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Explaining Recent Army and Navy Minority Recruiting Trends

Black representation among high-quality Army recruits has changed over time, with the black share of gross contracts falling 8.3 percentage points between fiscal years (FYs) 2000 and 2004, then increasing 1.2 percentage points between 2004 and 2007. (A recruit is deemed *high-quality* if he or she has a high school diploma and scores above average on the Armed Forces Qualification Test.) Black representation among Navy recruits has been generally stable. In contrast, Hispanic representation among high-quality recruits increased in both the Army (3.3 percentage points) between FYs 2000 and 2003 and in the Navy (5.3 percentage points) between FYs 2002 and 2005. These disparate trends suggest that black and Hispanic youths' enlistment decisions respond differently to resources, external opportunities, and other factors.

A team of RAND researchers identified factors correlated with trends in black and Hispanic representation among high-quality recruits in the Army and Navy. The researchers also suggested policies likely to be most effective in increasing high-quality enlistments among black, Hispanic, and white youth.

How Do Groups Respond Differently to Recruiting Resources?

The military relies on many resources to recruit youths, including enlistment bonuses, educational benefits (such as the Montgomery GI Bill), military pay, and recruiters. The researchers estimated enlistment models by race and ethnicity and identified several patterns:

- In the Army, black high-quality enlistments are more responsive to enlistment bonuses and less responsive to military pay, compared with high-quality enlistments of other groups.
- In the Army, Hispanic high-quality enlistments are highly responsive to military pay, Army educational benefits, and recruiters.

Abstract

Between 2000 and 2007, the representation of blacks among high-quality Army recruits declined, while in the Navy, black representation remained stable; the representation of Hispanics among high-quality recruits in both the Army and Navy grew during this period. RAND researchers identified factors that explain these recruiting trends and found that potential black and Hispanic recruits respond differently to recruiting resources and that these differences, along with economic and demographic factors, factors related to eligibility, and political factors, explain much of the changes.

- In the Navy, both black and Hispanic high-quality enlistments are responsive to recruiters, while the estimated effects of bonuses, military pay, and educational benefits are not statistically different from zero.
- Finally, enlistments respond differently to resources in the Army versus in the Navy. In general, Navy responsiveness to resources is lower, in percentage terms, than Army responsiveness.

What Accounts for the Recruiting Trends by Group?

In addition to the above-mentioned recruiting factors, the researchers identified economic and demographic factors (e.g., the unemployment rate and noncitizen population), eligibility factors (e.g., obesity rate and crime rate), and political factors (e.g., the war in Iraq and the presidential approval rate) that help explain high-quality minority enlistment trends. The table identifies factors that explain recruiting trends over time in the Army: specifically, the 8.3 percentage point

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decrease in black representation and the 3.3 percentage point increase in Hispanic representation noted at the outset. The table shows both factors contributing to the trend and those working against it.

Almost two-thirds of the decrease in black representation reflects a large negative effect associated with the Iraq war and the success of the Army in recruiting high-quality Hispanic and white youth. The Iraq war was associated with a negative effect for all groups, but the effect was largest for blacks—45 percent versus 21 percent for whites and Hispanics—over the data period. Blacks were less sensitive than other groups to the large increases in regular military compensation relative to civilian pay that occurred over this period. Thus, part of the decline in black representation arose from the success of the Army in increasing Hispanic and white enlistments through increases in military pay, which increased market share of these latter groups.

For the Army, increases in Montgomery GI Bill benefit levels explain about one-third of the 3.3 percentage point increase in Hispanic high-quality enlistments. Increases in relative military pay, as well as the stronger responsiveness of Hispanic versus black youth to pay increases, explain almost one-quarter of the increase in Hispanic representation over this period. Thus, resource changes have been important in explaining improvements in Hispanic representation in the Army in recent years. The estimated models are able to explain much of the recent changes in Army representation.

For the Navy, Hispanic representation among high-quality recruits has also increased (not shown), rising by 5.3 percentage points between 2002 and 2005. Almost all this increase—5 percentage points—is attributable to a positive estimated association between the Iraq war and Hispanic enlistments. For the Navy, the Iraq war is associated with a larger increase in Hispanic than black enlistments and a decrease in white enlistments. The Hispanic share of recruits rose dramatically in the Navy as the war progressed. The precise explanation for this finding remains unclear, but one possibility is that minority youth who wanted to serve in the military and who might have chosen the Army prior to the Iraq war chose the Navy instead.

Factors Explaining Recent Recruiting Trends Among Blacks and Hispanics in the Army

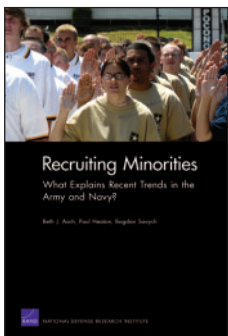
Factors Accounting for FY 2000–2004 Decrease in Black Representation		Factors Accounting for the FY 2000–2003 Increase in Hispanic Representation	
Iraq War	-5.2%	Montgomery GI Bill	+1.4%
Military/civilian pay differential	-2.0%	Military/civilian pay differential	+0.6%
Production recruiters	-0.3%	Production recruiters	+0.2%
Unemployment rate	-0.1%	Enlistment bonuses	+0.1%
Montgomery GI Bill	0.0%	Army College Fund	0.0%
Army College Fund	+0.2%	Iraq war	0.0%
Enlistment bonuses	+0.3%		
Other factors	-1.0%	Other factors	+0.3%
Amount explained	-8.0%	Amount explained	+2.6%
Total decrease	-8.3%	Total increase	+3.3%
Amount unexplained	-0.3%	Amount unexplained	+0.7%

NOTE: Values may not sum because of rounding.

Policy Implications

Because potential black and Hispanic recruits respond differently to recruiting resources, the military might effectively target resources to specific groups in each service, and even across services. However, such an approach may run counter to notions of equity and fairness—that is, the services might be reluctant to target resources based on race and ethnicity. Still, as policy allocation decisions are made, the services should recognize that these decisions will affect not only the quantity of high-quality enlistments but also their distribution across groups, and that some policies could alter minority representation.

The analysis also suggests the possibility of targeting resources *across* services by group, given the differential responses of different groups across services. Because researchers did not estimate joint models of Army and Navy enlistments, the study does not address the question of resource allocation across services; however, such analysis should be explored in future research. ■



This research brief describes work done for the RAND National Defense Research Institute documented in *Recruiting Minorities: What Explains Recent Trends in the Army and Navy?*, by Beth J. Asch, Paul Heaton, and Bogdan Savych, MG-861-OSD, 2009, 118 pp., \$24.00, ISBN: 978-0-8330-4717-5 (available at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG861/>). This research brief was written by Paul Steinberg. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. RAND® is a registered trademark.

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