



# Public Opinion on Veterans

## Fact Sheet

### Introduction

Since 2000, the Veterans' Institute has had an annual survey conducted into public opinion on veterans and topics related to veterans, where some of the same questions recur every year. This enables us to identify trends in Dutch public opinion in the longer term.

### Awareness of deployment

One question put annually concerns the Dutch public's awareness of the deployment of Dutch service personnel in wars and peacekeeping operations in the (recent) past. Unsurprisingly, the Second World War scores highly over the years. About 95% of respondents indicate they are aware of the deployment of Dutch service personnel and Merchant Navy personnel in wars between 1939 and 1945. Below are some of the figures relating to awareness of the deployment of Dutch service personnel:

	2004	2007	2010	2013
<b>WW II 1939-1945</b>	96%	93%	92%	95%
<b>Dutch East Indies 1945-1950</b>	92%	91%	90%	91%
<b>Korea 1950-1955</b>	41%	40%	45%	41%
<b>New Guinea 1950-1962</b>	59%	-	61%	56%
<b>Lebanon 1979-1985</b>	58%	62%	66%	64%
<b>Cambodia 1992-1993</b>	25%	-	-	20%
<b>Srebrenica 1994-1995</b>	91%	88%	88%	86%
<b>Bosnia 1992-2007</b>	93%	92%	90%	86%
<b>Kosovo 1999-2000</b>	-	-	-	78%
<b>Iraq 2003-2005</b>	98%	83%	78%	66%
<b>Uruzgan 2006-2010</b>	-	89%	93%	82%

The opinion figures concerning awareness of the deployment of Dutch military service personnel in the (recent) past show a very consistent picture over a period of ten years. There are only a few missions that have passed into oblivion. A number of factors can play a part here. The active dissemination of information about veterans and appreciation for them as part of veterans' policy, including by organising Netherlands Veterans' Day and supporting local veterans' days, could help to keep memories of military deployment alive. The same might also apply to increased media attention to veterans and deployment experiences.

## Was deployment justified?

The respondents who indicated they were aware of specific military action in which Dutch service personnel took part were also asked for their assessment of that deployment: 'justified', 'unjustified' or 'no opinion'. The section of the Dutch public which labelled a specific military deployment 'justified' is shown below:

	2004	2007	2010	2013
<b>WW II 1939-1945</b>	95%	93%	90%	93%
<b>Dutch East Indies 1945-1950</b>	55%	49%	52%	50%
<b>Korea 1950-1955</b>	-	40%	34%	33%
<b>New Guinea 1950-1962</b>	-	-	47%	45%
<b>Lebanon 1979-1985</b>	49%	46%	41%	36%
<b>Cambodia 1992-1993</b>	51%	-	-	32%
<b>Srebrenica 1994-1995</b>	56%	50%	49%	45%
<b>Bosnia 1992-2007</b>	-	51%	47%	46%
<b>Kosovo 1999-2000</b>	-	-	-	44%
<b>Iraq 2003-2005</b>	44%	38%	36%	32%
<b>Uruzgan 2006-2010</b>	-	43%	41%	37%

These results also produce a very consistent picture for the entire period, notwithstanding a slight drop since 2007. For a clearer interpretation of the 'justified' percentages it is important to know that in all years an average of about 25% of respondents answered 'no opinion' for the various missions they were questioned about.

## Hero, culprit, victim

In October 2006, to ascertain the dominant view held by society of veterans, an assessment was carried out to find out which of the following three characterisations was believed to be most applicable to Dutch veterans.

## “Veterans .....

	2006	2009
1. .... showed courage	73%	75%
2. ....have psychological problems	11%	10%
3. .... sometimes acted with excessive violence	5%	5%
4. .... don't know	10%	10%

The vast majority of Dutch people therefore first and foremost viewed veterans as ‘heroes’. This picture was confirmed in the 2012 and 2013 opinion polls amended in this section where respondents were presented with fourteen terms and asked whether they were applicable to veterans. The top three of the associations selected were ‘dutiful’ (96% and 94%), ‘helpful’ (94% and 95%) and ‘courageous’ (92% and 91%). ‘Psychological problems’ (37% and 34%), ‘sensation-seeking’ (20% and 21%) and ‘violent’ (16% and 17%) scored the lowest as associations.

The lower association with ‘psychological problems’ is noteworthy and confirmed in another part of the survey. In 2012 and 2013, in response to the assertion “A large number of Dutch veterans are psychologically damaged”, 37% and 44% respectively of the population indicated they agreed. This percentage was still in the order of 50% to 60% in previous years.

## Appreciation for veterans

Our opinion polls focus on appreciation for the role of the Netherlands in general and appreciation for the service personnel (veterans) deployed. Below is a table showing the response category “(very) high appreciation for service personnel deployed”:

	2004	2007	2010	2013
<b>WW II 1939-1945</b>	94%	-	-	90%
<b>Dutch East Indies 1945-1950</b>	63%	61%	61%	56%
<b>Korea 1950-1955</b>	-	-	-	58%
<b>New Guinea 1950-1962</b>	-	-	62%	53%
<b>Lebanon 1979-1985</b>	66%	73%	67%	57%
<b>Cambodia 1992-1993</b>	68%	-	-	63%
<b>Srebrenica 1994-1995</b>	65%	67%	63%	56%
<b>Bosnia 1992-2007</b>	-	-	-	60%
<b>Kosovo 1999-2000</b>	-	-	-	58%
<b>Iraq 2003-2005</b>	71%	67%	64%	58%
<b>Uruzgan 2006-2010</b>	-	71%	69%	61%

We have not provided an overview of appreciation for the role of the Netherlands in this fact sheet. We have sufficed with the observation that in the case of nearly all missions, appreciation for the role of the Netherlands is about 15% to 30% lower than appreciation for the service personnel deployed. The section of public opinion which subsequently decides that a specific deployment was not justified will have a lower appreciation for the role of the Netherlands. Evidently, this is not at the expense of appreciation for veterans themselves. On average, about 60% of the Dutch population indicates they have a (very) high appreciation for veterans. That said, there has been a slight drop in appreciation figures since 2007. It will become clear in the next few years whether this is a trend or part of a natural ripple effect following a period of moderately rising appreciation figures until 2007.

## **Conclusion**

In the last ten years, various assertions relating to veterans' policy or parts of it have also been presented to opinion poll respondents. The results show, among other things, that there is constant and broad support among society of about 75% for the veterans' policy, optimum after-care, public expressions of appreciation for veterans and the annual organising of the Netherlands Veterans' Day.

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## **Further information**

Since 2000, in collaboration with Blauw Research BV, the Veterans' Institute has been surveying common opinions as regards veterans. As far as the survey method is concerned, the fieldwork has been carried out via the internet since 2002 (prior to that, it took place by telephone). A minimum of 1000 Dutch people aged 18 and above take part in the survey every year. The use of a statistical calculation model means the survey results are representative of the adult Dutch population in terms of sex, age, political preference and education level. For more information, go to: [www.veteraneninstituut.nl](http://www.veteraneninstituut.nl) or ring 088-334 00 50.

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