VETERAN PERCEPTIONS SURVEY RESULTS & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



February 2025

CALL OF DUTY ENDOWMENT

MISSION ROLL CALL

Ipsos



diers course, trainees who could not pass the armed forces' physical or aptitude tests go through three months of remedial training, or boot camp. Photographs by Rebecca Kiger for The New Yorker

A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE U.S. MILITARY'S RECRUITING CRISIS

"In 2022 and 2023, the Army missed its recruitment goal by nearly twenty-five per cent—about fifteen thousand troops a year. It hit the mark last year, but only by reducing the target by more than ten thousand. The Navy has also fared badly: it failed to reach its goals in 2023, then met them in 2024 by filling out the ranks with recruits of a lower standard; nearly half measured below average on an aptitude exam. The Army Reserve hasn't met its benchmark since 2016, and the ranks are so depleted that active-duty officers have been put in charge of reserve units."

Rationale

- At a time of historically bad recruiting results, when the traditional explanations—strong economy, poor physical fitness, drug use, Samurai culture, etc.—do not sufficiently explain the problem
- Our goal was to test this hypothesis:
    - Have the legacies of 20 years of war, as seen through public sentiment about our veterans, negatively impacted recruiting in an unprecedented way?
- As we'll show you today, the short answer is yes, the hypothesis is valid.

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Methodology

This study was conducted between September 26 – October 9, 2024, by Ipsos using the probability-based, KnowledgePanel®. This poll is based on a nationally representative probability sample of the following groups:

- 1,011 general population adults age 18 or older
- 524 parents of children aged 14-17
- 291 teens aged 14-17, obtained through their parents who took the survey
- 205 school personnel (defined as teachers, counselors, or coaches for grades 9-12)

The margin of sampling error for this study is plus or minus 3.3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level for results based on the general population sample of adults; plus or minus 4.7 percentage points for parents; plus or minus 6.8 percentage points for teens; and plus or minus 8.2 percentage points for school personnel.

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PROBLEM #1: A HISTORICALLY LOW WILLINGNESS TO SERVE

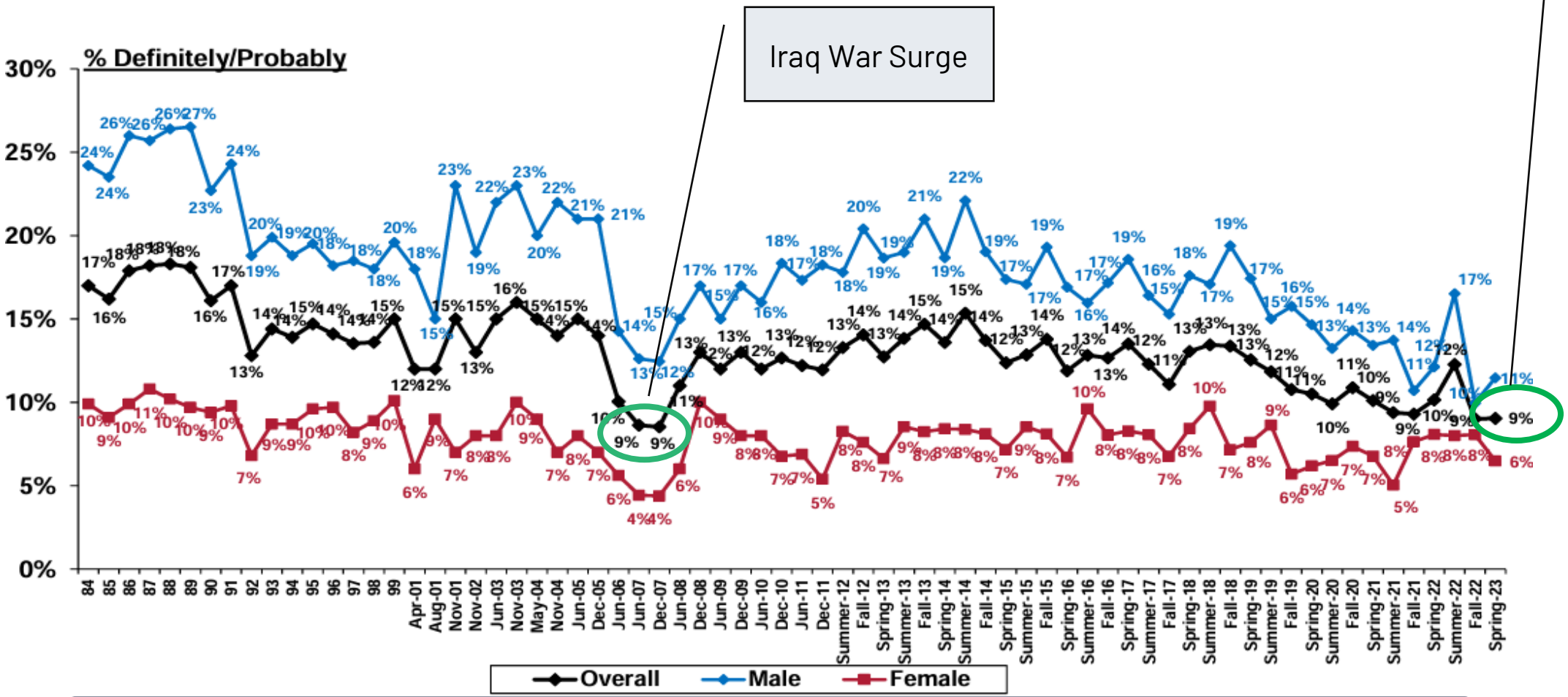
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Historical General Military Propensity

By Gender

FPP9: In the next few years, how likely is it that you will be serving in the Military?

Response options: Definitely, Probably, Probably Not, Definitely Not



Note: Youth ages 16–21. Estimates are charted to precise values.
Labels are rounded to the nearest whole percent.

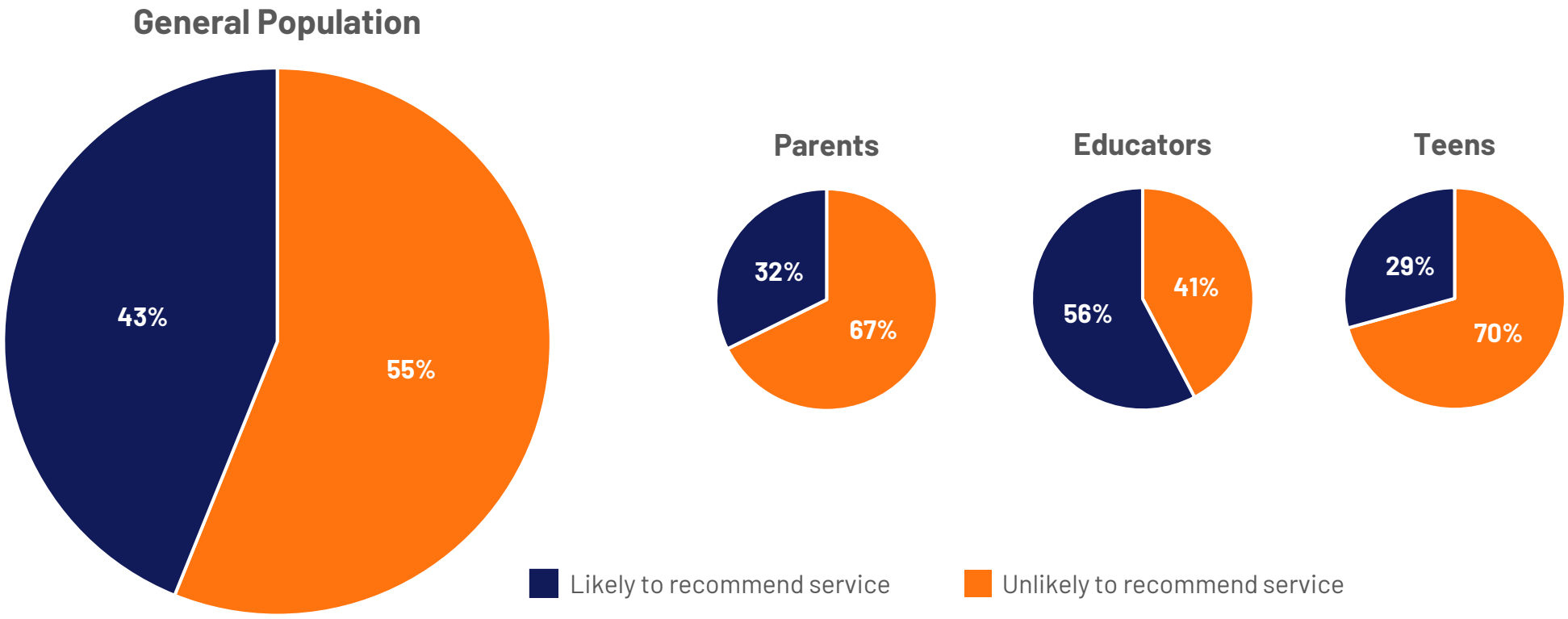
Source: DoD Youth Attitude Tracking Survey (YATS) and Youth Poll

JAMRS

Questions: YATS (Q503)–Jun-10 (FPP9): "Now, I'd like to ask you how likely it is that you will be serving in the Military in the next few years?"
Dec-10–Onwards (FPP9): "In the next few years, how likely is it that you will be serving in the Military?"

Enormous hesitancy in recommending military service to young people

How likely is it that you would recommend joining a military service?



Q (Adults) - We would like your opinion about the choices that your child has/young people have. Suppose your child/a young person asked for your advice about various post-high school options. How likely is it that you would recommend joining a military service such as the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, Space Force, or the National Guard?
Q (Teens) - How likely is it that you would recommend joining the military to someone your age (e.g., friend, family member, classmate)?
Base: General population (n=1,011); Parents (n=524); Teens (n=291); School Personnel (n=205)

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70%

of teens are **unlikely or very unlikely to recommend** joining the military to someone their age

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66%

of teens, if they were an employer, would **rather hire someone with a 4-year college degree** than with 4 years of military service.



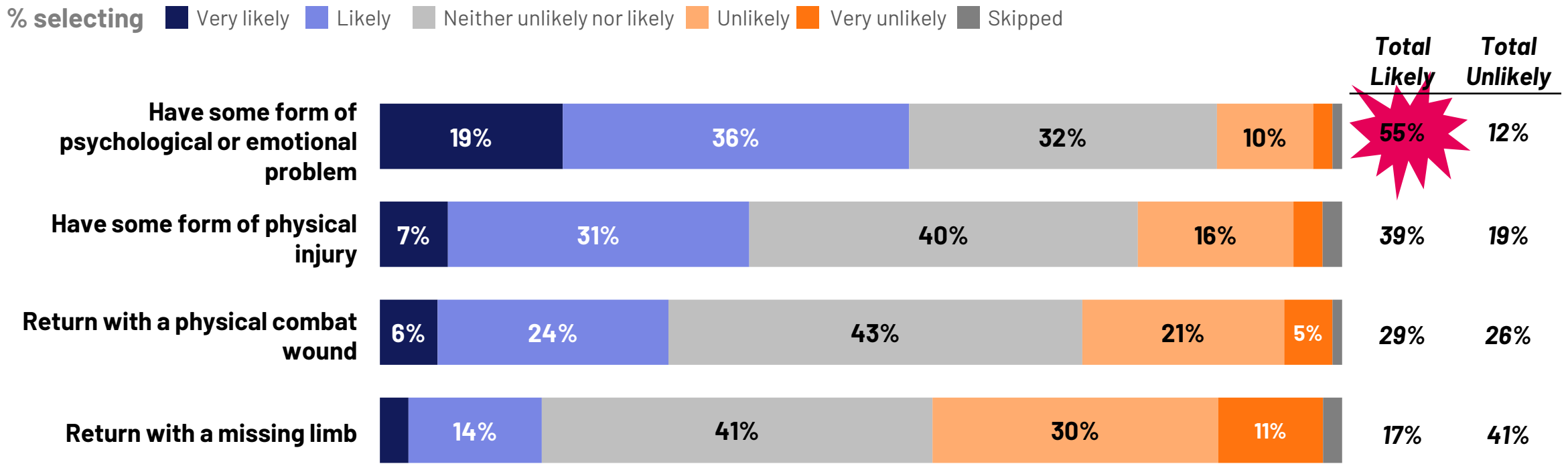
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PROBLEM #2: POOR PERCEPTIONS OF VETERAN OUTCOMES

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More than half of Americans say someone getting out of the military will likely have some form of psychological or emotional problem.

How likely do you think that someone getting out of the military will...

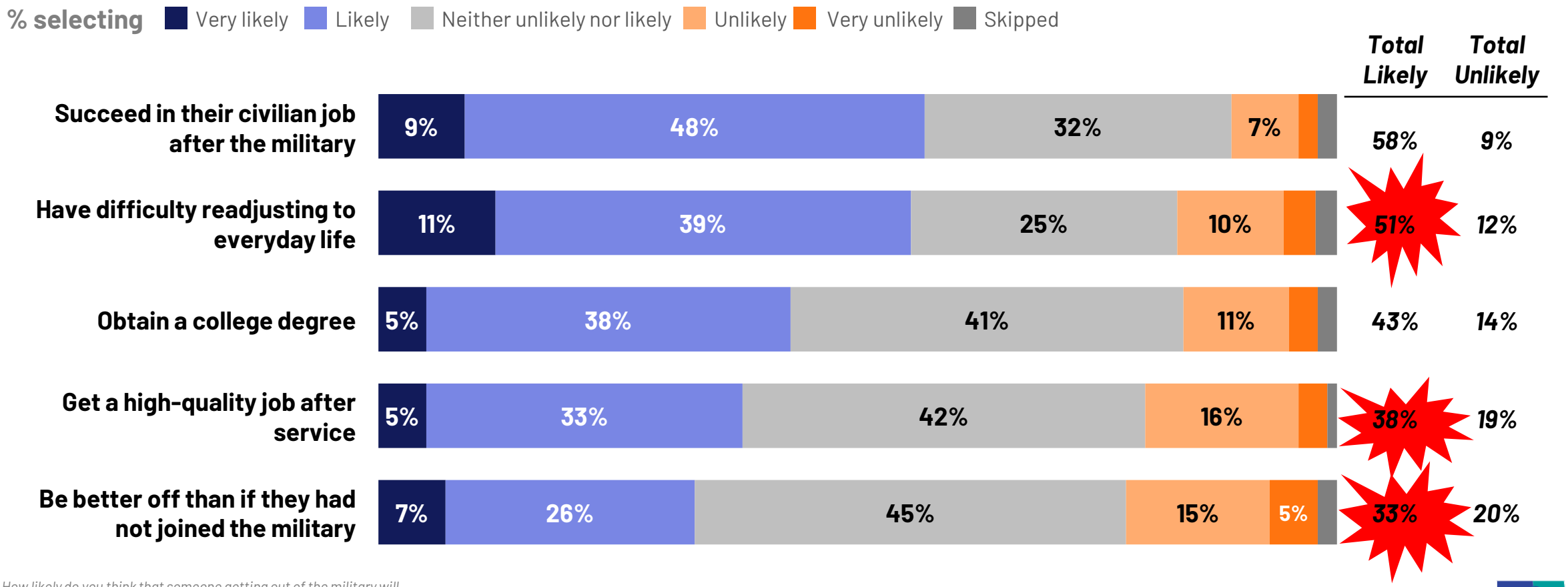


Q - How likely do you think that someone getting out of the military will...
Base: General population (n=1,011)

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More than a half of Americans say Veterans have difficulty reintegrating, and more than a third think they are unlikely to get a high-quality job.

How likely do you think that someone getting out of the military will...



Q - How likely do you think that someone getting out of the military will...
Base: General population (n=1,011)

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Teens are more likely than parents and educators to say someone getting out of the military will likely return with a physical wound or missing limb.

How likely do you think that someone getting out of the military will...*

% selecting likely (net)

	Total	Parents (A)	Teens (B)	School Personnel (C)
Have some form of psychological or emotional problem	55%	60%	64%	58%
Have some form of physical injury	39%	43%	49%	42%
Return with a physical combat wound	29%	37%	49% AC	32%
Return with a missing limb	17%	20%	27% A	20%

Q - How likely do you think that someone getting out of the military will...
Base: General population (n=1,011); Parents (N=524), Teens (N=291), School personnel (N=205)
**Note: Letters and shading indicate a statistically significant difference between groups*

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PROBLEM #3: POOR PERFORMING FEDERAL VETERAN PROGRAMS

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63%

of Americans feel **Veterans are supported poorly** by the federal government

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Severely Underperforming Federal Programs

Program Area	Federal Solution	Exemplar NPO Solution
Employment	DOL's $152M in Programs under VETS	Call of Duty Endowment grantees place more veterans into jobs and do so at **1/15th** the cost of Department of Labor Programs while achieving **higher quality outcomes**.
Traumatic Brain Injury	VA's ~$146M+ mTBI Program	The Avalon Action Alliance's treatment model **achieves better clinical outcomes compared to VA** (more than 72% of patients experienced reduction in Neurobehavioral Symptom Inventory and more than 95% have a positive Patient Global Impression of Change).
Mental Health	VA's $16.5B traditional mental health programs	Avalon trains over 1,000 veterans annually in the science of Post-traumatic Growth through the Warrior PATHH program experiencing **four times better outcomes** than VA's efforts.
Suicide Prevention	VA's $571M conventional suicide prevention programs	Through an initial $9M investment, the Face the Fight Coalition's sophisticated dynamic modeling estimates it will save **3,500+ lives by 2032**. Their efforts have already reached over 180,000 veterans with evidence-based suicide prevention interventions.

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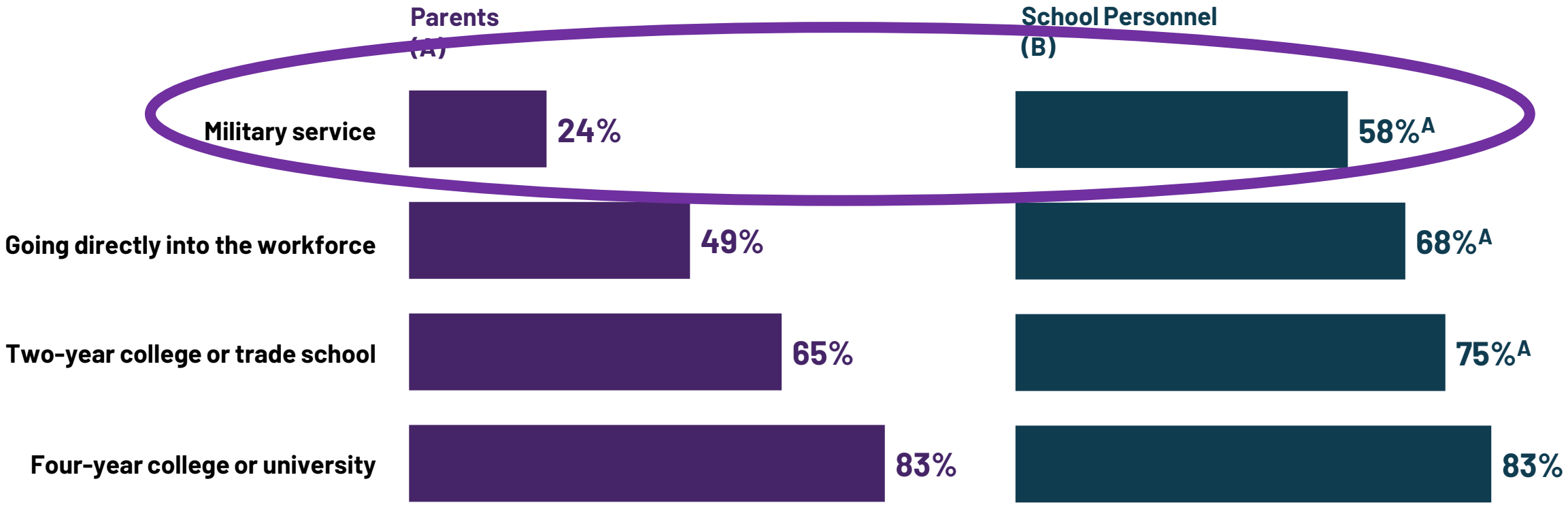
THE ROAD TO BETTER

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School personnel are much more likely to discuss military service with teens compared to parents of teens, which may highlight their potential as valuable resources for recruitment outreach.

How often do you discuss the following with teens?*

% selecting often/sometimes



Q. How often do you discuss the following with your teen/teens?
Base: Parents (N=405), School Personnel (N=205)

*Note: Letters indicate statistically significant differences

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Educators are much more likely than other adults & teens to believe Veterans will obtain a college degree, have job success, and be better off.

How likely do you think that someone getting out of the military will...*

% selecting likely (net)

	Total	Parents (A)	Teens (B)	School Personnel (C)
Succeed in their civilian job after the military	58%	56%	59%	65% A
Have difficulty readjusting to everyday life	51%	53%	53%	47%
Obtain a college degree	43%	50%	46%	55% B
Get a high-quality job after service	38%	43%	46%	53% A
Be better off than if they had not joined the military	33%	36%	31%	45% AB

Q - How likely do you think that someone getting out of the military will...
Base: General population (n=1,011); Parents (N=524), Teens (N=291), School personnel (N=205)
**Note: Letters and shading indicate a statistically significant difference between groups*

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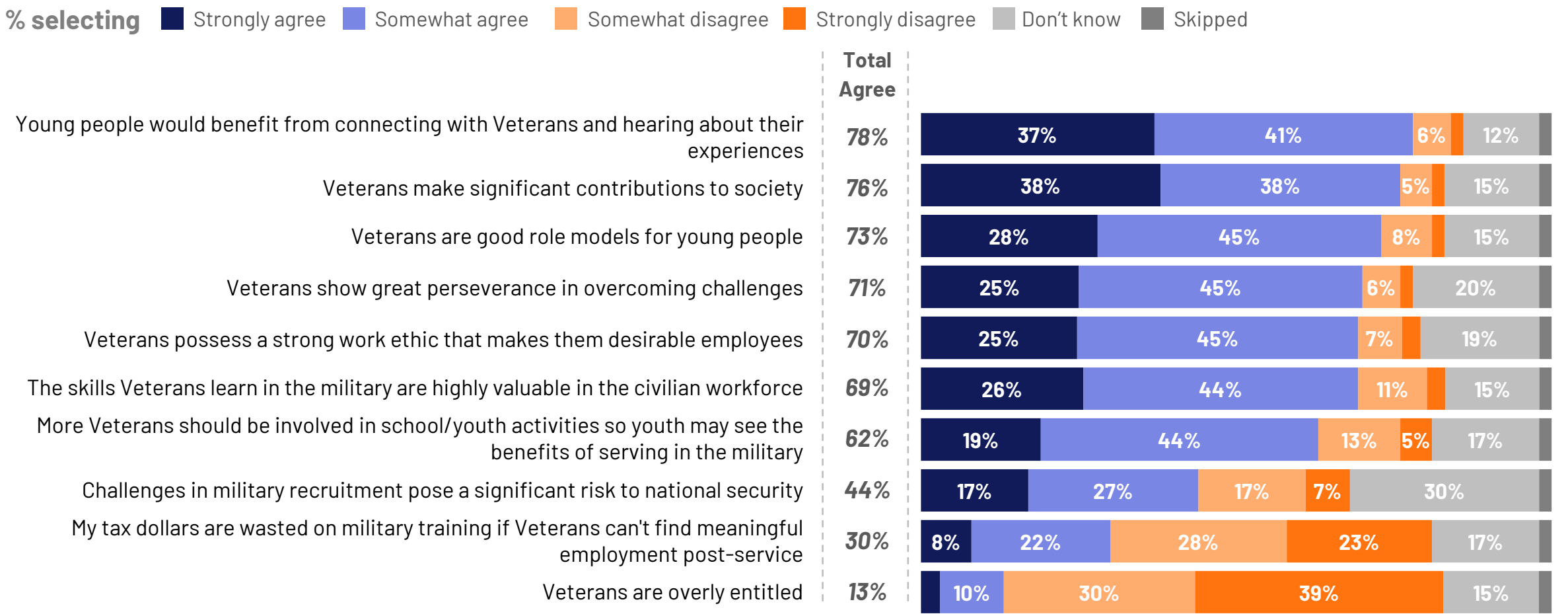
73%

of parents say **Veterans are good role models** for young people

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Most Americans feel youth would benefit from connecting with Veterans and hearing about their experiences.

How much do you agree with the following statements?*



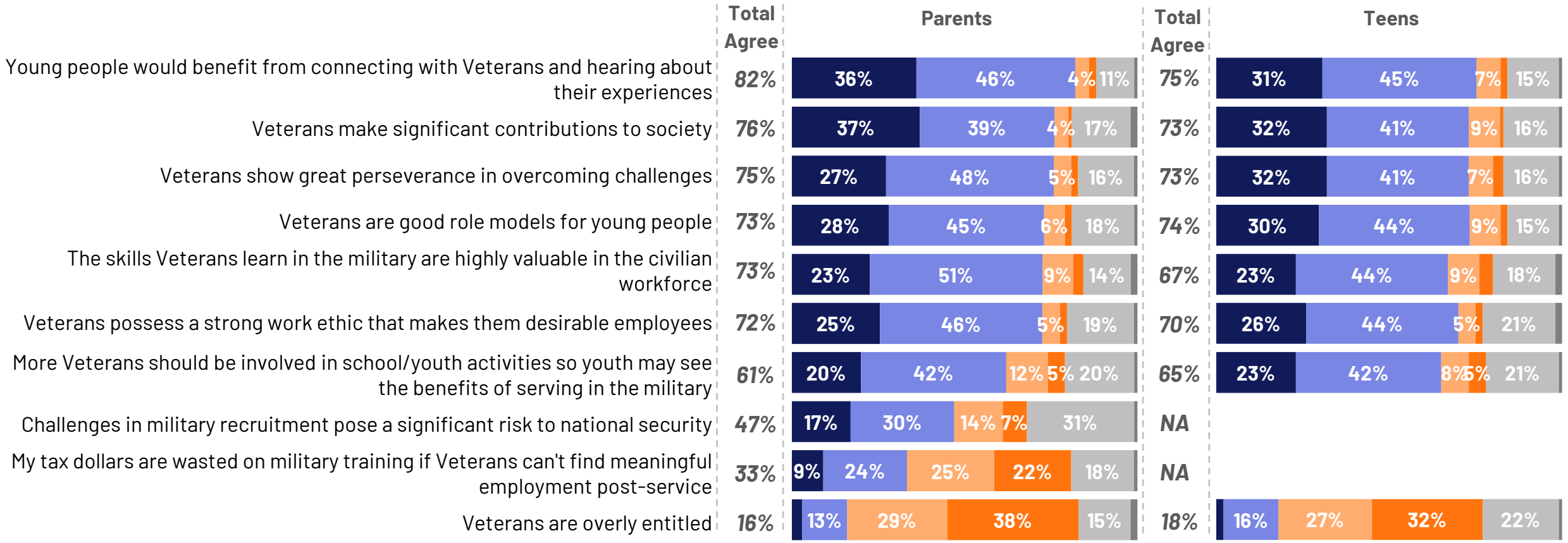
Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Base: General population (n=1,011)

** Note: Values less than or equal to 3% are not shown*

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Most parents and teens themselves feel teens would benefit from connecting with Veterans and hearing about their experiences.

How much do you agree with the following statements?*



Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Base: Parents (N=524); Teens (N=291)

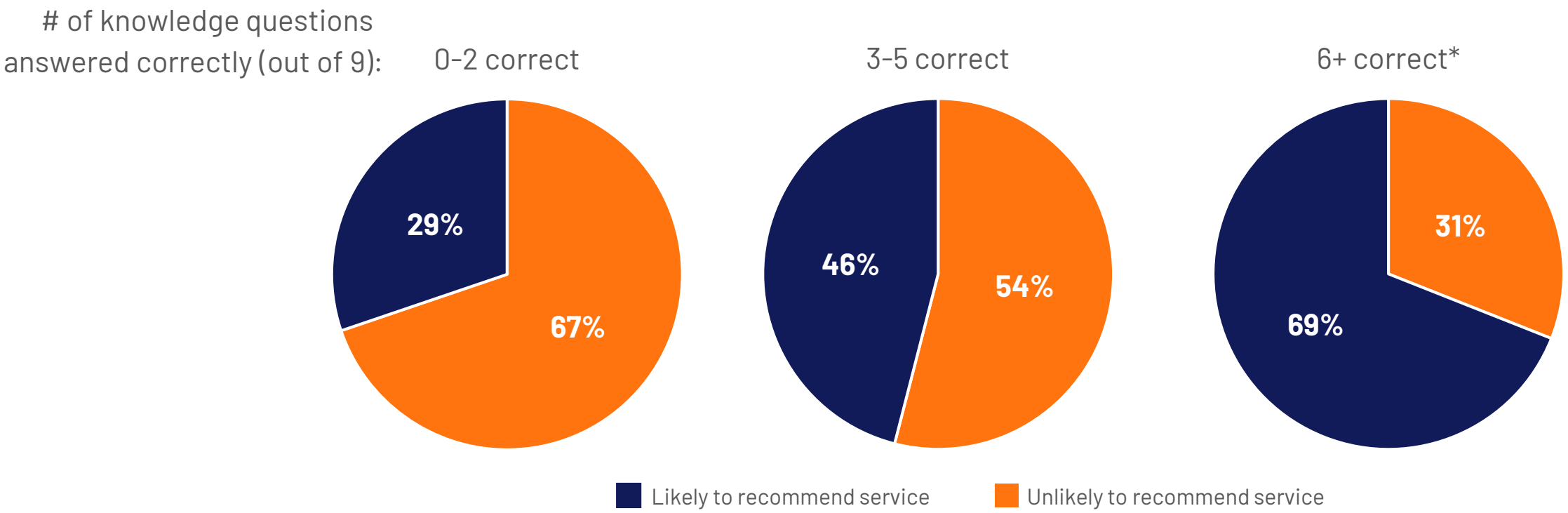
** Note: Values less than or equal to 3% are not shown*

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Americans who correctly answer questions about Veterans' experiences are more likely to recommend military service.

How likely is it that you would recommend joining a military service?

Responses represent non-veteran adults



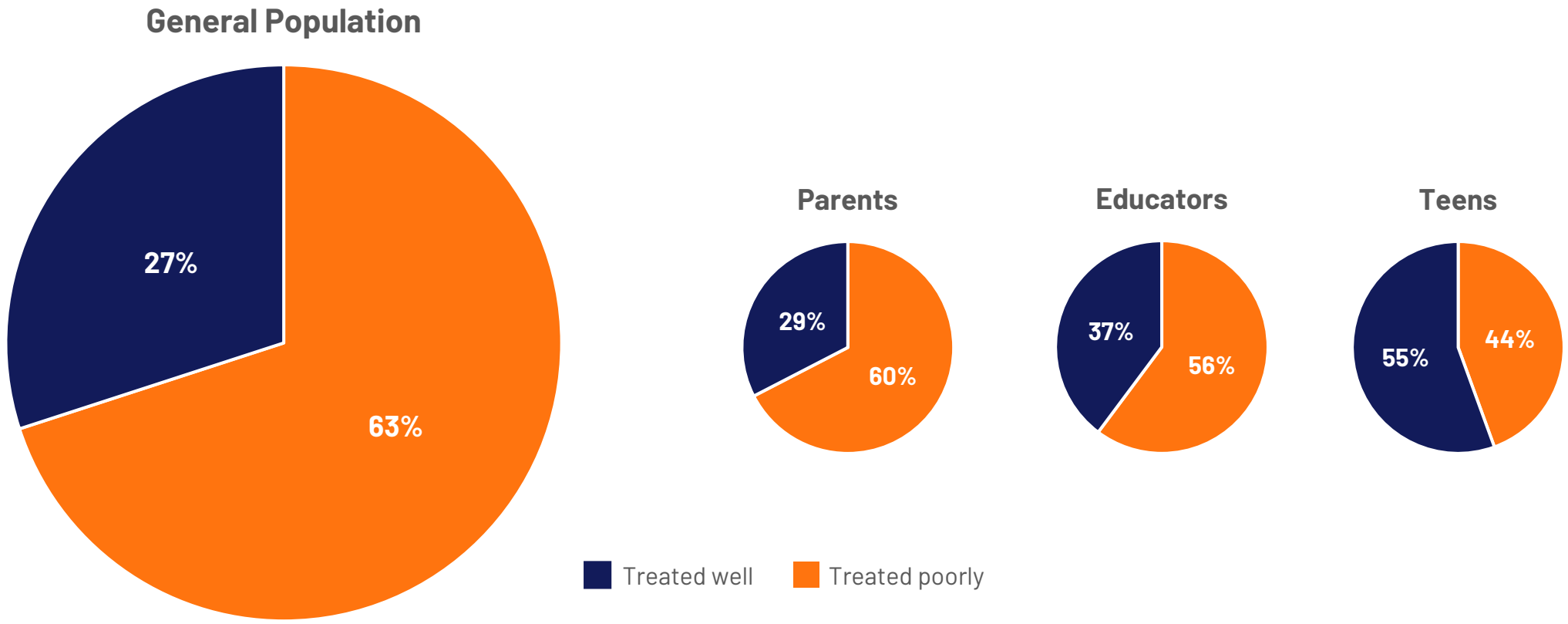
Q - We would like your opinion about the choices that your child has/young people have. Suppose your child/a young person asked for your advice about various post-high school options. How likely is it that you would recommend joining a military service such as the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, Space Force, or the National Guard?
Base: Non-Veterans (N=877): 0-2 correct (N=423), 3-5 correct (N=359), 6+ correct (N=95)*

**Note: Low base size (N<100). Interpret with caution*

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Most Americans think the federal government needs to do more to take care of Veterans after service.

How well do you think Veterans are supported by federal government programs?



Q - How well, if at all, do you believe Veterans are supported by federal government programs after their service?
Base: General population (n=1,011); Parents (n=524); Teens (n=291); School Personnel (n=205)

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISCUSSION

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Four Key Recommendations

1. Create and annually publish a veteran wellbeing accountability dashboard
2. Redirect government funds to best-in-class, proven nonprofits that consistently drive measurably superior outcomes
3. Launch a national Veteran awareness campaign
4. Educate high school staff on veteran outcome facts

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Recommendation #1: Create and annually publish a veteran wellbeing accountability dashboard

Rationale

- If something gets measured, it's more likely to get attention.
- There is no system to comprehensively track and ensure veteran wellbeing.
- Instead, there are uncoordinated, expensive, and largely unaccountable federal programs that may or may not actually help veterans.

Action

- Create a comprehensive, publicly accessible dashboard showcasing the objectives, budget, and outcomes of the six major veteran wellbeing areas: Employment, Mental Wellbeing, Brain Health, Physical Health, Housing, and Education.
- This initiative requires greater disclosure from existing government programs, demonstrating their inter-relationships, and driving accountability for clear, measurable outcomes from the $330 Billion federal veteran budget.

Expected Outcome

- Good results will actively counter pervasive misinformation; bad results will show where changes must be made. Such an effort could be incubated by DOGE and eventually handed over to the Office of Management and Budget, using best-in-class commercial sector data management techniques.

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Recommendation #2: Redirect government funds to best-in-class, proven nonprofits that consistently drive measurably superior outcomes

Rationale

- With almost two thirds of Americans thinking vets are supported poorly or very poorly by the federal government, it's time for a change.

Action

- Redirecting existing funds - that require no additional funding - not only ensures our veterans get better support from qualified organizations, it also could eventually save the government valuable resources.
- Similarly, this effort could be incubated in DOGE, where a formal efficiency and effectiveness review of government vs. comparable non-profit programs could be conducted.
- The recommendations should then be provided to Congress and incorporated into the next set of appropriation bills.

Expected Outcome

- Improved economic, mental and physical health for our Veterans and, over time, a growing awareness among Americans that military service leads to positive life outcomes.

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Recommendation #3: Launch a national Veteran awareness campaign

Rationale

- This study clearly shows there are major knowledge gaps between the American public and the military/veteran community that are harming our ability to recruit the future All-Volunteer Force.

Action

- Implement a sustained, multi-faceted campaign to highlight veterans' positive contributions to society and dispel negative stereotypes about military service.
- This campaign should focus on real-life success stories, emphasizing the skills, education, and career opportunities available to veterans.
- Partner with respected organizations, influencers, and media outlets to maximize reach and impact.
- A Presidential Commission should be created to guide these efforts, including oversight of spend and resulting outcomes.

Expected Outcome

- Increased willingness among Americans to recommend military service

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Recommendation #4: Educate high school staff on Veteran outcome facts

Rationale

- There is potential to make significant gains among educators, one of the most key influencers in a youth's decision to join the military, in their willingness to recommend military service. At the same time there is tremendous receptivity to learning more about service from the veteran community.

Action

- Veterans, the military's "alumni," when well taken care of are its best recruiters.
- DoD should partner with veteran organizations to develop and implement targeted educational programs focusing on high school counselors, teachers, and administrators.
- This effort should provide accurate information about military service, highlight the positive outcomes achieved by veterans, and address common misconceptions.
- Campaigns should showcase veterans' success in civilian life to highlight the benefits of a military career path for youth among their most key influencers.
- DoD should be required to report on the impact of this effort quarterly.

Expected Outcome

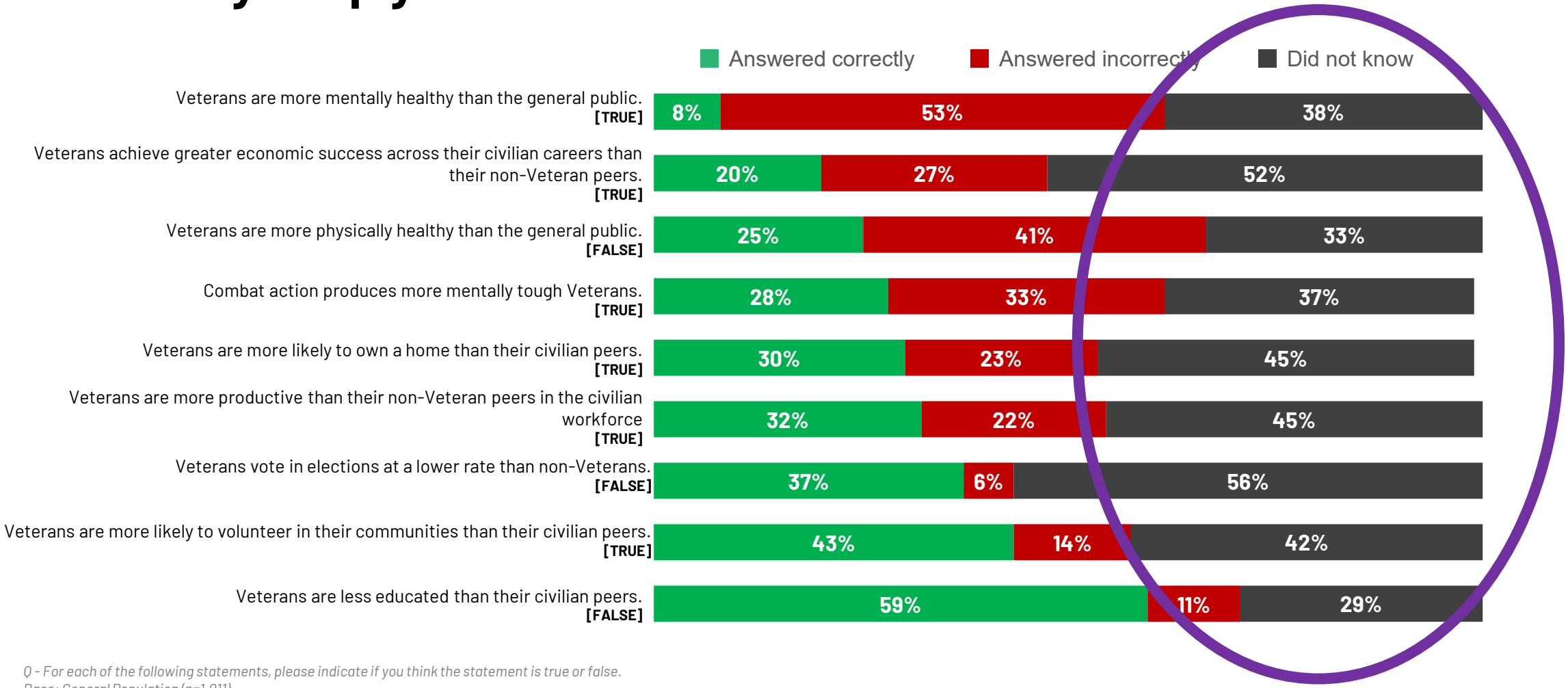
- Increased willingness to consider service among youth and greater understanding of the benefits of military service amongst Americans

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APPENDIX

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There is a significant lack of awareness around Veterans' experiences. When asked factual statements about Veterans, many Americans admit they simply don't know.

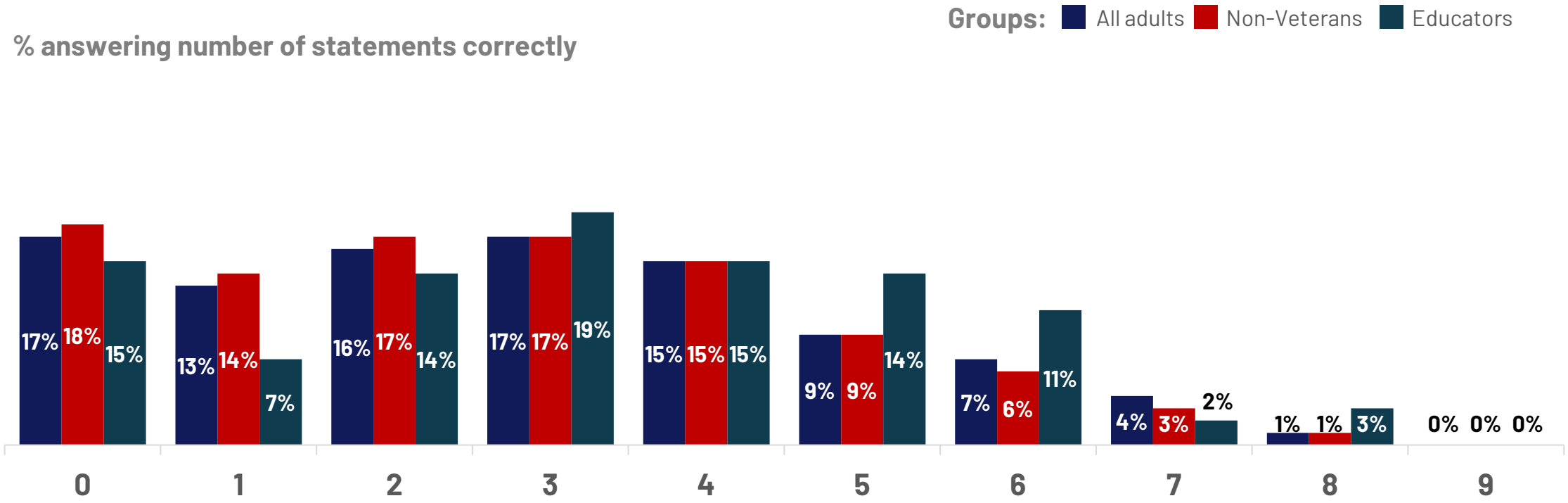


Q - For each of the following statements, please indicate if you think the statement is true or false.
Base: General Population (n=1,011)
Note – respondents were asked a series of True/False questions about Veterans. The correct answer is noted in **bold next to each statement.*

**Note: For data visualization purposes, "skipped" is not included as a response option on this slide*

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Nearly half of all Americans answer two or fewer (of nine) statements about Veterans correctly.



Q - For each of the following statements, please indicate if you think the statement is true or false.
Base: General Population (n=1,011); Non-Veterans (N=877); Educators (N=205)
**Note – Respondents were asked a series of True/False questions about Veterans.*

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