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# DISCHARGES UNDER THE DON'T ASK/DON'T TELL POLICY: WOMEN AND RACIAL/ETHNIC MINORITIES



## INTRODUCTION

This research brief considers the historic impact of the US military's "Don't Ask/Don't Tell" (DADT) policy on women and racial/ethnic minorities. Enacted by the US Congress in 1993, Don't Ask/Don't Tell prohibits lesbian, gay, or bisexual men and women from disclosing their sexual orientation while they serve in the US military. Since 1993, more than 13,000 individuals have been discharged for violating the DADT policy. Data presented in this brief show that the proportion of women and racial/ethnic minorities among those discharges has increased over time. In the late 1990s approximately a quarter of discharges were women and similar proportions were racial/ethnic minorities. In recent years, those proportions have increased to more than a third of the DADT discharges.

## DATA SOURCES

These analyses present data on the demographic composition of DADT discharges and compare that to the demographic characteristics of the US military as a whole. The analyses also include estimates of the proportion of women and racial/ethnic minorities among LGB individuals serving in the military derived from US Census data on same-sex couples.

Data about the number and characteristics of DADT discharges come from US Department of Defense statistics provided to Servicemembers United and The Palm Center at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Discharge data from 1994 through 2008 are available at [The DADT Digital Archive Project](#) of Servicemembers United. The 2009 data are available at [The Palm Center](#) and were provided by the US House Armed Services Committee. Data on the sex and racial/ethnic composition of discharges are only available from 1997 through 2009.

Race and ethnicity data on the discharges were reported differently over time. From 1997 through 2003, Hispanic ethnicity was reported alone and racial categories of White, African-American, American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Other/Unknown did not include any individuals of Hispanic ethnicity. From 2005 through 2008,

additional details about the racial composition for individuals of Hispanic and non-Hispanic ethnicity were also provided. The 2009 discharge data did not include any information about individuals of Hispanic ethnicity.

Corresponding data describing the characteristics of the full US military population from 1997 through 2008 are from the US Department of Defense, [Office of the Under Secretary for Personnel and Readiness](#). Race and ethnicity data were reported differently over time. From 1997 through 2003, Hispanic ethnicity was reported alone and racial categories of White, African-American, American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Other/Unknown did not include any individuals of Hispanic ethnicity. From 2005 through 2008, race and ethnicity were separately reported. All racial categories included those who were of Hispanic ethnicity and separate figures for the number of individuals reporting as Hispanic were provided. But data did not allow for the determination of racial categories that exclude those of Hispanic ethnicity.

The DADT policy largely precludes the collection of data that would permit a direct assessment of the demographic characteristics of the LGB population serving in the military. However, several studies have used US Census Bureau data on cohabiting same-sex couples as a proxy to consider the characteristics of this largely hidden population. Two reports estimate the proportion of LGB men

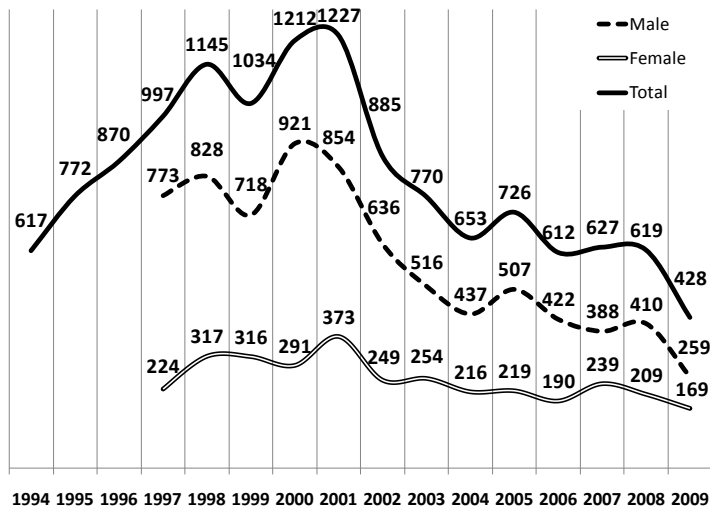
and women serving on active duty and in the guard and reserve forces in 2000 and in 2008 (Gates 2005, Gates 2010) using data from Census 2000 and the 2008 American Community Survey, respectively. Estimates for the proportion of racial/ethnic minorities among those in same-sex couples who indicate that they are on active duty or in the guard or reserves were derived from the same sources explicitly for these analyses.

## WOMEN

From 1994 through 2009, 13,194 men and women have been discharged under the DADT policy. The total number of discharges has been declining since 2001 when 1,227 men and women were discharged. In 2009, only about a third that many individuals (428) were discharged under the policy (see Figure 1).

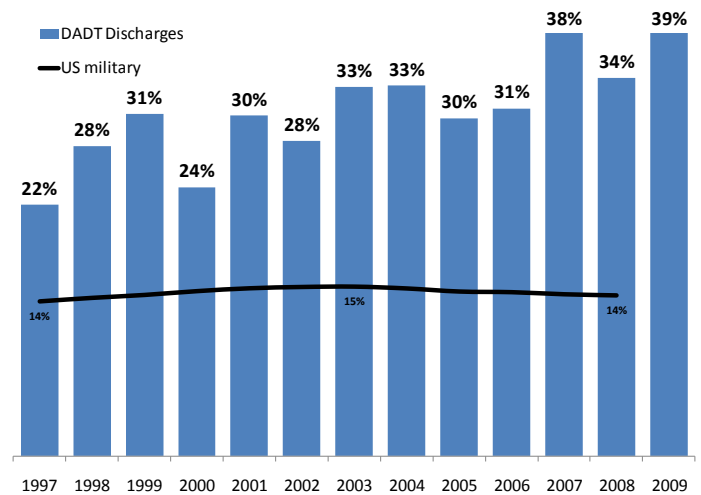
This decline has been more pronounced among men than among women. Among men, the total number of discharges has been reduced from a peak of 921 in 2000 to 259 in 2009, a reduction of nearly 72%. The number of female discharges reached a peak in 2001 at 373 and has declined to 169 in 2009, a somewhat more modest 55% reduction.

FIGURE 1. DISCHARGES UNDER THE DADT POLICY FROM 1994 TO 2009; DISCHARGES BY SEX FROM 1997 TO 2009.



From 1997 through 2009, women have comprised between 14% and 15% of US military personnel. However, women have comprised more than twice that proportion (30%) among those discharged under DADT from 1997 through 2009. The percentage of women among DADT discharges has been increasing over time from a low of 22% in 1997 to a high of 39% in 2009 (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2. PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN AMONG DADT DISCHARGES AND IN THE US MILITARY, 1997 TO 2009.

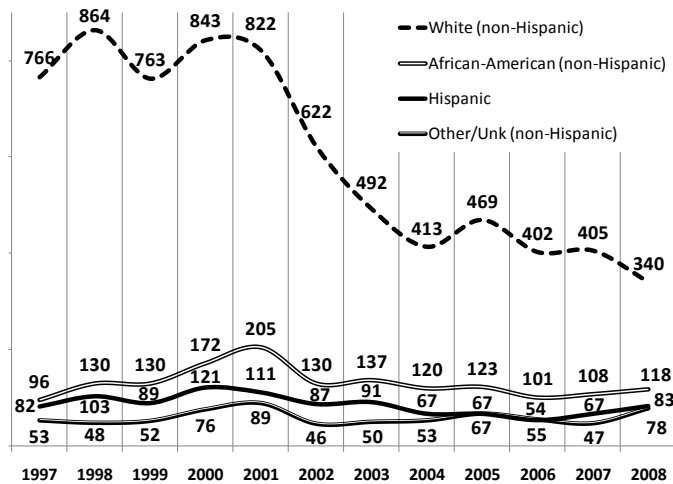


Research (Gates 2005; Gates 2010) suggests that the proportion of women within the LGB population exceeds the corresponding proportion within the whole military. Estimates derived from data collected in 2000 suggest that approximately 32% of the LGB population in the military was female. That figure is 41% in estimates derived from 2008 data.

## RACE AND ETHNICITY

Discharges of White (non-Hispanic) individuals have declined steadily from a high of 864 in 1998 to 340 in 2008, a decline of 61% (see Figure 3). The declines are somewhat more modest or not really evident among other racial and ethnic groups. The number of African-American (non-Hispanic) discharges decreased by 51% from 2001, when those discharges reached a peak at 205, through to 2006 when there were 101 discharges. That figure increased modestly to 118 in 2008.

FIGURE 3. DISCHARGES UNDER THE DADT POLICY BY RACE AND ETHNICITY, 1997-2009.

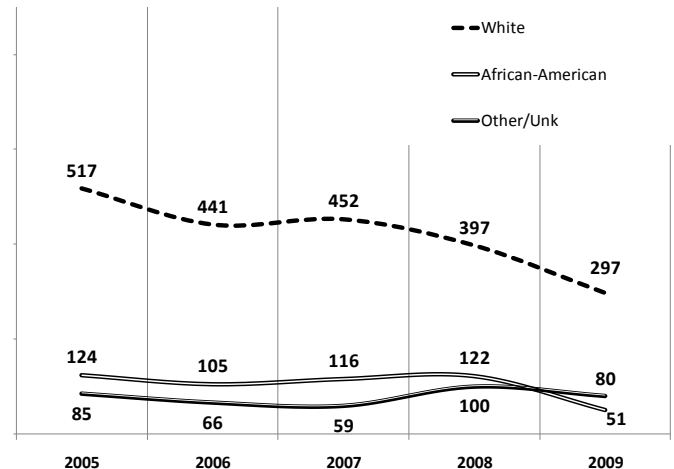


Discharge data for Hispanics and other racial groups offer less evidence of the declines observed among White and African-American individuals. Hispanic discharges have declined from a peak of 205 in 2001 to 118 in 2008, but the figures have been relatively steady or even increasing slightly from 2004 through 2008. Among other groups, there is little evidence of substantial declines in DADT discharges (detailed racial and ethnic discharge data are provided in the Appendix).

The 2009 discharge data did not include information about those of Hispanic ethnicity. In that year, all racial categories for discharges include an unknown number of Hispanics. Comparable racial data on discharges was available from 2005 through 2008 (see Figure 4).

When Hispanics are included in race categories, data show that White discharges have declined by nearly 43% from 2005 through 2009, from 517 to 297. The level of African-American discharges remained relatively steady from 2005 through 2008, varying from 105 to 124, followed by a steep decline in 2009 to 51. Discharges among other race groups showed no clear pattern of either increases or decreases.

FIGURE 4. DISCHARGES UNDER THE DADT POLICY BY RACE, 2005-2009.



While the proportion of racial and ethnic minorities in the military has remained relatively stable since 1997, the proportion of non-White individuals among DADT discharges has risen over time (see Figure 5).

Racial and ethnic minorities comprised nearly a quarter of DADT discharges in 1997. More recently, that figure has increased to more than a third of discharges.

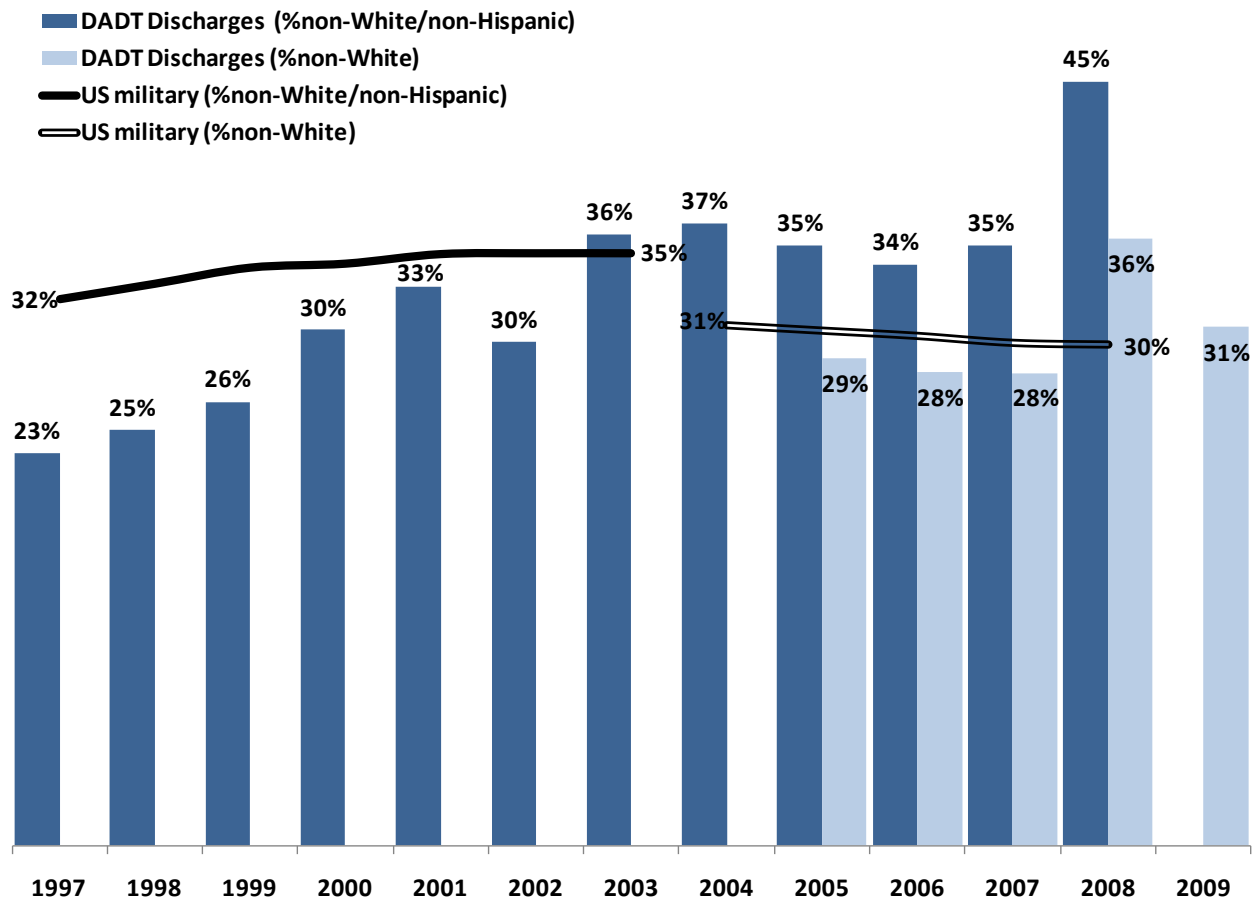
By comparison, about a third of all men and women in the US military are racial or ethnic minorities. Data from individuals in same-sex couples who say they are either on active duty or in the guard or reserve suggest that about a quarter are non-white. This was true in both 2000 and in 2008.

## CONCLUSION

This research brief highlights how the demographic composition of individuals discharged under the US military's Don't Ask/Don't Tell policy has changed substantially over time. Unfortunately, the available data do not really allow for a thorough assessment of the causes of these changes.

But the analyses do document a marked shift in how DADT is being enforced among various demographic groups. It is clear that women and racial/ethnic minorities now bear a larger portion of the burden imposed by the policy than they did when the policy was first implemented in 1993.

FIGURE 5. PROPORTION NON-WHITE AMONG DADT DISCHARGES AND IN THE US MILITARY, 1997-2009.



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## APPENDIX

APPENDIX TABLE. 1994-2009 DON'T ASK/DON'T TELL DISCHARGES, BY SEX AND RACE/ETHNICITY

				Non-Hispanic						Hispanics included					
	Total	Male	Female	White	African-American	American Indian	Asian/Pacific Islander	Other/Unknown	Hispanic	White	African-American	American Indian	Asian/Pacific Islander	Other/Unknown	Hispanic
1994	617														
1995	772														
1996	870														
1997	997	773	224	766	96	15	29	9	82						
1998	1,145	828	317	864	130	9	24	15	103						
1999	1,034	718	316	763	130	18	21	13	89						
2000	1,212	921	291	843	172	28	21	27	121						
2001	1,227	854	373	822	205	28	20	41	111						
2002	885	636	249	622	130	20	13	13	87						
2003	770	516	254	492	137	10	20	20	91						
2004	653	437	216	413	120	16	20	17	67						
2005	726	507	219	469	123	19	30	18	67	517	124	19	32	34	67
2006	612	422	190	402	101	16	25	14	54	441	105	16	25	25	54
2007	627	388	239	405	108	16	16	15	67	452	116	18	18	23	67
2008	619	410	209	340	118	16	43	19	83	397	122	18	49	33	83
2009	428	259	169							297	51	12	35	33	