the end of the Cold War. The shrinking number of veterans is important to consider when looking at veterans' influence because veterans vote within their own interest, so a change in their numbers will mean a change in their voting power. According to the US Census Bureau, the number of veterans in the US declined from 27,481,000 in 1990 to 26,403,000 in 2000. In 2009, that number dropped to 21,900,000 (US Census Bureau, 2010). This drop can be attributed to loss of World War II veterans, as well as a decrease in the US military's size after the Cold War. It is important to realize that the number of veterans has dropped, even in the midst of two US wars. The modern army employs far fewer soldiers than it did during the Cold War. One question this raises is whether veterans will be able to continue to hold onto their power after the World War II and Vietnam War veterans pass away. Veteran influence, however, is disproportionate to their size because non-veterans also support their causes. Public support of veterans can be measured by examining the public confidence in the military. Gallup lists the military as the institution that Americans have most confidence in, with 76% of Americans claiming to have "great confidence" in the military in 2010 (Saad 2010). Confidence in the US military peaked in 1991, when 85% of Americans expressed great confidence in the institution. Confidence in the military fell during the nineties, and was only 69% in June of 2001 (Newport 2007). By June 2003, that number had rebounded to 82% (Newport 2007). Confidence in the military as an institution gives veterans more power, and this is certainly a sign that the current climate has contributed to increased power for veterans.

Veterans gain power from the amount of access they have to the political system. Veterans in Congress are a group of veterans that have the highest level of access to the institution. Despite this fact, the number of veterans in Congress has been on a steady decline. This is troubling to veterans, because having their own group dominate the legislative branch made it easier to persuade Congress to pass legislation that would support them. In 1969, 75% of Congress served in the military (Raasch, 2010). By 2001, that number had dropped to 31%. In 2010 it had dropped again to 22.5% (Raasch, 2010). Fewer and fewer veterans are getting elected to Congress because the number of Veterans running for Congress has declined as well. Former President Bush was a veteran, and although current President Obama never served, Vice President Biden did. Veterans in office are able to influence policy directly. Specifically, when veterans hold federal offices, veteran influence is increased.

⁵ These groups will be used to study the influence of veterans' groups because of their national size and scope and their continued operation in the political realm during the time of this study.

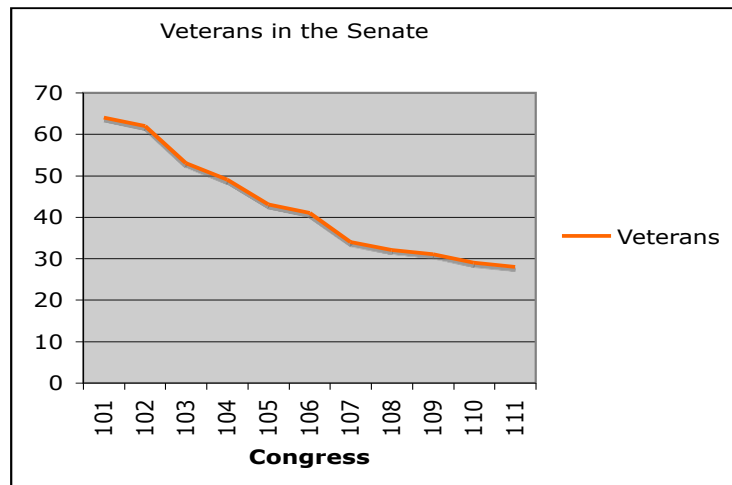
A final method of measuring veterans' influence in politics is to examine the importance of presidential narratives during elections. The emphasis that candidates place on veterans' issues and the use of positive veteran narratives, like the war hero narrative, are signs that veterans remain important in politics. Important narratives in the post-Cold War time period include the 1996 presidential election, where vice presidential candidate Jack Kemp was a veteran. In the 2000 election, George Bush was the only veteran. In the 2004 election, both Bush and John Kerry were veterans. Finally, in the 2008 election, John McCain was a veteran. The presence of veterans as presidential candidates in elections is an example of veteran influence.

The size of veterans' organizations and the number of veterans that are holding office are indicators that can be used to measure their influence. Other indicators that reveal veterans' influence in elections include the amount of attention given during elections to veterans and the success of politicians that used the veterans' narrative.

Analysis

The number of veterans in the House of Representatives has declined steadily from 1989 to the present. There were 182 veterans in the House of Representatives in the 101st Congress, but only 147 in the 104th. The number of Veterans dropped once again in the 107th to 126, and continued to slide to the 111th Congress, which only contained 98 veterans out of the 435-member body. This is a clear display of a decline of veteran power, because veterans in Congress are a literal example of the declining voice in government office.⁶

Figure 1: Veterans in the Senate, 101st through 111th Congress



Source: Biographical Directory of the United States Congress

Veteran membership in the Senate also declined over this period. 64 members of the 101st Congress were Veterans; however, the number has consistently fallen since. The 105th Congress boasted only 43 veterans, and the 111th Congress had 28 veteran Senators. The drop in Veterans in the Senate is another loss of Veteran power. One may note that it would be expected for the number of veterans to drop off in this period as the World War II generation passes away. The national mood surrounding 9/11 may have slowed the slide because the

⁶ One possible factor in the decline of Veterans in Congress is the rise of women in the Legislature. This is addressed in the Appendix

number of veterans in the Senate drops off more slowly after the 107th Congress, which met in 2001 there were 34 Veterans in the 107th Congress, 32 in the 108th, 31 in the 109th, 29 in the 110th, and 28 in the 111th. This could be a sign of veteran resurgence in politics, as few of the remaining veterans in Congress were losing elections.

One factor that contributed to the decrease of veterans in Congress is the increase in the number of female candidates and officeholders. Women are less likely than men to have served in the military and the number of women in Congress between 1989 and 2009 increased from 17% in 1989 to 24.3% in 2009 (Center for American Women in Politics, 2011). The increase in the number of women remains relatively small, however, and does not account for the massive decrease of veterans in Congress.

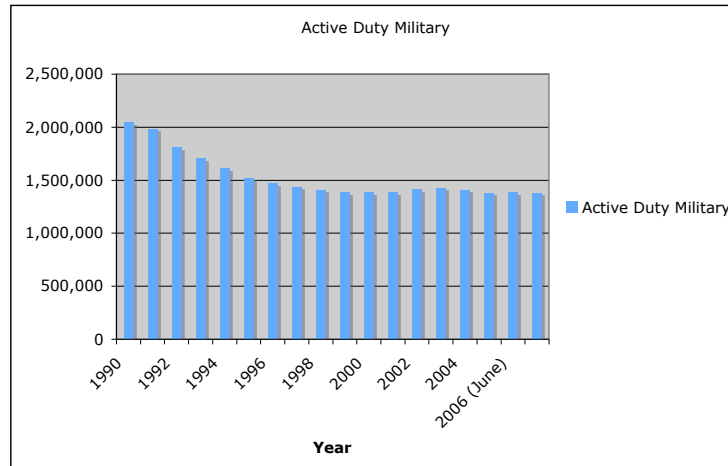
Another governmental barometer to examine veteran influence in politics is candidacy. In 2010, the veterans organization, Vets for Freedom, backed ten Iraq and Afghanistan veterans running for the House in 2010 (The Weekly Standard, 2010). A total of 27 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans ran for Congress, with 25 running for the House and 2 running for the Senate (Rieckhoff, 2010). This new generation of veterans is an example of how the current wars are increasing veteran power. Eight of these veterans were elected (Vets for Freedom, 2010). This surge in Iraq and Afghanistan numbers in the House gives veterans power, and is an example of how post-9/11 veterans have become more influential.

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Like professional organizations, veterans' group membership is limited by the number of members of that group that participate. Many veterans' organizations, like the VFW and AL depend on active duty veterans to keep their ranks up. They are losing the many members of the World War II and Korean War, and to some extent, the Vietnam War, and if they hope to keep their power as an interest group, will need to gain new members. Active duty personnel are also a barometer for how heavily involved the military is in worldwide conflicts. One would assume that the more active duty soldiers there are in a given year, the more the military is being used. As anticipated, the number of active duty soldiers decreased in the nineties as the United States drew down from the Cold War. The number of active duty soldiers in this time period steadily dropped, from just over two million in 1990 to a million and a half in 1995, to under one million four hundred in 2000. One would expect the number of active duty soldiers to have increased after 2001 and during the Afghan and Iraqi wars. However, the number of active duty personnel simply leveled off. The lack of military buildup traditionally associated with wars may lead to a smaller veteran influence in the future.

Public opinion for the military is currently at one of the highest points that it has ever been. This is shown by a 2009 Gallup poll, which found that 82% of Americans had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the military. This amount of support was surpassed only one time since

Figure 2: Active Duty Military

1975, during Operation Desert Storm when the number of Americans with a great deal of support for the military was at 85%. This is important when considering the importance of veterans because veteran status is linked to the support of the military. If the general population supports veterans, it gives them greater legitimacy. As one can discern from the poll, support for the military has been higher in the post-9/11 era than previously. This is probably in part because Americans tend to support the military more during times of war. The spike in support for veterans during Desert Storm supports this phenomenon. Since the number of veterans has been decreasing in recent years, veterans will have to increasingly rely on public support in order to pass important bills and gain political support. Consequently, veterans will have support as long as the public supports the military, but that support can be lost, leaving veterans more vulnerable to their public standing than in previous eras.

The American Legion, which had a steady membership of about three million members between 1989 and 1996, saw their membership decrease to two and a half million by 2006. Likewise, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, which had a membership of over two million during the early nineties, saw their membership drop to 1,900,000 in 2006, signifying about a ten percent drop (Encyclopedia of Associations). As a result of declining membership, the two largest and most powerful veterans' organizations have been forced to close posts and reduce services due to this drop in membership.

Discussion

This study of veterans in the post September 11 era is important because veterans have historically been important players in the political process. From the Revolutionary War to after Vietnam, veterans have consistently had some level of success when petitioning the government. Veterans have historically gained the most generous and important legislation after a war. This is evident from early interest groups organized by Civil War Veterans to the GI Bill, passed after World War II. Even groups that failed their original goals, like the Bonus Army of 1932, were still able to cause a stir in politics. The US is currently engaged in two wars, so it is likely that veterans will once again assemble to petition for more rights. This study does not go so far as to assume if or when modern veterans will attempt to pass pro-veteran legislation, but history has shown that veterans have organized in order to gain political power after every conflict, and it is likely that this trend will continue with the latest generation of veterans.

Another trend this study has revealed is the decline of veterans overall. The post-Cold War era veterans, as well as every other group of veterans since World War II, have had more living members than the current pool. As the World War II generation fades away and the Vietnam War generation ages, it will be interesting to see if the smaller group of veterans is still able to achieve dynamic changes in American politics.

Finally, veterans' organizations have been a staple in petitioning the government and ensuring that veteran opinion was considered in Congress. However, since traditionally powerful veterans' groups like the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars continue to shrink, even with the influx of new combat veterans from Afghanistan and Iraq. It will be interesting to see if a new organization emerges to support a new veterans' organization, or if these traditional groups are able to continue to operate.

My project does not address the questions of what legislation veterans will introduce or whether their traditional organizations will survive after the older generations have gone. These would be excellent starting points for researchers interested in furthering this field of study. Researchers could also further examine the proliferation of new Iraq and Afghanistan veterans' groups, and the type of impact they will have on the country in the coming years. A final project that could be examined would be the increase of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans in Congress, and what sort of legacy their generation of vets will leave.

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