

Implications of Force Drawdowns for Demographic Diversity

In January 2012, the Department of Defense (DoD) announced plans for a large-scale drawdown of U.S. military forces. As a result, by fiscal year (FY) 2019, the Army may be at its smallest since before World War II. The Marine Corps also continues with reductions, and the Air Force was doing so through FY 2015.

In the planning of these drawdowns, little attention has been paid to the possible consequences for the demographic diversity of U.S. forces. As a result, DoD's Office of Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity (ODMEO) asked the RAND National Defense Research Institute to review previous drawdowns for lessons learned, assess potential future drawdown impacts on workforce diversity, and identify policy options available to address negative impacts. The RAND project focused on the gender and race/ethnicity components of diversity.

Diversity During Prior Drawdowns

Despite major reductions in the size of the active-duty force in all four services in the 1990s, demographic diversity increased.¹ Across all services, the percentage of women increased from about 11 to 15 percent in the 1990s, with the Air Force showing the greatest increase (from 14 to 19 percent). Racial/ethnic-minority representation increased by over 8 percentage points during the same time period, with the Navy showing the greatest increase (from 23 to 38 percent).

The RAND team was able to differentiate these net gains into changes in accessions and separations. As an example, accessions among female Army officers were responsible for year-to-year gains, most of which were on the order of 0.4 percentage point from 1990 through 2001. Meanwhile, separations were also increasing, to roughly 0.2 percentage point higher than the previous year, damping the effects of the accession-driven increase.²

Why was the female separation rate higher? Perhaps women had characteristics known to be associated with higher separation, such as lower grade (rank) and education level. To find out, the RAND researchers compared male continuation rates with a female sample that resembled the males in grade, education level, etc. This analysis did not find much

¹ The diversity of the reserve components also increased. The focus of the RAND study, however, was the active-duty force. For the latter, the RAND team also examined Navy and Air Force drawdowns of the mid-2000s; these results are not summarized here.

² Among Army officers, black representation increased because of decreasing separations from year to year, and Hispanic representation increased due to a mix of increasing accessions and decreasing separations from year to year.

Key findings:

- During the post–Cold War drawdown of the 1990s, the demographic diversity of U.S. active-force units actually increased. However, no statistically significant relationship between past drawdowns and diversity could be established.
- Directing drawdown cuts to applicants with lower scores on the Armed Forces Qualification Test is likely to reduce demographic diversity.
- Directing cuts to selected occupational specialties or experience levels is also likely to affect demographic diversity, though with different outcomes for different groups.
- Results of adverse impact analyses can help the services develop long-term strategies for recruiting, accessions, and assignments to achieve demographic balance across specialties, experience levels, and performance categories. The analyses can also validate assumptions and measures used in drawdown decisions to ensure that all personnel receive fair and equitable treatment.

of a reduction in the gap between male and female continuation rates, suggesting that factors other than grade and education are responsible for male-female differences in retention.

Diversity During Current and Future Drawdowns

Although impacts on force structure may be inferred from decisions about how to draw down the force (e.g., a more senior force can result from accession cuts), the impact on demographic diversity is not readily apparent. For one thing, the services do not make such decisions with diversity goals in mind. Also, the civilian labor market and other factors affect demographic accession and retention trends.

Given limited historical information on this issue, the RAND team developed a methodology for analyzing the potential impact on demographic diversity of different methods for drawing down the force. The methodology compares the percentage of women (or of racial/ethnic minorities) with the percentage in a larger baseline group across different scenarios for implementing a drawdown. This methodology was conducted for all four active-duty service components, officers and enlisted, although specific scenarios varied by service.

Illustrative findings for Army enlisted personnel are shown in the table, where each shaded cell represents the percentage of women, non-Hispanic blacks, or Hispanics cut under that scenario if the cuts are carried out as described in each row. Thus, the first number under “Women” means that, if all accession cuts were taken from the lowest Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) categories, 18.8 percent of female Army enlisted accessions would be cut. This is greater than the 14.7 percent loss if cuts were spread across all female accessions.

Based on this analysis, the RAND researchers identified three policy-relevant themes. First, cuts drawn heavily from personnel in nontactical-operations occupations could adversely affect women and non-Hispanic blacks because women and blacks are more heavily concentrated in such career fields. Second, cuts based on personnel experience could have varying effects. In general, cuts to longer-serving individuals could have an adverse impact on black personnel but could benefit women. Third, and perhaps the strongest of the themes, is that tightening accession standards, e.g., requiring higher AFQT scores, could have an adverse impact on women and minorities, although non-Hispanic white women would be less affected than others.

Recommendations

Force management and diversity policy experts consulted by the RAND team noted the legal challenges of using

demographic information in drawdown decisions. As a result, RAND did not recommend specific force management policy changes at that level. Instead, the team offered two recommendations regarding how force managers *can* consider the demographic implications of drawdown decisions.

The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) should direct the services to conduct adverse impact analyses prior to making drawdown decisions. The *Uniform Guidelines for Employee Selection Procedures* from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) provides potentially relevant guidance.

ODMEO should assist in adapting the EEOC guidance for service drawdown decisions because of its expertise in (civilian) equal employment opportunity, where adverse impact analysis is common practice. The general approach used in this study offers a way to structure the main analytic elements. The services should be encouraged to adjust their analyses with more detailed scenarios and modeling.

ODMEO should validate the services’ results. To do so, OSD will need to direct the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) to acquire more performance and disciplinary data used in drawdown decisions by the services. At a minimum, ODMEO can make sure the services answer the questions stated in the policy guidance and can spot-check analytical results. To spot-check results, ODMEO would need DMDC data, including quality data and other details not currently available.

Percentages cut from women and racial/ethnic minorities under different drawdown scenarios

| Scenario | Scenario Variations: Allocation of Cuts | Women | Non-Hispanic Black | Hispanic |
|--|---|-------|--------------------|----------|
| Accessions cut & AFQT requirements tightened | 100% from Categories IIIB–IV | 18.8 | 31.7 | 18.0 |
| | 75% Categories IIIB–IV, 25% Category IIIA | 17.8 | 28.8 | 16.9 |
| | 50% Categories IIIB–IV, 50% Category IIIA | 16.7 | 25.8 | 15.7 |
| | All accessions (baseline) | 14.7 | 20.2 | 13.2 |
| Reduced RCPs (E-4) | All from E-4s with at least 8 yrs of service | 11.0 | 25.0 | 12.9 |
| | All E-4s (baseline) | 14.2 | 19.3 | 12.8 |
| Reduced RCPs (E-5) | All from E-5s with at least 14 yrs of service | 9.4 | 34.5 | 11.0 |
| | All E-5s (baseline) | 12.2 | 20.3 | 13.7 |
| Involuntary separation program | 75% from tactical, 25% nontactical | 4.0 | 21.6 | 12.5 |
| | 50% tactical, 50% nontactical | 7.8 | 26.3 | 12.6 |
| | 25% tactical, 75% nontactical | 11.6 | 31.0 | 12.7 |
| | All E-7s, E-8s, & E-9s (baseline) | 10.9 | 30.1 | 12.7 |

NOTES: See text for interpretation. IIIA, IIIB, and IV are AFQT score categories indicating progressively lower aptitudes. E-4 through E-9 are enlisted ranks running from the equivalent of corporal to that of sergeant major in the Army. RCPs = retention control points = years of service at which member must move up or out. Dark shading indicates cuts greater than the pertinent baseline rate; light shading indicates cuts smaller than that baseline rate.

This research brief describes work done in the RAND National Defense Research Institute and documented in *Force Drawdowns and Demographic Diversity: Investigating the Impact of Force Reductions on the Demographic Diversity of the U.S. Military*, by Maria C. Lytell, Kenneth Kuhn, Abigail Haddad, Jefferson P. Marquis, Nelson Lim, Kimberly Curry Hall, Robert Stewart, and Jennie W. Wenger, RR-1008-OSD (available at www.rand.org/t/RR1008), 2015. To view this brief online, visit www.rand.org/t/RB9859. The RAND Corporation is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous. RAND is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest. RAND’s publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. RAND® is a registered trademark. © RAND 2015

Limited Print and Electronic Distribution Rights: This document and trademark(s) contained herein are protected by law. This representation of RAND intellectual property is provided for noncommercial use only. Unauthorized posting of this publication online is prohibited. Permission is given to duplicate this document for personal use only, as long as it is unaltered and complete. Permission is required from RAND to reproduce, or reuse in another form, any of our research documents for commercial use. For information on reprint and linking permissions, please visit www.rand.org/pubs/permissions.html.