

# Department of the Air Force Officer Talent Management Reforms

## Implications for Career Field Health and Demographic Diversity

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### ISSUE

The Air Force is undertaking unparalleled reforms to the way it manages officer development and promotion. As part of these reforms, the Air Force has split the Line of the Air Force (LAF), a single developmental category (DevCat) accounting for more than 80 percent of officers and 40 career fields, into six separate DevCats, and the Air Force is applying new personnel management flexibilities introduced by the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019. The purpose of these changes is to enable the Air Force to identify, develop, and reward talent at all stages during an officer's career.

The motivations behind these personnel policy reforms are clear. However, given the complexity of officer development and promotion management, it is difficult to fully anticipate the effects of these changes. To help decisionmakers evaluate the utility and implications of new personnel policies, the RAND study team built a strategic tool called the Air Force Personnel Policy Simulation Tool (PPST) to simulate the effects of new personnel policies on career field health and demographic diversity. A tool like PPST is needed to ensure that Air Force policy changes will further stated goals to identify potentially adverse effects of personnel policy changes on career fields and demographic groups, and if needed, to develop mitigating courses of action.



### APPROACH

In conducting its research, the study team used quantitative approaches that included

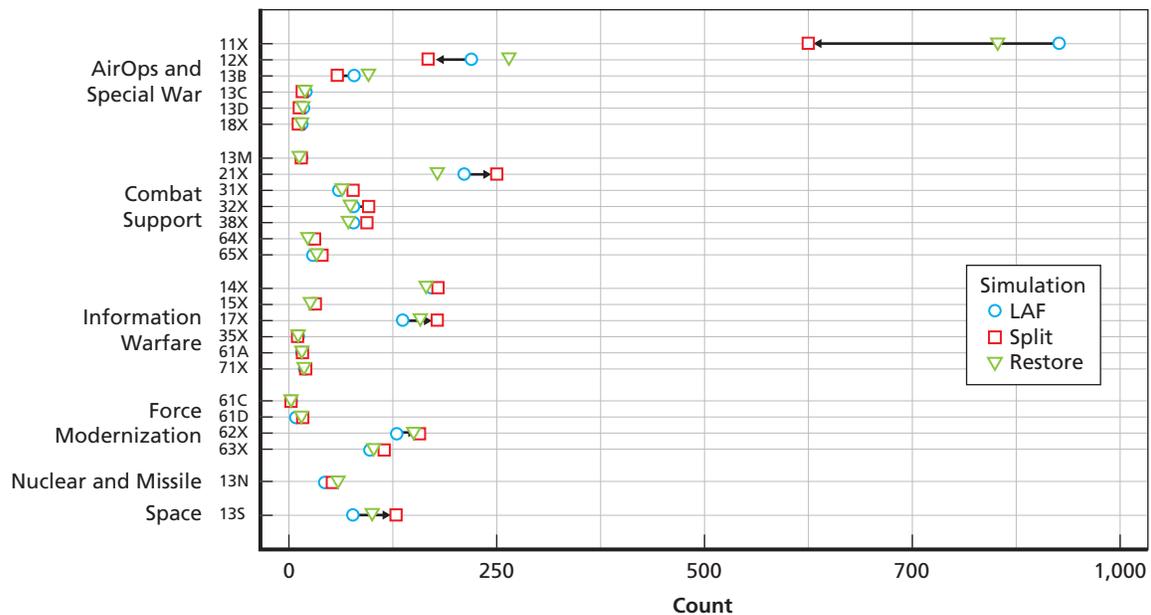
- analyzing historical data to build statistical models of promotion and retention of individuals in different career fields and demographic categories
- developing an inventory model to simulate annual officer accessions, promotion planning, promotion selection, and separation
- conducting simulations to examine how splitting the LAF into separate DevCats, adopting merit-based sequencing of promotion lists, and adopting wider promotion windows will affect career field health and demographic diversity.



## FINDINGS

- *Effects of splitting the LAF into separate DevCats on career field inventories.* Splitting the LAF may reduce selection rates for career fields that historically received more promotions and increase selection rates for those that historically received fewer promotions. Changes in selection rates, in turn, may change inventory sizes (see the figure).
- *Effects of splitting the LAF on demographic diversity.* Because female officers and minority officers are overrepresented in career fields that have historically received fewer promotions, splitting the LAF may increase diversity at the ranks of O-5 and O-6.
- *Effects of eliminating below-the-promotion-zone (BPZ) selections and adopting merit-based sequencing on career field health.* Eliminating BPZ selections may cause officers to reach O-5 and O-6 with more years of service on average and to serve for fewer years at those grades. This in turn would mean that more annual separations would occur at O-5 and O-6 and that more promotions would be needed to maintain grade strength.
- *Effects of eliminating BPZ selections and adopting merit-based sequencing on demographic diversity.* Simulation results indicated that white female officers are expected to receive the highest percentage of BPZ selections after splitting the LAF. Consequently, the effects of replacing BPZ with merit-based sequencing may have a more negative effect for white female officers than for other demographic categories.
- *Widening promotion zones.* For officers to become competitive for promotion after first being passed, they would need to complete additional career development experiences visible to promotion boards and treated as significant growth signals.

### O-6 INVENTORIES AFTER SPLITTING THE LAF AND RESTORING PROMOTION OPPORTUNITY





## CONCLUSIONS

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- Officer management and promotion reforms may enhance the Air Force's ability to tailor developmental pathways to the needs of officers in different career fields and to identify and develop talent in officers throughout their careers.
- The implementation of these changes will affect career field health and demographic diversity in various ways, some favorably and some unfavorably.
- A strategic tool like PPST can help the Air Force to prospectively evaluate the effects of personnel policy changes.



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