



INSTITUTE FOR DEFENSE ANALYSES

Study on Reducing Barriers to Minority Participation in Elite Units in the Armed Services

Dina Eliezer
Jordan Marcusse
Ashlie Williams
Dave Cotting
Joseph Adams
Caroline Earle
Juliana Esposito
Akshay Jain
Anthony Johnson
Nigel Mease
Carrington Metts
Heidi Reutter

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About this Publication

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For More Information:

Dr. Dina Eliezer, Project Leader
deliezer@ida.org, 703-578-2734
Ms. Jessica L. Stewart, Director, SFRD
jstewart@ida.org, 703-575-4530

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Institute for Defense Analyses
730 E. Glebe Rd
Alexandria, VA 22305 • (703) 845-2000

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*This research was conducted between June 2021 – November 2022

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Executive Summary

This research was conducted between June 2021 – November 2022

Background and Approach

The Office of the Secretary of Defense asked the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) to conduct a study to meet the requirements of Section 557 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) Fiscal Year (FY) 2021. Section 557 requires the Department of Defense (DOD) to sponsor a study to assess barriers to ethnic/racial minority and women’s participation in Special Operations Forces (SOF),¹ aviation (pilots/navigation), Marine Corps Force Reconnaissance (Force Recon) and Coast Guard Maritime Security Response Teams (MSRT). Collectively, we refer to all the units/specialties specified in Section 557 as “examined units/specialties.”

IDA undertook four lines of effort: 1) analyzed participation in examined units/specialties by race/ethnicity and gender (Section 557(a)(2)(A)–(C), Chapters 2-5); 2) conducted focus groups to assess barriers to participation (Section 557(a)(2)(D), Chapter 6); 3) interviewed key stakeholders to assess progress on recommendations made by RAND in their 1999 report on SOF (Section 557(a)(2)(E), Chapter 7); and 4) developed recommendations to address barriers and increase access and participation for women and ethnic/racial minorities (Section 557(a)(2)(F)–(G), Chapter 8).

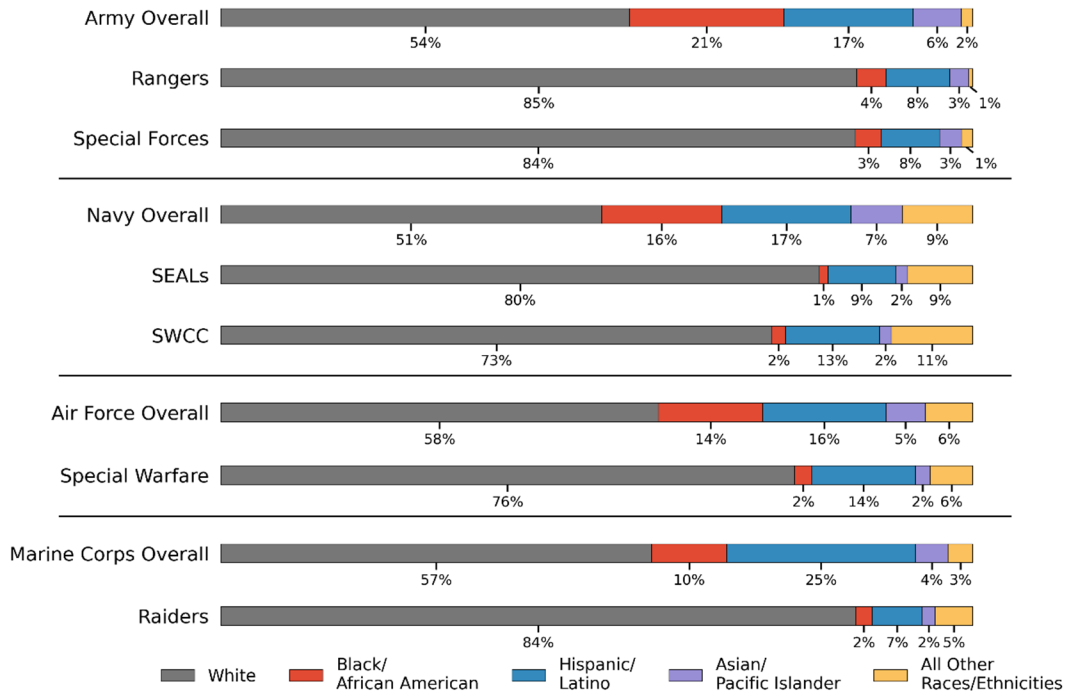
Quantitative Analysis of Diversity and Representation

Quantitative analyses are presented in three sections: first we examine representation in SOF, then among pilots/navigation, and finally among Force Recon and MSRT.

SOF. Ethnic/racial minorities in the SOF specialties examined are underrepresented relative to their proportion in the overall population of service members (SMs). Black/African American and Asian/Pacific Islander SMs are underrepresented across all SOF specialties, and Hispanic/Latino SMs are underrepresented across the majority of SOF specialties. Underrepresentation of Black/African American SMs is particularly pronounced (see the following figure). Although the overall number of ethnic/racial

¹ SOF units examined, as specified in Section 557: Army Rangers; Army Special Forces; Navy Sea, Air, and Land Teams (SEALs); Marine Raiders; and Air Force Special Warfare. Section 557 does not list Special Warfare Combatant Craft Crewman (SWCC); however, we include this specialty in our quantitative analyses to allow for trend analysis because they were included in the 1999 RAND report referred to in Section 557. Air Force Special Warfare includes: Combat Controller, Pararescue, Special Reconnaissance, Combat Rescue, Special Tactics Officers, Tactical Air Control Party, Tactical Air Control Party Officers, and Special Operations Weather Officers.

minority SMs participating in SOF has increased over the past two decades, ethnic/racial minorities are underrepresented to a greater degree than they were 25 years ago. That is, the increase in SOF diversity has been less pronounced than the increase in total force diversity.



Source: Derived from DMDC Active Duty Master file, March 2022.

Notes: Population represented includes Enlisted, Warrant Officers, and Commissioned Officers.

“Hispanic/Latino” refers to all SMs who reported a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, regardless of race. All other ethnic/racial groups include only SMs who did not report a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. Asian/Pacific Islander includes Native Hawaiian.

Percentage of Reported Race/Ethnicity by Officer and Enlisted Operators in Examined SOF Units/Specialties Compared to Service Population (March 2022)

With the exception of one career field in Special Warfare, none of the SOF specialties examined were open to women before 2016. As of March 2022, participation by women in SOF is extremely low; none of the specialties had more than five female enlisted members or five female officers.

Pilots/navigators. Minorities and women are underrepresented as pilots/navigators. Black/African American officers and Asian/Pacific Islander officers are consistently underrepresented as pilots and navigators, while Hispanic/Latino officers are underrepresented among pilots, but not navigators. Women are underrepresented in both pilot and navigator specialties, but more so for pilots. Notably, more than a quarter of flag officers (i.e., general officers or admirals) are pilots/navigators. Increasing minority and

women's representation among pilots/navigators may thus represent a prime opportunity to improve the diversity of the senior officer corps.

Force Recon and MSRT. Ethnic/racial minorities are markedly underrepresented in Marine Corps Force Recon. Only Black/African American members are underrepresented in Coast Guard MSRT while the remaining ethnic/racial minority groups are proportionally represented. As in SOF, female participation in Force Recon and MSRT is minimal, with no women in Force Recon and fewer than five women in MSRT.

Barriers to Participation for Women and Ethnic/Racial Minorities

IDA conducted 79 focus groups with a total of 340 women and men, including ethnic/racial minority and White SMs in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard. Participants included members of the units/specialties specified in Section 557. Additionally, to assess external awareness and interest in the examined units/specialties, IDA conducted focus groups with SMs from a range of other career fields. IDA coded qualitative data from focus group discussions into themes and identified perceived barriers to female/minority participation in the units/specialties examined, as well as perceived barriers that affect both women/minority groups and majority groups. The focus group findings represent SMs' personal perspectives, and may not reflect recent changes in policy or practice, and, on some occasions, may be based on misperceptions.

Awareness of the specific units/specialties examined was low among participants not serving in those specialties. Participants noted that media depictions may not appeal to women and ethnic/racial minorities because they fail to meaningfully display diversity, focus on narrow aspects of specialties, and do not highlight transferrable career skills. For those trying to join the examined units/specialties while already in service, participation can be deterred by a lack of support from one's current leadership to transfer to one of the units/specialties examined, concerns about career risks if one fails to be selected, and inadequate time/knowledge needed to complete required steps.

Recruits who make it to selection and training for examined units/specialties face significant hurdles. Participants noted that exceptional grit, motivation, and physical ability are required. Prior preparation, including physical training and strategies for managing stress, can help candidates succeed. However, even the strongest candidates are susceptible to injury, and many participants believed that women are more susceptible than men. Participants discussed the high intelligence necessary to pass flight school and many non-aviation participants doubted their own ability to succeed. However, pilots/navigators emphasized that completing flight school is more attainable than most people think.

Some participants believed there to be disparate treatment of different demographic groups during assessment and selection, though there was disagreement about which groups are favored. Some participants asserted that female and ethnic/racial minority SMs

are treated more leniently, while others maintained that female and ethnic/racial minority SMs must work harder to exceed standards to overcome biases against them.

Participants perceived challenges once SMs join the units/specialties examined. Frequent deployments, high operation tempos, and demanding work make managing family life difficult and were perceived to harm women’s fertility. Many participants spoke positively of command climate, but some participants described experiences in examined units/specialties where they felt disrespected based on their gender or racial/ethnic identity. Furthermore, participants noted that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts can cause friction and backlash among unit members. Although some participants affirmed the value of increasing diversity, others expressed skepticism about the need for changes to promote diversity.

Progress on Past Recommendations for SOF

To examine progress on past recommendations specific to SOF (i.e., from the 1999 RAND report referred to in Section 557), IDA interviewed 87 current and former military/civilian personnel (i.e., United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) staff, other DOD staff, and former SMs with relevant expertise) and reviewed publicly available research, reports, and articles. IDA found that DOD has made at least partial progress on most of the 1999 RAND recommendations, including efforts to expand recruitment and outreach to underrepresented groups, ensure the relevance of standards and the rigor of assessment and selection, and collect data on diversity and command climate (see the following figure).

Progress	Specialized SOF recruiters Inclusion of minority SOF members in outreach Recruiting events in minority communities Some images of minority members on websites	Operationally relevant and gender-neutral standards Preparatory training at recruitment and before/during assessment Inclusion of women in training cadre (Navy)	D&I Strategic/Action Plans Focus expanded beyond diversity to inclusion Routine tracking and reporting of race/ethnicity and gender Climate surveys and sensing sessions
	Recruitment	Selection & Training	DEI Infrastructure
Challenges	Recruiters incentivized to meet numeric targets, not to engage diverse populations Minority SOF members disproportionately tasked with outreach Perceived need for engagement with youth at an earlier age SOF websites lack sufficient images of minorities and content on career benefits	Misconceptions about lowered standards for diversity may undermine inclusion Unclear if an ongoing and transparent mechanism exists to validate/ensure relevancy of standards Minorities may have fewer opportunities to prepare/train prior to service	Challenges integrating data across services and systems Survey fatigue and concern about lack of anonymity Some USSOCOM component staff serve in D&I roles as an additional duty Concerns about obtaining buy-in at all levels and encountering backlash to DEI initiatives

Summary of Progress on 1999 RAND Recommendations and Challenges in Recruitment; Assessment and Selection and Training; and DEI Infrastructure

Actions to improve DEI in SOF have accelerated in recent years. Specifically, USSOCOM has created new DEI-specific offices and positions, formed an Executive Steering Committee to coordinate and share best practices, and developed a Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Strategic Plan and Implementation Action Plan. These efforts appear comprehensive and sustained, but it is too soon to assess their impact.

Recommendations

IDA identified past recommendations specific to SOF that require continued progress and developed additional recommendations for all units/specialties examined. These recommendations aim to address barriers experienced by women and ethnic/racial minorities specifically, but many recommendations also address general barriers all SMs may face. Addressing general barriers will serve to increase access to examined units/specialties for all SMs, including women and ethnic/racial minorities.

Continued Progress Needed on 1999 RAND Recommendations for SOF

- Continue to ensure minorities/women participate in outreach, recruiting extends to minorities/women, and materials feature diverse members and missions.
- Continue to increase awareness of swim training and related support resources the Services provide to prepare candidates for selection and training.
- Continue to assess command climate and discrimination to measure progress on USSOCOM's D&I Implementation Action Plan.

New Recommendations for SOF, Force Recon, MSRT, and Pilots/Navigators

- Incentivize minority participation in outreach, recruiter engagement with diverse groups, and informal outreach/mentorship.
- Educate and incentivize leaders from originating units to improve support for subordinates who seek to join examined units/specialties.
- Continue to expand access to training for examined specialties prior to service.
- Increase awareness/access to commissioning opportunities for enlisted SMs seeking to become pilots/navigators.
- Embed guidance related to psychological and cognitive skills in preparatory materials and training (e.g., guides, pre-assessment training, flight school).
- Review current physical training, nutrition, and injury-prevention strategies for SOF, Force Recon, and MSRT to ensure relevance to women.
- Develop strategies to reduce and prevent backlash to DEI initiatives.
- Continue to provide opportunities to add flexibility to careers/support families.

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1. Introduction

A. Background and Purpose

Section 557 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 (Section 557) requires the Department of Defense (DOD) to sponsor a Federally Funded Research and Development Center (FFRDC) to conduct an independent study. The intent of the study is to assess barriers to ethnic/racial minority (i.e., non-White/Caucasian race and/or Hispanic/Latino ethnicity) and female participation in Special Operations Forces (SOF), aviation (i.e., pilots and navigators), and units in the Marine Corps (Force Reconnaissance; Force Recon) and Coast Guard (Maritime Security Response Teams; MSRT) with similar selection processes, missions, and capabilities as SOF.

Taken together, these units/specialties are often considered elite due to their selectivity, prestige, and the benefits members may receive during service (e.g., special pays, access to high-quality resources and facilities) or after service (e.g., lucrative civilian employment for pilots). The units/specialties listed in Section 557 are provided below; in this paper, we collectively refer to them as the “examined units/specialties.”

- **SOF units:** Army Special Forces (SF); Army 75th Ranger Regiment (Rangers); Navy Sea, Air, and Land Teams (SEALs); Navy Special Warfare Combatant Craft Crewmen (SWCC)²; Marine Raiders; and Air Force Special Warfare.³
- **Marine Corps Force Reconnaissance (Force Recon):** Upon its formation, Marine Corps Special Operations Command (MARSOC) initially drew from Force Recon to populate the Raiders. Force Recon remains an elite specialty, separate from the Raiders/MARSOC, with demanding qualifications and missions.

² Section 557 does not list SWCC; however, we include this specialty in our quantitative analyses to allow for trend analysis because they were included in the 1999 RAND report referred to in Section 557 and they have a similar assessment and selection and training pipeline to the Navy SEALs.

³ Special Warfare is an umbrella category used by the Air Force to describe its ground combat operators and includes the three Air Force specialties named in Section 557 of the NDAA, Combat Controller (CCT), Pararescue (PJ), and Special Reconnaissance (SR), as well as Combat Rescue (CRO), Special Tactics Officers (STO), Tactical Air Control Party (TACP), Tactical Air Control Party Officers (TACPO), and Special Operations Weather Officers.

- **Coast Guard Maritime Security Response Teams (MSRT):** Coast Guard team within its Deployable Special Forces (DSF), the Coast Guard corollary to SOF.
- **Pilots and navigators:** Pilots of manned aircraft, remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) pilot occupations, and navigators (i.e., Combat System Operator (CSO) in the Air Force and Naval Flight Officers (NFOs) in the Navy and Marine Corps).

A 1999 RAND study found that ethnic/racial minorities were under-represented in SOF and recommended a range of actions to address barriers minorities face to participation.⁴ Section 557 calls for a reexamination of minority representation in SOF and expansion of past research to assess additional non-SOF specialties and gender representation now that combat restrictions for women have been lifted. The Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (OUSD(P&R)) asked the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) to conduct this research. The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict (ASD SO/LIC) co-sponsored this study. Table 1 presents the specific requirements for this study outlined in Section 557 of the NDAA as well as the corresponding chapters in this paper.

Table 1. Requirements Specified in Section 557 of the NDAA FY2021 and Corresponding Chapter(s) in this Paper

Section 557(a)	Description	Chapters in this Paper
(2)(A)	“Description of ethnic, racial, and gender composition of [examined] units”	2-5
(2)(B)	“Comparison of participation rates of minority populations in [examined] units to general [military] population”	2-5
(2)(C)	“Comparison of...minority officers...O-7 or higher... in each [examined] unit to... all such officers...of that [examined] unit”	2-5
(2)(D)	“Identification of barriers to minority (including English language learners) participation in recruitment, accession, assessment, and training”	6 and Appendix B
(2)(E)	“Status and effectiveness of the response to the recommendations in the report of the RAND Corporation...”	7
(2)(F), (G)	“Recommendations to increase the numbers of minority officers...and to increase minority participation in [examined] units”	8

Note: Section 557(d) uses the term “covered units” to refer to all the units/specialties required for inclusion; however, we instead use the term “examined units/specialties,” as “covered units” often means covert in a military context.

⁴ Margaret C. Harrell et al., *Barriers to Minority Participation in Special Operations Forces*, MR-1042-SOCOM (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1999).

B. Methodology and Scope

To meet the requirements specified in Section 557, IDA analyzed military personnel data to determine the demographic composition of examined specialties compared to the general military population (Section 557(a)(2)(A)–(C)). To assess barriers to minority participation in the units/specialties indicated in Section 557 (Section 557(a)(2)(D)), IDA conducted focus groups with members of the examined units/specialties as well as service members (SMs) not in those specialties.

Finally, to assess progress on recommendations made in the 1999 RAND report regarding diversity in SOF (Section 557(a)(2)(E)), IDA reviewed relevant literature and documents and conducted interviews with service staff and other key stakeholders. Based on IDA’s study findings, we present recommendations to address barriers and ultimately increase access to and participation in the examined units/specialties for women and ethnic/racial minorities (Section 557(a)(2)(F)–(G)).

When discussing SOF throughout this paper we limit our focus to operators – individuals specifically selected and trained to conduct special operations – rather than individuals serving in combat support or combat service support roles assigned or attached to SOF units (i.e., enablers). We centered our research on operators to permit a more focused analysis, given that enablers come from a range of career backgrounds and operators tend to be less demographically diverse than enablers.

In the quantitative analyses presented in Chapters 2 to 5 and the focus group analyses presented in Chapter 6, we include results for all units/specialties specified in Section 557. When assessing progress on past recommendations in Chapter 7, we only discuss SOF, as the 1999 RAND recommendations pertained solely to SOF. In Chapter 8, we present areas for continued progress on the RAND recommendations pertaining to SOF as well as new recommendations relevant for SOF, Force Recon, MSRT, and pilots/navigationers.

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2. Quantitative Analysis Methodology

A. Overview of Examined Units/Specialties

In Section 557, Congress called for this study to measure participation rates of ethnic/racial minorities and women within SOF units/specialties, as well as within other select specialties in the U.S. Armed Forces. Chapters 3 to 5 of this paper contain quantitative analyses that serve to fulfill this requirement. Each chapter includes an analysis of ethnic/racial minority and women’s participation within the examined units/specialties, and of general/flag officers whose career history includes one of the examined specialties. Chapter 3 of this paper provides quantitative analyses of the SOF units/specialties included in the Section 557, including historical comparisons to the 1999 RAND report.⁵ Chapter 4 provides quantitative analyses of pilot and navigator specialties, including those within SOF. Chapter 5 covers the non-SOF specialties identified in Section 557 (see Table 2).

Table 2. Special Operations and Non-Special Operations Specialties Examined

Special Operations (Chapter 3)		Army Special Forces (SF), Army Rangers Navy Sea, Air, and Land Teams (SEALs) and Special Warfare Combatant Craft Crewmen (SWCC) Marine Raiders Air Force Special Warfare, including: Combat Controller (CCT), Pararescue (PJ), Special Reconnaissance (SR), Combat Rescue (CRO), Special Tactics Officers (STO), Tactical Air Control Party (TACP), Tactical Air Control Party Officers (TACPO), and Special Operations Weather Officers
Pilots and Navigators (Chapter 4)		SOF and non-SOF pilots of manned aircraft / combat systems operator (CSO) / remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) pilot occupations
Special Operations Capable (Chapter 5)		Marine Corps Force Reconnaissance

⁵ Section 557 does not list Navy SWCC. However, we include them in the quantitative analyses to allow for trend analysis because they were included in the 1999 RAND report and their assessment and selection and training pipeline is similar to the Navy SEALs.



Note: Within Air Force Special Warfare, the specialties of CRO, Special Operations Weather Officers, PJ, TACP, and TACPO are only considered SOF when assigned to Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) units. All other Special Warfare specialties are always SOF.

B. Methodology

This analysis is composed of several processes: identifying the populations to be studied; defining the racial, ethnic, and gender categories to be reported; and defining and producing measurements of participation and representation. The methodology described in the current chapter applies to all quantitative analysis chapters (3-5).

In the military, minority representation varies by paygrade. For this reason, we analyze enlisted and officers separately for much of the analysis in the paper. This paper uses the term “officers” to refer collectively to both warrant and commissioned officers.

1. Identification of Examined Specialties

Each DOD specialty studied in this paper is identified and measured using the Active Duty Master file, which IDA received from the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC). This dataset has monthly records of every active duty SM. This paper is based on the data for March 2022, the most recent data available at the time of writing (see Appendix C for more information). The United States Coast Guard (USCG) provided data directly on gender, race, and ethnicity for operators in the MSRTs, reflecting the SMs as of October 2021.

2. Racial and Ethnic Categorizations

DMDC’s Active Duty Master file provides six race categories: American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, White, and Other. SMs may indicate more than one race (except in the Army), and the data include each combination of up to three races. IDA combined Asian and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander into a single racial category called “Asian/Pacific Islander,” included all other single-race categories, and grouped the multiracial combinations into an umbrella “multiracial” category. DMDC data also include 22 categories of ethnicity, of which five are considered Hispanic/Latino: Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Latin American with Hispanic descent, and other Hispanic descent. SMs do not have the option to indicate more than one ethnicity.

For this analysis, we combined race and ethnicity data into nonoverlapping categories, aligning with the U.S. Census Bureau’s approach.⁶ Specifically, the Hispanic/Latino category includes SMs of any race, whereas the race categories only include members of that particular race who are not Hispanic. For example, the Black/African American category includes only non-Hispanic/Latino Black/African American SMs. We also report a category for “not reported,” which includes SMs who reported neither a race nor a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity.

3. Statistical Methodology for Measuring Ethnic and Racial Diversity

This paper uses two terms to measure the extent to which women and ethnic/racial minority groups are included in the specialties studied: participation and representation. We define these terms as follows.

- **Participation** is the extent to which the group (gender or ethnic/racial group) is present in the specialty. We refer to participation with a number or a percentage of group members within the specialty.
- **Representation** is the extent to which the group (i.e., gender or ethnic/racial group) participates in the specialty at a comparable rate to their participation in the comparison population (service overall). We use a metric called the **representation quotient (RQ)** to precisely measure representation.⁷ The RQ is the ratio of the proportion of a particular gender or race/ethnicity in a given specialty to the proportion of that gender or race/ethnicity in the overall service population:

$$RQ = 100 * \frac{\text{Proportion of group in a specialty}}{\text{Proportion of group in overall service population}}$$

- An RQ less than 100 indicates that the group is underrepresented in the specialty relative to the overall service population.
- An RQ greater than 100 indicates that the group is overrepresented in the specialty relative to the overall service population.
- An RQ of exactly 100 indicates that the group is equally represented in the SOF/other specialty and the overall service population.

⁶ Eric Jensen et al., “Measuring Racial and Ethnic Diversity for the 2020 Census,” *United States Census Bureau*, August 4, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2021/08/measuring-racial-ethnic-diversity-2020-census.html>.

⁷ The 1999 RAND report includes a Representation Index which uses the same proportion as the RQ but subtracts it from 100 (e.g., an RQ of 25 would equal a Representation Index of 75, given $100 - 25 = 75$); we use the RQ to simplify interpretation.

For example, if Black/African American individuals make up 16 percent of the general service population but only 4 percent of a specialty, they would be underrepresented in the specialty with an RQ of 25.⁸ This would mean that the proportion of Black/African Americans in the specialty is one-fourth (25 percent) of the proportion of Black/African Americans in the overall service population.

Conversely, an RQ of 125 among White members in a specialty would indicate overrepresentation in the specialty relative to the service population, such that White individuals' proportion in the specialty is 125 percent of their proportion in the overall service population (i.e., the proportion of White individuals in the specialty is 25 percent greater than their proportion in the service population).

For a given RQ, we test whether its value is statistically significantly different from 100. Statistical significance indicates that the difference between the actual RQ and 100 (with 100 indicating equal representation in the examined specialty relative to the overall service population) is not likely due to random variation. We do this by means of a Fisher-Pitman Permutation test.

This test compares the RQs for each group in the specialty to the distribution of RQs that would result if the specialty was populated by randomly chosen members of the service population.⁹ This hypothesis test produces p-values for the RQ of each group. We use asterisks to indicate when the p-value is less than 0.05, as this is the most commonly used threshold for statistical significance.¹⁰

⁸ Calculation: $100 * \frac{4\%}{16\%} = 25$

⁹ Estimated by simulating populating the specialty by random draws from the enlisted or officer population of the corresponding service, simulated 10,001 times.

¹⁰ A statistically significant p-value is evidence that the population is over- or under-represented in SOF specialties, but a statistically significant p-value is not sufficient to identify the causes of that over- or underrepresentation, or even whether the causes are internal or external to DOD.

3. Quantitative Analysis of Diversity within Examined SOF Specialties

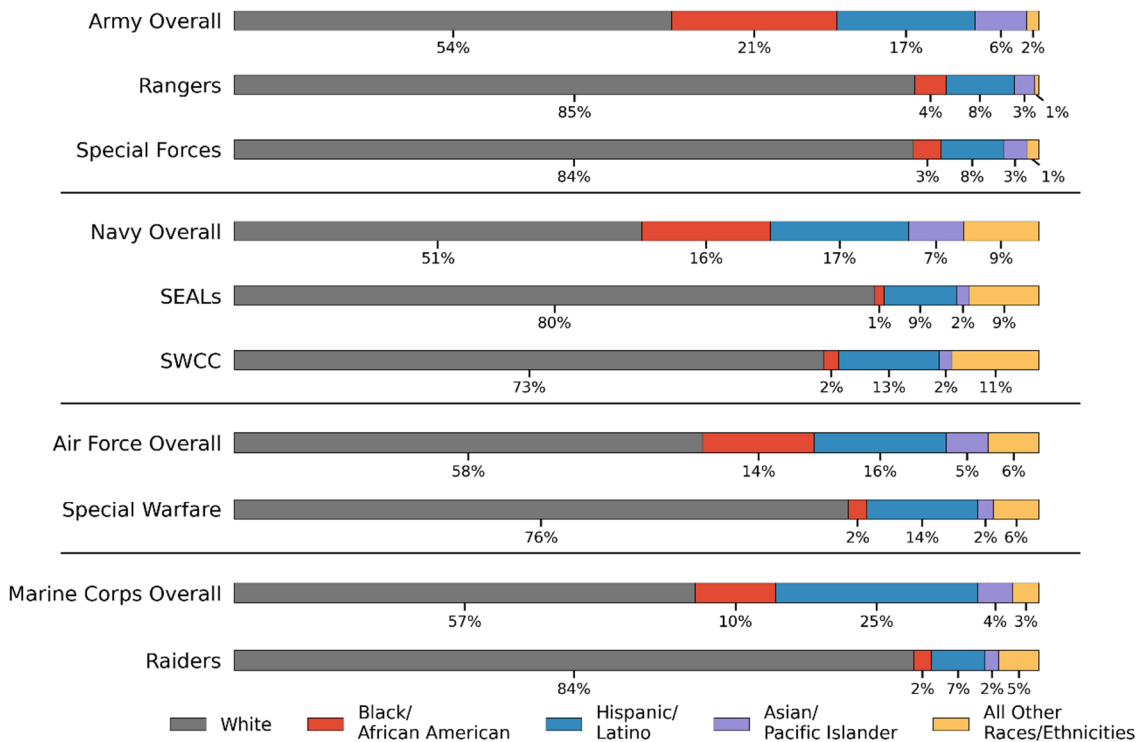
A. Overview

This chapter examines participation in SOF specialties, but is limited to operators – individuals selected and trained to conduct special operations – rather than individuals serving in combat support or combat service support roles assigned or attached to SOF units (i.e., enablers).

We find that participation in SOF by ethnic/racial minority groups has increased in the past two decades, particularly among Hispanic/Latino service members (SMs). The enlisted Navy and Air Force specialties have seen particularly large increases in ethnic/racial minority participation. Nevertheless, most ethnic/racial minority groups remain underrepresented in SOF specialties relative to their proportion in the overall population of SMs, and this underrepresentation has increased since 1997.

Among almost all specialties studied, we find consistent patterns of marked underrepresentation for Black/African American SMs, along with consistent overrepresentation of White SMs. In the majority of specialties, Asian/Pacific Islander and Hispanic/Latino SMs are underrepresented as well.

Figure 1 shows the proportion of different ethnic and racial groups among the SOF specialties named in Section 557, with the proportions in the Services overall included for comparison.



Source: Derived from DMDC Active Duty Master file, March 2022.

Note: Population represented includes Enlisted, Warrant Officers, and Commissioned Officers.

Note: "Hispanic/Latino" refers to all SMs who reported a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, regardless of race. All other ethnic/racial groups include only SMs who did not report a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. Asian/Pacific Islander includes Native Hawaiian.

Figure 1. Percentage of Reported Race/Ethnicity in Specified SOF Specialties Compared to Service Population (March 2022)

This pattern is consistent across enlisted and officers. Compared to all other ethnic/racial minority groups, Black/African American SMs are underrepresented in the SOF specialties to the greatest extent. Specifically, the proportion of enlisted Black/African American SMs in each of these specialties is less than one fourth (25 percent) of their proportion in the overall enlisted population for their service. Similarly, the proportion of Black/African American officers is less than one third (33 percent) of their proportion in the overall officer population for their service.

Hispanic/Latino and Asian/Pacific Islander SMs are generally underrepresented in the examined SOF specialties, although to a lesser extent than Black/African Americans (with limited exceptions). White SMs are overrepresented in every examined SOF specialty relative to their proportion in the overall parent Services. American Indian/Alaskan Native SMs do not demonstrate consistent patterns of over- or under-representation among the examined SOF specialties.

B. Participation and Representation of Ethnic and Racial Groups among SOF Specialties Examined

We begin the analysis with a consideration of the ethnic and racial composition of the SOF specialties examined in Section 557: Army Rangers and SF; Navy SEALs and SWCC; Air Force Special Warfare; and Marine Raiders. Figure 2 and Table 3 present participation of racial and ethnic groups among the enlisted element of these specialties, compared to their participation in the overall enlisted population of the parent service.

The most prominent finding is that Black/African American enlisted SMs are markedly underrepresented in each of these specialties. The proportion of Black/African American enlisted in these specialties ranges from 1 percent to 4 percent across the examined SOF specialties, whereas the proportion of enlisted Black/African Americans in the service overall ranges from 11 percent to 23 percent. This translates to Representation Quotients (RQs; the ratio of participation in the SOF specialty to participation in the service overall) for enlisted Black/African Americans ranging from 5 in the SEALs to 22 in the Raiders, with the RQs for the other SOF specialties falling in between.

Representation Quotients (RQs) less than 100 indicate that the group is underrepresented relative to their representation in the general population, with smaller values denoting greater underrepresentation; RQs greater than 100 indicate the group is overrepresented (see Chapter 2 for the methodology).¹¹

In other words, Black/African American enlisted are less than one fourth as prevalent in each examined SOF specialty as in the total enlisted population for their service.

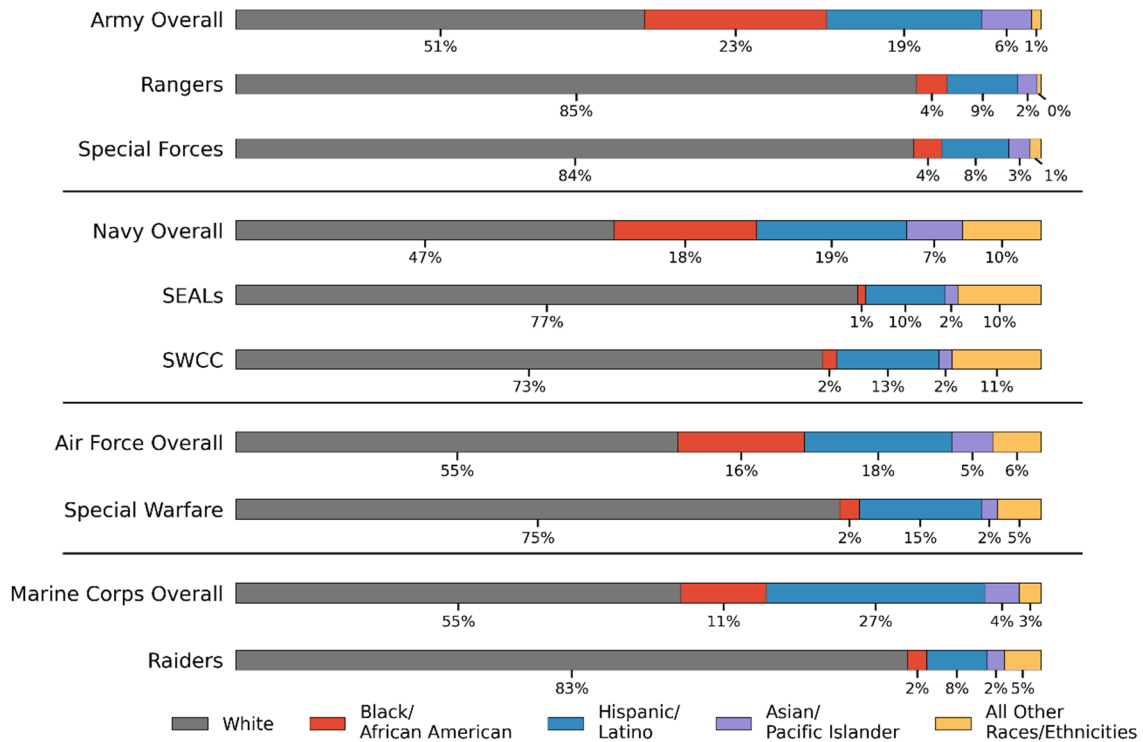
Hispanic/Latino enlisted members are roughly half as prevalent in the Rangers, Special Forces, SEALs, and SWCC as they are in the respective Services, with RQs ranging from 43 to 68. They are underrepresented by a smaller but still statistically significant amount in the Air Force's Special Warfare specialties, with an RQ of 83. They are highly underrepresented among the Raiders, with an RQ of 28.

¹¹ The enlisted ranks of the Army and Navy contain larger proportions of Black/African Americans than the U.S. population, and the Marine Corps contains a larger proportion of Hispanic/Latinos than the U.S. population. As a check, we calculated RQs using a comparison population of 20–30 year-olds in the United States rather than the enlisted population of the services. This resulted in RQs of 27 and 25 for Black/African American enlisted in the Rangers and Special Forces, and RQs of 7 and 13 for the SEALs and SWCC. Using the same comparison population for the Raiders results in an RQ of 35. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, *Annual Estimates of the Resident Population by Sex, Age, Race, and Hispanic Origin for the United States: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2019 (NC-EST2019-ASR6H)*.

In each of the examined SOF specialties, enlisted Asian/Pacific Islanders are underrepresented by at least half, with RQs ranging from 23 to 49. Underrepresentation is most pronounced in the SEALs and SWCC, with RQs of 23 and 24, respectively.

Enlisted American Indian/Alaskan Natives exhibit inconsistent patterns of over- and underrepresentation across the examined SOF specialties. They are overrepresented in the Rangers and Special Forces and underrepresented in the SEALs and SWCC. The differences in representation are not statistically significant in Special Warfare or Raiders.

White SMs are consistently overrepresented among the enlisted members in the examined SOF specialties. They comprise 73 percent to 84 percent of the enlisted populations of these specialties, whereas their proportion in the overall enlisted population of their service ranges from 47 percent to 55 percent, such that the RQs range from 136 to 167.



Source: Derived from DMDC Active Duty Master file, March 2022.

Note: "Hispanic/Latino" refers to all SMs who reported a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, regardless of race. All other ethnic/racial groups include only SMs who did not report a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. Asian/Pacific Islander includes Native Hawaiian.

Figure 2. Percentage of Reported Race/Ethnicity by Enlisted in Examined SOF Specialties Compared to Service Population (March 2022)

Table 3. Percentage of Reported Race/Ethnicity by Enlisted Members of Examined SOF Specialties, RQ, and Statistical Significance (March 2022)

Race	Army Overall	Rangers	Special Forces	Navy Overall	SEALs	SWCC	Air Force Overall	Special Warfare	Marine Corps Overall	Raiders
White	51%	84% RQ: 167*	84% RQ: 166*	47%	77% RQ: 164*	73% RQ: 155*	55%	75% RQ: 136*	55%	83% RQ: 151*
Black/African American	23%	4% RQ: 17*	4% RQ: 16*	18%	1% RQ: 5*	2% RQ: 10*	16%	2% RQ: 15*	11%	2% RQ: 22*
Hispanic/Latino	19%	9% RQ: 46*	8% RQ: 43*	19%	10% RQ: 53*	13% RQ: 68*	18%	15% RQ: 83*	27%	8% RQ: 28*
Asian/Pacific Islander	6%	2% RQ: 38*	3% RQ: 42*	7%	2% RQ: 23*	2% RQ: 24*	5%	2% RQ: 39*	4%	2% RQ: 49*
American Indian/ Alaska Native	0.7%	0.4% RQ: 57*	0.5% RQ: 74*	1%	2% RQ: 172*	2% RQ: 186*	0.4%	0.3% RQ: 87	0.9%	0.6% RQ: 67
Multiple Races				6%	5% RQ: 83*	5% RQ: 87	4%	4% RQ: 81*	1%	2% RQ: 198*
Not Reported	0.5%	0.1% RQ: 20*	0.8% RQ: 178*	3%	3% RQ: 117	4% RQ: 127	1%	2% RQ: 124	0.7%	2% RQ: 249*
Number of Enlisted	373,538	2,186	6,553	284,865	2,463	787	262,157	2,059	154,959	851

Source: Derived from DMDC Active Duty Master file, March 2022.

Note: RQ refers to representation quotient. An RQ greater than 100 indicates that the group is overrepresented in the specified specialty relative to their representation in the service overall, whereas an RQ less than 100 indicates that the group is underrepresented; *p<.05

Note: Percentages displayed in this table are rounded, whereas RQs were computed using percentages before rounding.

Note: "Hispanic/Latino" refers to all SMs who reported a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, regardless of race. All other ethnic/racial groups include only SMs who did not report a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. "Asian/Pacific Islander" includes Native Hawaiian.

Figure 3 and Table 4 present participation of racial and ethnic groups among the officers of the examined SOF specialties, compared to their participation in the overall officer population of the parent service. The officer pool is much less racially and ethnically diverse than the enlisted. In each of the Services, the proportion of White individuals among the officer population is at least 15 percentage points higher than among the enlisted population of the same service. The small number of officers relative to enlisted in SOF specialties, paired with the fact that the service-wide populations of officers are not very diverse, means that it can be difficult to establish that RQs are statistically different from 100. As such, a lack of statistical significance should not be taken as clear evidence that there is no under- or overrepresentation. Notably, the SWCC has only 44 warrant officers and no commissioned officers, and the only statistically significant finding within this group is the overrepresentation of White officers (36 out of 44 officers are White). Therefore, SWCC will not be analyzed further in this section.

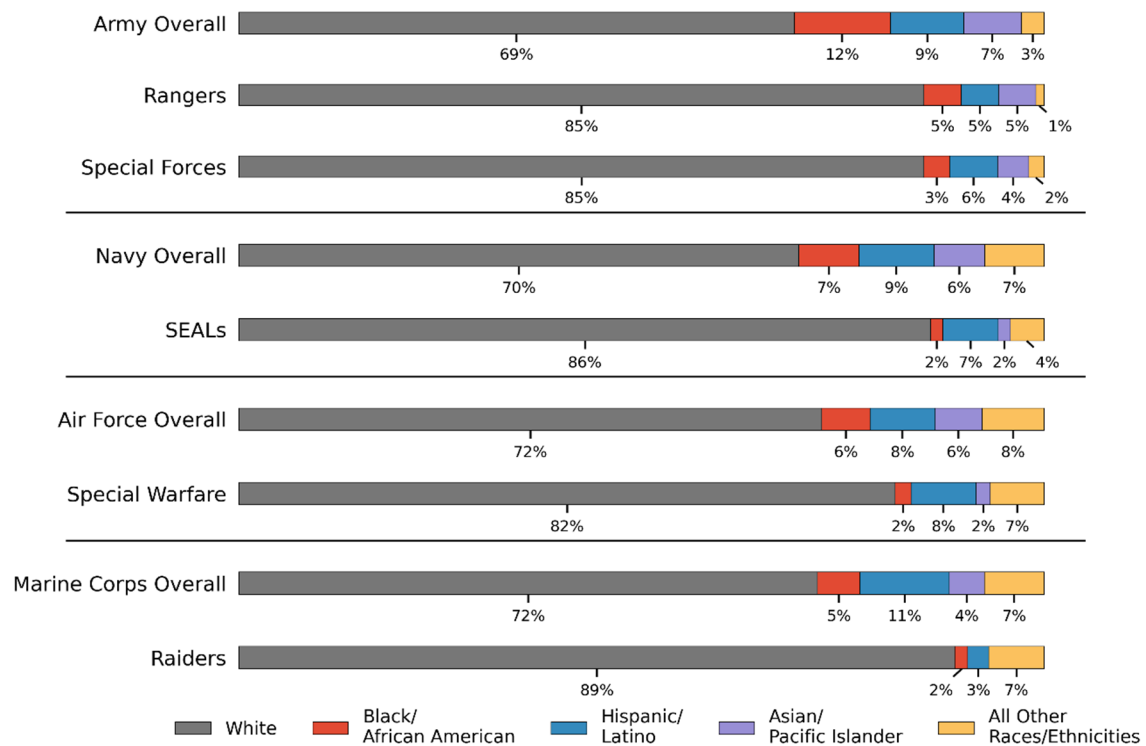
As with the enlisted, Black/African American officers are consistently markedly underrepresented in the examined SOF specialties. Across the examined SOF specialties, RQs for Black/African American officers range from 20 to 39. In every specialty other than the Rangers, Black/African American officers are less than one third as prevalent as Black/African American officers are in the parent service overall.

Hispanic/Latino representation varies quite a bit across specialties. Hispanic/Latino officers are proportionately represented among Special Warfare, with an RQ of 100. However, their RQs range from 51-74 in the Rangers, Special Forces, and SEALs. They are very underrepresented in the Raiders, with an RQ of 24.

In the SEALs, Special Warfare, and Raiders, Asian/Pacific Islanders are underrepresented to a large extent, with RQs ranging from 0 to 30. Underrepresentation is less extreme in the Rangers and Special Forces, with RQs of 65 and 54, respectively. The underrepresentation in the Rangers is not statistically significant, but the small number of officers total in the Rangers makes it difficult to achieve statistical significance.

American Indian/Alaskan Natives exhibit inconsistent patterns of over- and underrepresentation across the examined SOF specialties. Given that this is a small percentage of a small population (officers), none of the differences are statistically significant.

White SMs are consistently overrepresented among the officers in the examined SOF specialties, even compared to the baseline populations which are 69% to 72% White. Across these specialties, the RQs for White officers range from 112 in Special Warfare to 124 in the SEALs and Raiders. This difference is statistically significant for each examined SOF specialty.



Source: Derived from DMDC Active Duty Master file, March 2022.

Note: "Hispanic/Latino" refers to all SMs who reported a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, regardless of race. All other ethnic/racial groups include only SMs who did not report a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. Asian/Pacific Islander includes Native Hawaiian.

Note: We omit SWCC from this graph because the population of officers is only 44.

Figure 3. Percentage of Reported Race/Ethnicity by Commissioned and Warrant Officers in Specified SOF Specialties Compared to Service Population (March 2022)

Table 4. Percentage of Reported Race/Ethnicity by Officers in Examined SOF Specialties, RQ, and Statistical Significance (March 2022)

Race	Army Overall	Rangers	Special Forces	Navy Overall	SEALs	Air Force Overall	Special Warfare	Marine Corps Overall	Raiders
White	69%	85% RQ: 123*	85% RQ: 123*	70%	86% RQ: 124*	72%	82% RQ: 112*	72%	89% RQ: 124*
Black/African American	12%	5% RQ: 39*	3% RQ: 26*	8%	2% RQ: 20*	6%	2% RQ: 33*	5%	2% RQ: 30*
Hispanic/Latino	9%	5% RQ: 51*	6% RQ: 66*	9%	7% RQ: 74*	8%	8% RQ: 100	11%	3% RQ: 24*
Asian/Pacific Islander	7%	5% RQ: 65	4% RQ: 54*	6%	2% RQ: 24*	6%	2% RQ: 30*	4%	0% RQ: 0*
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.5%	0% RQ: 0	0.5% RQ: 109	0.8%	0.4% RQ: 55	0.4%	0.2% RQ: 52	0.9%	2% RQ: 246
Multiple				5%	2% RQ: 37*	3%	4% RQ: 113	2%	1% RQ: 51
Not Reported	2%	1% RQ: 44	1% RQ: 59*	2%	2% RQ: 105	4%	3% RQ: 70	4%	4% RQ: 82
Total	93,072	194	2,102	55,695	929	60,975	508	22,077	189

Source: Derived from DMDC Active Duty Master file, March 2022. We omit SWCC from this table because the population of officers is only 44.

Note: RQ refers to representation quotient. An RQ greater than 100 indicates that the group is overrepresented in the specified specialty relative to their representation in the service overall, whereas an RQ less than 100 indicates that the group is underrepresented; asterisk (*) indicates that the over- or under-representation is statistically significant with $p < .05$.

Note: Percentages displayed in this table are rounded, whereas RQs were computed using percentages before rounding.

Note: "Hispanic/Latino" refers to all SMs who reported a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, regardless of race. All other ethnic/racial groups include only SMs who did not report a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. "Asian/Pacific Islander" includes Native Hawaiian.

C. Women’s Participation in Examined SOF Specialties

With the exception of one career field in Special Warfare (TACP Officer), none of the six examined SOF specialties were open to women prior to 2016. As of March 2022, participation by women across each of the SOF specialties is very low. No SOF specialty had more than five female enlisted or five female officers.¹² Among each of these specialties, women’s participation is not higher than 1 percent. In contrast, women’s participation in the overall Services ranges from 9 percent (Marine Corps) to 21 percent (Air Force).

D. Changes in Ethnic and Racial Diversity in Examined SOF Specialties since 1997: A Comparison with the 1999 RAND Report

IDA compared the findings presented in this paper against RAND’s 1999 report to examine changes in representation over time. Table 5 summarizes the findings. RAND examined racial and ethnic minority representation in five specialties (Special Forces, Rangers, SEALs, SWCC, and CCT/PJs and other airmen serving on SOF-specific aircraft) using DMDC data from the 1997 fiscal year. At that time, participation by racial and ethnic minorities in these units was highest among enlisted SWCC, with minorities comprising 17 percent of members. Using 2022 data, IDA found a marked increase in diversity since 1997, with racial and ethnic minority members comprising 24 percent of enlisted SWCC. We do not have data on SWCC officers in 1997, as RAND’s 1999 report did not include warrant officers.

Navy SEALs and Air Force SOF units had the lowest minority participation in 1997: 6 percent of officers and 9 percent of enlisted members in the SEALs, and 7 percent of officers and 10 percent of enlisted members in Air Force SOF. As of 2021, proportions of minority participation in both groups had increased substantially. Minority participation in the SEALs had increased to 12 percent of officers and 19 percent of enlisted. Minority participation in Air Force SOF units increased to 16 percent of officers and 23 percent of enlisted members. In each of these groups, we primarily see increased participation by Hispanic/Latino SMs and little change in Black/African American participation.

Army units have seen comparatively smaller changes in minority participation since 1997. In the Special Forces and Rangers, 8 to 10 percent of officers and 10 to 14 percent of enlisted members were minorities in 1997, compared to 14 percent of officers and 15 percent of enlisted members in 2022. At both time points, minority participation was generally greater in Special Forces than Rangers, and we see a greater increase in minority representation in the Rangers compared to Special Forces.

¹² Due to the small number of women, we omit precise headcounts to protect individual privacy.

Table 5. Changes in Ethnic/Racial Minority Participation from 1997 to 2022

	% Enlisted Minorities in Specialty		% Officer Minorities in Specialty	
	1997	2022	1997	2022
Rangers	10%	15%	8%	14%
Special Forces	14%	15%	10%	14%
SEALs	9%	19%	6%	12%
SWCC	17%	24%	-	14%
Special Warfare*	10%	23%	7%	16%

Source: Derived from 1999 RAND Report (Harrell et al) and DMDC Active Duty Master file, March 2022.

Note: The category of “Special Warfare” was limited to CCTs and PJs in the RAND report and the Marine Raiders did not exist at the time of publication.

Note: “Minorities” includes all individuals who report Hispanic/Latino ethnicity and/or report a race other than White.

The percentage of ethnic and racial minorities in the examined SOF specialties has increased since 1997, but so has the percentage of ethnic and racial minorities in the overall service population. Using the values of the RQ,¹³ we are able to compare the extent to which underrepresentation has changed in the four specialties included in the 1999 RAND report (see findings in Table 6 below). The RAND report provides data on representation of Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino SMs.¹⁴ The RAND report did not provide the ethnic/racial makeup of SWCC in 1997, so SWCC is not included.

Table 6. Changes in Representation Quotients from 1997 to 2022

	RQ: Enlisted				RQ: Officers			
	Black/African American		Hispanic/Latino		Black/African American		Hispanic/Latino	
	1997	2022	1997	2022	1997	2022	1997	2022
Rangers	20	17	56	46	45	39	65	51
Special Forces	24	16	78	43	39	26	69	66
SEALs	17	5	54	53	22	20	100	74
Special Warfare	13	15	77	83	34	33	81	100

Source: Derived from 1999 RAND Report (Harrell et al) and DMDC Active Duty Master file, March 2022.

¹³ The 1999 RAND report uses a representation index, which we converted into an RQ.

¹⁴ The 1999 RAND report also includes data for “other minorities,” but it is not clear whether that category includes SMs reporting multiple ethnic/racial identities, and/or those reporting no ethnic/racial identity.

Note: RQ refers to representation quotient. An RQ greater than 100 indicates that the group is overrepresented in the specified specialty relative to their representation in the service overall, whereas an RQ less than 100 indicates that the group is underrepresented.

Note: The category of “Special Warfare” was limited to CCTs and PJs in the RAND report and the Marine Raiders did not exist at the time of publication.

Overall, we find that representation of Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino SMs has decreased among the Rangers, Special Forces, and SEALs. Within Special Warfare, we observe increases in representation of Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino SMs except for Black/African officers, but note that the specialties included in this category differ between the 1999 RAND report and this report.

E. Representation of Ethnic and Racial Groups within Select SOF Specialties in Comparison with the SMs Satisfying Eligibility Criteria

The 1999 RAND report compared the ethnic and racial composition of the examined SOF specialties to the population of SMs who satisfied baseline eligibility criteria for the specialties, using data on Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) scores, rank, and occupation code. In that report, they found that applying these criteria, particularly the ASVAB criteria, resulted in a less diverse population eligible to serve in SOF, primary in the Army and Navy.

We carry out a similar analysis, identifying the population who meets the eligibility criteria for each specialty. In Table 7 we note the various aspects of qualification criteria which were and were not available for use in this study.

Table 7. Categories of Eligibility Criteria for SOF Specialties

Criteria observed in the dataset	Criteria not observed in the dataset
Service	Ability to meet fitness standards
Age	Swimming ability
Rank, time in grade, time in service	Health data
ASVAB component scores	Article 15 or other punishments
Occupation	Eligibility for a security clearance
Citizenship	Financial status
Education	Other qualifications

We limit this analysis to the enlisted population, because that is the population for which ASVAB scores apply. Among the officers, the criteria that we can observe effectively select for junior officers.

In Table 8 we present the ethnic and racial composition of the population satisfying the eligibility criteria observable in the data. With two exceptions, the ethnic and racial composition of the eligible population (i.e., those who meet the subset of qualifications

available in our dataset) does not differ substantially from the ethnic and racial composition of the enlisted population overall. The first exception is the Rangers, for which 69 percent of the eligible enlisted are White, compared to 51 percent in the Army overall. Black/African American enlisted soldiers are 9 percent of the eligible enlisted population, compared to 23 percent in the Army overall.

The percentages of Hispanic/Latino and Asian/Pacific Islander Soldiers among the eligible population are both two percentage points lower than in the Army overall. This result is largely driven by the requirement that a member of the 75th Ranger Regiment have a Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) in the Infantry Branch (11X) in order to be defined as a SOF operator in this paper. Removing the MOS requirement results in an eligible population with similar ethnic and racial diversity as the Army overall.

The second exception is SWCC, for which the percentage of eligible enlisted White Sailors is 59% percent compared to 47 percent in the Navy overall. The percentage of eligible enlisted Black/African American sailors is 10 percent for SWCC, as compared to 18 percent in the Navy overall. The percentages of eligible enlisted Hispanic/Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaskan Native sailors are also lower than in the Navy overall, but the reduction is less stark for these groups as compared to Black/African American sailors.

This difference arises from the ASVAB score requirement to qualify for SWCC. Adjusting the SWCC's ASVAB score requirement to match that of the Navy SEALs results in an eligible population with similar proportions of ethnic and racial groups as in the Navy overall. It is worth noting that the actual ethnic/racial compositions of the SEALs and SWCC are similar despite the impact of their different ASVAB score eligibility criteria.

Table 8. Percentage of Reported Race/Ethnicity by the Enlisted Population Eligible for Examined SOF Specialties in Comparison to the Enlisted Population of the Service Overall (March 2022)

Race	Eligible Population			Eligible Population			Eligible Population		Eligible Population	
	Army Overall	Rangers	Special Forces	Navy Overall	SEALs	SWCC	Air Force Overall	Special Reconnaissance	Marine Corps Overall	Raiders
White	51%	69%	55%	47%	50%	57%	55%	56%	55%	56%
Black/African American	23%	9%	20%	18%	16%	10%	16%	16%	11%	10%
Hispanic/Latino	19%	17%	18%	19%	19%	17%	18%	18%	27%	26%
Asian/Pacific Islander	6%	4%	5%	7%	5%	5%	5%	4%	4%	4%
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.7%	0.8%	0.7%	1%	0.7%	0.9%	0.4%	0.4%	0.9%	0.8%
Multiple				6%	5%	6%	4%	4%	1%	1%
Not Reported	0.5%	0.3%	0.4%	3%	5%	5%	1%	1%	0.7%	0.8%
Number of Enlisted	373,538	42,079	56,514	284,865	126,997	100,719	262,157	203,524	154,959	111,061

Source: Derived from DMDC Active Duty Master file and MEPCOM file, March 2022.

Note: "Hispanic/Latino" refers to all SMs who reported a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, regardless of race. All other ethnic/racial groups include only SMs who did not report a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. "Asian/Pacific Islander" includes Native Hawaiian.

Note: For Special Warfare, we apply the qualification standards for Special Reconnaissance because that specialty has the strictest ASVAB general score qualification among the Special Warfare specialties.

Table 9 presents a comparison of the RQs for each examined SOF specialty using two baselines for comparison: the service overall and the eligible population. The RQs for most of the examined SOF specialties do not change much with the comparison populations, with the exceptions of the Rangers and SWCC.

Among the Rangers, underrepresentation of Black/African American and Asian/Pacific Islander Soldiers is less severe, and White Soldiers are less overrepresented when comparing the Ranger population to the eligible population rather than to the Army population overall. For SWCC, the changes are smaller but more broadly distributed when comparing the SWCC population to the eligible population rather than to the Navy population overall. In this case, underrepresentation lessens for Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian/Pacific Islander sailors, as does overrepresentation of White Sailors. Overrepresentation of American Indian/Native Alaskans increases.

The 1999 RAND report also adjusted the eligible population for the studied specialties by assuming differential rates of non-judicial punishments (NJP) and swim ability across ethnic/racial groups. However, they did not directly observe these outcomes; rather, they used indirect data to produce rough estimates of differential rates of NJP receipt and swimming ability across ethnic/racial groups.

At the time of IDA's study, there was still little data available on differential receipt of NJPs or on swimming ability aggregated by ethnic/racial groups. We could not obtain data on either factor at the level of individual SMs, which means that we could not observe the rates of NJP receipt and swimming ability among individuals who have satisfied the ASVAB and other eligibility criteria. Rather than apply highly uncertain estimates of differential swimming ability and rates of NJP to this analysis, we determined to leave these factors as "known unknowns."

Table 9. Representation Quotients for the Enlisted in Examined SOF Specialties where the Comparison Population is the Service or the Eligible Population

	Rangers	Special Forces	SEALs	SWCC	Special Warfare	Raiders
White						
<i>Service</i>	167*	166*	164*	155*	136*	151*
<i>Eligible population</i>	122*	152*	153*	126*	134*	148*
Black/African American						
<i>Service</i>	17*	16*	5*	10*	15*	22*
<i>Eligible population</i>	42*	17*	6*	18*	16*	23*
Hispanic/Latino						
<i>Service</i>	46*	43*	53*	68*	83*	28*
<i>Eligible population</i>	52*	46*	52*	76*	84*	29*
Asian/Pacific Islander						
<i>Service</i>	38*	42*	23*	24*	39*	49*
<i>Eligible population</i>	60*	48*	32*	33*	44*	50*
American Indian/ Alaska Native						
<i>Service</i>	57*	74*	172*	186*	87	67
<i>Eligible population</i>	49*	74*	343*	288*	88	71
Multiple Races						
<i>Service</i>			83*	87	81*	198*
<i>Eligible population</i>			92	83	83	164*
Not Reported						
<i>Service</i>	20*	178*	117	127	124	249*
<i>Eligible population</i>	31*	223*	75*	82	131	214*

Source: DMDC Active Duty Master file and MEPCOM file, March 2022.

Note: RQ refers to representation quotient. An RQ greater than 100 indicates that the group is overrepresented in the specified specialty relative to their representation in the service overall, whereas an RQ less than 100 indicates that the group is underrepresented; asterisk (*) indicates that the over- or under-representation is statistically significant with $p < .05$.

Note: "Hispanic/Latino" refers to all SMs who reported a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, regardless of race. All other ethnic/racial groups include only SMs who did not report a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. "Asian/Pacific Islander" includes Native Hawaiian.

F. Ethnic and Racial Diversity among General Officers and Flag Officers with a Background in SOF Specialties

As specified in Section 557 of the NDAA FY 2021, we include an analysis of the percentage of minority officers with paygrades O7–O10 and backgrounds in examined SOF specialties, compared to the percentage of minority officers of paygrades O7–O10 overall. Officers in these paygrades are referred to as general officers in the Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps and as flag officers in the Navy and Coast Guard. For brevity, we use the abbreviation of GOFOs for “general officers and flag officers.”

Across all Services, the GOFOs are disproportionately composed of White officers compared to the overall officer population. The population of GOFOs ranges from 84 percent White (Army) to 89 percent White (Air Force and Navy), with other Services falling between those percentages. In comparison, the population of commissioned officers overall ranges from 70 percent White (Army) to 73 percent White (Marine Corps), with the other Services in between.

Our analyses of GOFOs should be interpreted with caution. The available data only extend back to January 2000, so we cannot identify the full career history of current GOFOs. For most of these officers, we do not observe data from the early years of their career, during which time SMs most commonly serve in SOF specialties. In addition, we cannot reliably identify the relevant Unit Identification Codes (UICs) for all specialties throughout the full history of our data.

As a result, we can only observe GOFOs’ current and past affiliation with SOF specialties that can be reliably identified by an occupation code, using records of the GOFOs’ occupation codes from January 2000 to March 2022. This impedes our ability to identify officers who were affiliated with the Army Rangers and the Marine Raiders. UICs are critical for identifying Army Rangers, as a large number of officers throughout the Army have the same occupation code as operators in the Rangers (11A) but do not meet the definition of Ranger unless they hold the UIC of the 75th Ranger Regiment.

We identify current members of the Marine Raiders by occupation code, but the occupation codes for the Raiders only date back to 2011. This means that we could not identify individuals who were members of the Raiders between the specialty’s founding in 2006 and the creation of the occupation code in 2011.

Table 10 shows the results of these analyses. White officers make up a larger share of the GOFOs with identifiable backgrounds in SOF specialties compared to the broader pool of GOFOs. However, the population of GOFOs is too small to identify over- or under-representation with statistical significance.

Table 10. Counts of Reported Race/Ethnicity by General Officers and Flag Officers with a Background in Examined SOF Specialties (March 2022)

Race	Army Overall	Special Forces	Navy Overall	SEALs	Air Force Overall	Special Warfare
White	248	15	193	11	230	3
Black/African American	36	1	6	0	15	0
Hispanic/Latino	4	0	8	0	2	0
Asian/Pacific Islander	5	0	4	0	2	0
American Indian/Alaska Native	1	0	1	0	1	0
Multiple			3	0	3	0
Not Reported	1	0	3	0	5	0
Number of General/Flag Officers	295	16	218	11	258	3

Source: Derived from DMDC Active Duty Master file, March 2022.

Note: "Hispanic/Latino" refers to all SMs who reported a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, regardless of race. All other ethnic/racial groups include only SMs who did not report a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. "Asian/Pacific Islander" includes Native Hawaiian.

Note: Army Rangers and Marine Raiders are not included in this table due to limitations in identifying members of these specialties in historical data.

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4. Quantitative Analysis of Diversity within Pilot and Navigator Specialties

A. Overview

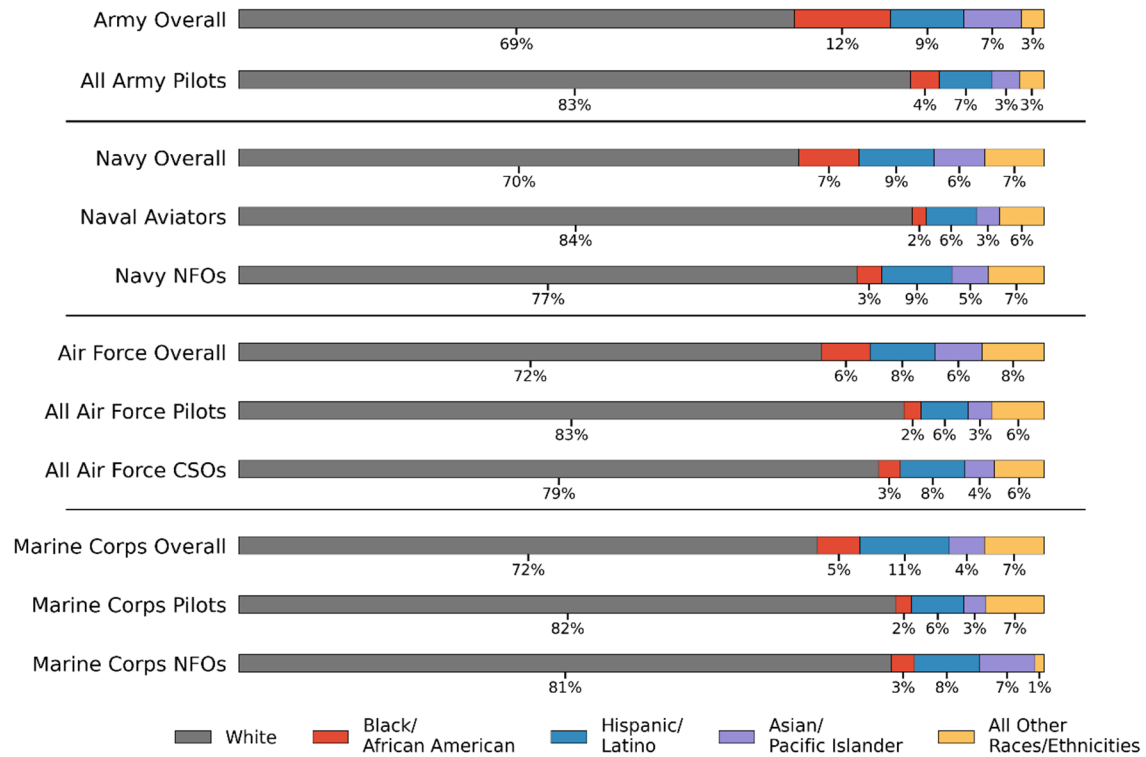
In addition to the SOF specialties considered in Chapter 3, Section 557 calls for an analysis of diversity among the pilot and navigator specialties. These are high-profile, selective specialties, and they contribute a large fraction of general and flag officers across the Services. In this paper, we define the term “pilots” as individuals whose role includes operating an aircraft. The Navy uses the term “aviators” for these individuals, and when we refer specifically to the Navy, we will also use the term “aviators.” We define the term “navigators” as the individuals who are responsible for operating weapons, navigation, and communication systems for aircraft.

The Army does not have navigators. The Air Force uses the term “combat systems operators,” or CSOs, to refer to navigators. The Navy and Marine Corps use the term “naval flight officer,” or NFO. Thus, we use the terms CSO and NFO when referring specifically to Air Force and Navy/Marine Corps navigators, respectively, but we use the term navigator when discussing trends across the Services.

With limited exceptions,¹⁵ there are no enlisted SMs in any of the pilot or navigator specialties presented in this chapter. We do not include enlisted pilots and navigators in this analysis. We include the Marine Corps NFOs, but this specialty is too small to reliably identify over- or under-representation for many groups.

Figure 4 shows the proportion of different ethnic and racial groups among the pilot and navigator specialties, with the proportions among the commissioned and warrant officers in the Services overall included for comparison.

¹⁵ There are a small number of enlisted Remotely Piloted Aircraft pilots in the Air Force, but that specialty is being phased out. Rachel S. Cohen, “Air Force previews plan to phase out enlisted drone pilots,” *Air Force Times*, December 7, 2021, <https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2021/12/07/air-force-previews-plan-to-phase-out-enlisted-drone-pilots/>.



Source: DMDC Active Duty Master file, March 2022.

Note: Population represented includes Warrant Officers and Commissioned Officers.

Note: "Hispanic/Latino" refers to all SMs who reported a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, regardless of race. All other ethnic/racial groups include only SMs who did not report a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. Asian/Pacific Islander includes Native Hawaiian.

Figure 4. Percentage of Reported Race/Ethnicity by Officers in Pilot and Navigator Specialties Compared to Service Population of Officers (March 2022)

We find that Black/African American officers are consistently underrepresented among the pilot and navigator specialties, less than half as prevalent as among the officer corps in each respective service. Hispanic/Latino officers are consistently underrepresented among pilots, although generally not among navigators. Asian/Pacific Islander officers are consistently underrepresented among both the pilot and navigator specialties. Under- and over-representation of American Indian/Alaskan Native officers is inconsistent across the pilot and navigator specialties. White officers are overrepresented in pilot and navigator specialties across the Services.

Women are underrepresented in the pilot and navigator specialties compared to officers overall, particularly among pilots.

B. Participation and Representation of Ethnic and Racial Groups within Pilot and Navigator Specialties

We begin this chapter with an analysis of participation and representation by ethnic and racial groups in the pilot and navigator specialties. We measure participation as the percent of members of each racial ethnic/racial group in each specialty, and we measure representation by means of the representation quotient (RQ), which compares the percentage of ethnic/racial group members in each specialty to the percentage of members of that group in the officers of the corresponding service overall (see Chapter 2.B.3).

Representation quotients (RQs) less than 100 indicate that the group is underrepresented relative to their representation in general population with smaller values denoting greater underrepresentation; RQs greater than 100 indicate the group is overrepresented.

The number of NFOs in the Marine Corps is small, such that it can be difficult to establish that representation is statistically distinguishable from equal representation. Table 11 presents the participation and representation of ethnic and racial groups among the pilot and navigator specialties. White officers are overrepresented relative to the service across each specialty, particularly among pilots.

Black/African American officers are markedly underrepresented in each specialty. Across the Services, 2 to 4 percent of pilots are Black/African American. Black/African American officer pilots are roughly one third as prevalent as in the officer corps of the Services overall, with RQs ranging from 23 (Naval aviators) to 36 (Marine Corps pilots). Among the Navy NFOs and Air Force CSOs, Black/African American officers are less than one half as prevalent as in the officers of the Services overall with RQs of 41 and 45, respectively.

Hispanic/Latino officers are underrepresented among each of the pilot specialties, with RQs ranging from 59 (Marine Corps) to 72 (Army and Air Force). Their representation in the navigator specialties is not statistically different from that in the Services overall. Asian/Pacific Islanders are two-thirds as prevalent among Marine Corps pilots as among Marine Corps officers overall (RQ of 63).

Further, Asian/Pacific Islander officers are roughly half as prevalent among pilots in the Army, Navy, and Air Force as among the officers of those Services overall (RQs of 48, 45, and 51, respectively). Underrepresentation is less stark among Navy NFOs and Air Force CSOs, with RQs of 72 and 62. American Indian/Alaska Native officers are underrepresented among Naval Aviators, but they are not statistically under- or over-represented within the remaining specialties.

Table 11. Percentage of Reported Race/Ethnicity by Officers in Pilot and Navigator Specialties, RQ, and Statistical Significance (March 2022)

Race	Army Overall	Army Pilots	Navy Overall	Naval Aviators	Navy NFOs	Air Force Overall	Air Force Pilots	Air Force CSOs	Marine Corps Overall	Marine Corps Pilots	Marine Corps NFOs
White	69%	83% RQ: 121*	70%	84% RQ: 120*	77% RQ: 110*	72%	83% RQ: 114*	79% RQ: 110*	72%	82% RQ: 114*	81% RQ: 113*
Black/African American	12%	4% RQ: 30*	8%	2% RQ: 23*	3% RQ: 41*	6%	2% RQ: 35*	3% RQ: 45*	5%	2% RQ: 36*	3% RQ: 54
Hispanic/Latino	9%	7% RQ: 72*	9%	6% RQ: 67*	9% RQ: 94	8%	6% RQ: 72*	8% RQ: 99	11%	6% RQ: 59*	8% RQ: 73
Asian/Pacific Islander	7%	3% RQ: 48*	6%	3% RQ: 45*	5% RQ: 72*	6%	3% RQ: 51*	4% RQ: 62*	4%	3% RQ: 63*	7% RQ: 158
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.5%	0.5% RQ: 107	0.8%	0.3% RQ: 43*	0.5% RQ: 67	0.4%	0.4% RQ: 116	0.4% RQ: 103	0.9%	0.9% RQ: 100	0% RQ: 0
Multiple			5%	4% RQ: 78*	5% RQ: 100	3%	3% RQ: 89*	3% RQ: 96	2%	2% RQ: 82*	0% RQ: 0*
Not Reported	2%	2% RQ: 106	2%	2% RQ: 81*	2% RQ: 89	4%	3% RQ: 77*	3% RQ: 67*	4%	5% RQ: 104	1% RQ: 25*
Total	93,072	7,812	55,695	7,224	3,272	60,975	14,926	3,328	22,077	3,480	174

Source: Derived from DMDC Active Duty Master file, March 2022.

Note: RQ refers to representation quotient. An RQ greater than 100 indicates that the group is overrepresented in the specified specialty relative to their representation in the service overall, whereas an RQ less than 100 indicates that the group is underrepresented; asterisk (*) indicates that the over- or under-representation is statistically significant with $p < .05$.

Note: Percentages displayed in this table are rounded, whereas RQs were computed using percentages before rounding.

Note: "Hispanic/Latino" refers to all SMs who reported a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, regardless of race. All other ethnic/racial groups include only SMs who did not report a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. "Asian/Pacific Islander" includes Native Hawaiian.

C. Women’s Participation in Pilot and Navigator Specialties

Table 12 presents women’s participation in each of the seven pilot and navigator specialties examined. Overall, women’s participation in pilot and navigator specialties is higher than their participation in the SOF specialties discussed in Chapter 3, but appreciably lower than their participation in each of the Services overall.

Among the seven pilot and navigator specialties, women’s participation ranges from 4 percent (Marine Corps Pilots) to nearly 16 percent (Navy NFOs). Overall, women are less than half as prevalent among the pilot specialties as they are among the officers in the Services, with RQs of 31 (Air Force) to 47 (Marine Corps). Women are half as prevalent among the Air Force CSOs, and roughly four-fifths as prevalent among the Navy NFOs.

The Marine Corps has the lowest percentage of women in pilot and navigator specialties, as well as the lowest percentage of women officers among the four DOD Services examined. The Air Force has a greater percentage of women officers in the service overall, but women’s participation in Air Force pilot and CSO specialties is somewhat lower than in the Navy aviator and NFO specialties. These differences are statistically significant for all pilot/navigator specialties except Marine Corps NFOs.

Table 12. Percent Female Officers in Pilot and Navigator Specialties, RQ, and Statistical Significance (March 2022)

	Female SMs Overall	Female Pilots/ Aviators	Female CSOs/ NFOs
Army	18%	8% RQ: 41*	N/A
Navy	21%	9% RQ: 44*	16% RQ: 78*
Air Force	23%	7% RQ: 31*	12% RQ: 50*
Marine Corps	9%	4% RQ: 47*	7% RQ: 75

Source: Derived from DMDC Active Duty Master file, March 2022.

Note: RQ refers to representation quotient. An RQ greater than 100 indicates that the group is overrepresented in the specified specialty relative to their representation in the service overall, whereas an RQ less than 100 indicates that the group is underrepresented; asterisk (*) indicates that the over- or under-representation is statistically significant with $p < .05$.

Note: Percentages displayed in this table are rounded whereas RQs were computed using percentages before rounding.

D. Participation and Representation of Ethnic and Racial Groups and Women within SOF Pilot and Navigator Specialties

A subset of Army and Air Force pilots serve in SOF. There are three SOF pilot and navigator specialties considered in this analysis: Army SOF pilots (pilots who are members of the Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR)), Air Force SOF pilots, and Air Force SOF CSOs. We compare the membership of these three specialties to the overall populations of pilots and navigators in the Army and Air Force in Table 13. The RQs in this table measure representation among the SOF pilot and navigator specialties in comparison to the pilot and navigator specialties overall in the Army and Air Force.

RQs in this section compare the SOF pilot and navigator specialties to the overall populations of pilots/navigators in the service:

$$RQ = 100 * \frac{\text{Proportion of group in SOF pilot/navigator specialty}}{\text{Proportion of group in overall pilot/navigator specialty}}$$

With a few exceptions listed below, the ethnic and racial composition of the SOF pilots and navigators is similar to that of the overall pilot and navigator populations in the Army and Air Force.

Among the SOF Army pilots, Black/African Americans and Asian/Pacific Islanders are underrepresented compared to Army pilots overall, with RQs of 55 and 51, respectively. White pilots are not overrepresented among Army SOF pilots compared to Army pilots overall. There are a relatively large number of SOF Army pilots who do not report a race or ethnicity (4 percent for SOF Army pilots compared to 2 percent for Army pilots overall).

Among the SOF Air Force pilots, Black/African American pilots are underrepresented compared to Air Force pilots overall, with an RQ of 70. The population of SOF CSOs is too small to determine over- or under-representation with statistical significance for most groups, but White CSOs are overrepresented compared to the population of CSOs overall.

Women are less than half as prevalent among SOF Army pilots as among Army pilots overall. Women's representation among Air Force SOF pilots and SOF CSOs is roughly proportionate to their representation among pilots and CSOs overall, respectively.

Table 13. Percentage of Reported Race/Ethnicity by Officers in SOF Pilots and Navigators in Comparison with All Pilots and Navigators in the Corresponding Service, RQ, and Statistical Significance (March 2022)

Race	Army Pilots	Special Operations Aviators	Air Force Pilots	SOF Air Force Pilots	Air Force CSOs	SOF Air Force CSOs
White	83%	85% RQ: 102	83%	83% RQ: 101	79%	82% RQ: 103*
Black/African American	4%	2% RQ: 55*	2%	1% RQ: 70*	3%	2% RQ: 91
Hispanic/Latino	7%	6% RQ: 97	6%	6% RQ: 103	8%	7% RQ: 83
Asian/Pacific Islander	3%	2% RQ: 51*	3%	3% RQ: 105	4%	3% RQ: 76
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.5%	0.4% RQ: 86	0.4%	0.5% RQ: 104	0.4%	0.3% RQ: 70
Multiple			3%	2% RQ: 70*	3%	4% RQ: 119
Not Reported	2%	4% RQ: 167*	3%	4% RQ: 111	3%	2% RQ: 77
Female	8%	3% RQ: 40*	7%	7% RQ: 94	12%	12% RQ: 104
Total	7,812	455	14,926	2,173	3,328	729

Source: Derived from DMDC Active Duty Master file, March 2022

Note: RQ refers to representation quotient. An RQ greater than 100 indicates that the group is overrepresented in the specified specialty relative to their representation among the pilots/CSOs in the service overall, whereas an RQ less than 100 indicates that the group is underrepresented; asterisk (*) indicates that the over- or under-representation is statistically significant with $p < .05$.

Note: Percentages displayed in this table are rounded, whereas RQs were computed using percentages before rounding.

Note: "Hispanic/Latino" refers to all SMs who reported a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, regardless of race. All other ethnic/racial groups include only SMs who did not report a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. "Asian/Pacific Islander" includes Native Hawaiian.

E. Ethnic and Racial Diversity among General Officers and Flag Officers with a Background in Pilot and Navigator Specialties

We include an analysis of the percentage of minority officers among GOFOs with a background in the pilot and navigator specialties compared to the overall populations of GOFOs. We identify current GOFOs who have served as pilots or navigators using the same techniques as in Section 3.F of this paper. As a result, we can only identify GOFOs who served as pilots or navigators from 2000 to 2022, or who retained a pilot or navigator occupation code for at least part of that time interval. We present our findings in Table 14.

Among the GOFOs of the Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps, the ethnic and racial composition of those who served as pilots and navigators is roughly comparable to the ethnic and racial composition of GOFOs in the service overall. However, more than a quarter of the GOFO corps in each of these Services is drawn from the pilot and navigator specialties, so they represent prime opportunities to improve the diversity of the senior officer corps going forward.

Among the general officers of the Army, the population who served as pilots is less diverse than the general officers of the Army overall. Specifically, general officer pilots include a higher percentage of White individuals and a lower percentage of Black/African American individuals compared to general officers of the Army overall.

Table 14. Percentage of Reported Race/Ethnicity by General Officers and Flag Officers in Pilot and Navigator Specialties, RQ, and Statistical Significance (March 2022)

Race	Army Overall	Army Pilots	Navy Overall	Naval Aviators/ NFOs	Air Force Overall	Air Force Pilots/CSOs	Marine Corps Overall	Marine Corps Pilots/NFOs
White	84%	97% RQ: 115*	89%	89% RQ: 101	89%	90% RQ: 101	86%	92% RQ: 108
Black/African American	12%	0% RQ: 0*	3%	5% RQ: 167	6%	4% RQ: 67	8%	4% RQ: 47
Hispanic/Latino	1%	0% RQ: 0	4%	5% RQ: 126	0.8%	0.8% RQ: 101	4%	4% RQ: 111
Asian/Pacific Islander	2%	3% RQ: 174	2%	0% RQ: 0	0.8%	0.8% RQ: 101	1%	0% RQ: 0
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.3%	0% RQ: 0	0.5%	2% RQ: 335	0.4%	0% RQ: 0	0%	0% RQ: N/A
Multiple			1%	0% RQ: 0	1%	2% RQ: 134	0%	0% RQ: N/A
Not Reported	0.3%	0% RQ: 0	1%	0% RQ: 0	2%	3% RQ: 161	1%	0% RQ: 0
Number of General/Flag Officers	295	34	218	65	258	128	83	25

Source: Derived from DMDC Active Duty Master file, March 2022.

Note: RQ refers to representation quotient. An RQ greater than 100 indicates that the group is overrepresented in the specified specialty relative to their representation in the service overall, whereas an RQ less than 100 indicates that the group is underrepresented; asterisk (*) indicates that the over- or underrepresentation is statistically significant with $p < .05$.

Note: Percentages displayed in this table are rounded, whereas RQs were computed using percentages before rounding.

Note: "Hispanic/Latino" refers to all SMs who reported a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, regardless of race. All other ethnic/racial groups include only SMs who did not report a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. "Asian/Pacific Islander" includes Native Hawaiian.

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5. Quantitative Analysis of Diversity within Force Reconnaissance and MSRT

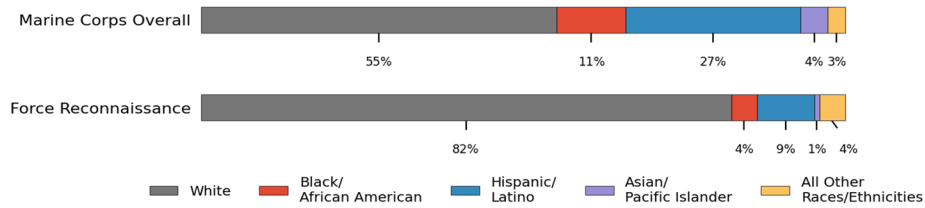
This section contains analyses of diversity among the remaining specialties named in Section 557: Force Recon and MSRT. These specialties are not SOF specialties, but they have related roles and capabilities. The Raiders are the Marine Corps' only SOF specialty, but Marine Corps Special Operations Command (MARSOC) initially drew from Force Recon to populate the units that would become the Marine Raiders in 2015,¹⁶ and Force Recon remains an elite specialty with demanding qualifications. The Coast Guard refers to MSRT as “deployable specialized forces.” There are no general or flag officers for whom a history of participation in Force Reconnaissance or MSRT can be identified in our data.

A. Participation and Representation of Ethnic and Racial Groups and Women within Force Recon

Force Recon is a small specialty, comprised of 154 Marines. This means that over- or under-representation within the specialty is difficult to identify with statistical significance. Force Recon only has 30 officers (23 of whom are White), which is too small of a population to reliably identify over- or under-representation with statistical significance. As a result, we did not conduct further analysis on the composition of officers in Force Recon.

Figure 5 and Table 15 present the participation and representation of ethnic/racial groups within Force Recon. Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian/Pacific Islanders are markedly underrepresented among the enlisted Force Recon members, compared to Marine Corps enlisted members overall, with RQs of 38, 33, and 19, respectively. White enlisted are overrepresented in Force Recon.

¹⁶ “About,” MARSOC Marines Website, accessed October 5, 2022, <https://www.marsoc.marines.mil/About/>.



Source: Derived from DMDC Active Duty Master file, March 2022.

Note: "Hispanic/Latino" refers to all SMs who reported a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, regardless of race. All other ethnic/racial groups include only SMs who did not report a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. Asian/Pacific Islander includes Native Hawaiian.

Figure 5. Percentage of Reported Race/Ethnicity by Enlisted in Force Recon Compared to Service Population (March 2022)

Due to the small population, it cannot be determined whether American Indian/Alaskan Native enlisted are over-, under-, or proportionately represented among either specialty. There are no women in Force Recon. The specialty was not open to women prior to 2016.

Table 15. Percentage of Reported Race/Ethnicity by Enlisted in Force Recon, RQ, and Statistical Significance (March 2022)

Race	Marine Corps Overall	Force Reconnaissance
White	55%	82% RQ: 149*
Black/African American	11%	4% RQ: 38*
Hispanic/Latino	27%	9% RQ: 33*
Asian/Pacific Islander	4%	0.8% RQ: 19*
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.9%	0.8% RQ: 92
Multiple	1%	2% RQ: 136
Not Reported	0.7%	2% RQ: 244
Total	154,959	124

Source: Derived from DMDC Active Duty Master file, March 2022.

Note: RQ refers to representation quotient. An RQ greater than 100 indicates that the group is overrepresented in the specified specialty relative to their representation in the service overall, whereas an RQ less than 100 indicates that the group is underrepresented; asterisk (*) indicates that the over- or under-representation is statistically significant with $p < .05$.

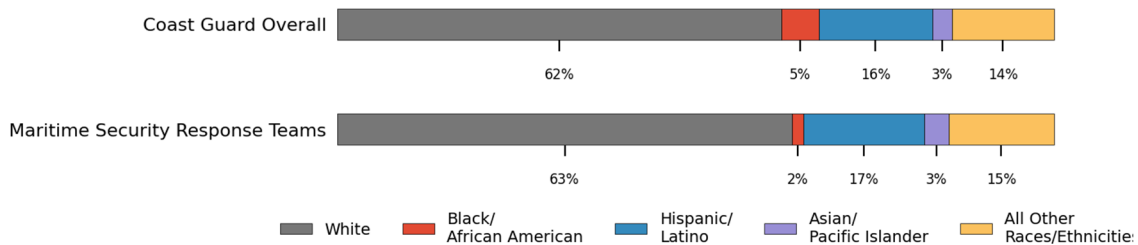
Note: Percentages displayed in this table are rounded, whereas RQs were computed using percentages before rounding.

Note: "Hispanic/Latino" refers to all SMs who reported a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, regardless of race. All other ethnic/racial groups include only SMs who did not report a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. "Asian/Pacific Islander" includes Native Hawaiian.

B. Participation and Representation of Ethnic and Racial Groups and Women within MSRT

MSRT is also a small specialty, with 293 operators. As a result, it is difficult to identify over- or under-representation with statistical significance for most ethnic/racial groups. MSRT only has 33 officers (22 of whom are White), which is too small a population to determine statistical significance. As a result, we do not analyze the population of officers in MSRT.

Figure 6 and Table 16 present the participation and representation of ethnic/racial groups among enlisted MSRT. Black/African American enlisted are less than one-third as prevalent in MSRT as in the enlisted of the Coast Guard overall. The only other statistically significant finding is that enlisted reporting multiple races are overrepresented among the MSRT.



Source: Derived from USCGHQ, October 2021.

Note: "Hispanic/Latino" refers to all SMs who reported a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, regardless of race. All other ethnic/racial groups include only SMs who did not report a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. Asian/Pacific Islander includes Native Hawaiian.

Figure 6. Percentage of Reported Race/Ethnicity by Enlisted in MSRT Compared to Service Population (October 2021)

The remaining ethnic and racial minorities have RQs greater than 100, but we cannot determine over-, under-, or proportionate representation due to the small number of enlisted in the MSRT. In addition, a relatively large percentage of SMs in the Coast Guard do not report a race or ethnicity, and this raises concern about whether the ethnic and racial diversity of the service is accurately represented by the available statistics.

Table 16. Percentage of Reported Race/Ethnicity by Enlisted in MSRT, RQ, and Statistical Significance (October 2021)

Race	Coast Guard Overall	Maritime Security Response Teams
White	62%	64% RQ: 102
Black/African American	5%	2% RQ: 29*
Hispanic/Latino	16%	17% RQ: 107
Asian/Pacific Islander	3%	4% RQ: 126
American Indian/Alaska Native	2%	2% RQ: 146
Multiple	4%	6% RQ: 174*
Not Reported	9%	6% RQ: 68
Total	31,638	260

Source: Derived from DMDC Active Duty Master and USCGHQ, October 2021.

Note: RQ refers to representation quotient. An RQ greater than 100 indicates that the group is overrepresented in the specified specialty relative to their representation in the service overall, whereas an RQ less than 100 indicates that the group is underrepresented; asterisk (*) indicates that the over- or under-representation is statistically significant with $p < .05$.

Note: Percentages displayed in this table are rounded, whereas RQs were computed using percentages before rounding.

Note: "Hispanic/Latino" refers to all SMs who reported a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, regardless of race. All other ethnic/racial groups include only SMs who did not report a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. "Asian/Pacific Islander" includes Native Hawaiian.

There are fewer than five female operators in MSRT. MSRT has been open to women for much longer than many of the other specialties studied in this report. The Coast Guard lifted all sex-based restrictions in 1978.¹⁷

¹⁷ "Women in the U. S. Coast Guard: Moments in History," United States Coast Guard, February 22, 2021, <https://www.history.uscg.mil/Browse-by-Topic/Notable-People/Women/Women-in-Coast-Guard-Historical-Chronology/>.

6. Barriers to Minority Participation in Examined Units/Specialties

A. Overview

This chapter details findings from focus groups conducted from May to August 2022. To understand barriers to minority participation in the units/specialties examined, IDA spoke with 340 service members (SMs) across the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard, including members of examined units/specialties as well as SMs who did not belong to those units/specialties. For the purpose of this study we define barriers broadly, as perceptions, attitudes, policies, and practices that reduce individuals' interest in and/or ability to join the units/specialties examined in this study.

Conversely, IDA defined “enabling” factors as perceptions, attitudes, policies, and practices that facilitate the entry of individuals into the examined units/specialties, or support them in overcoming barriers. IDA’s qualitative data collection revealed a number of perceived barriers to female/minority participation in the units/specialties examined, as well as barriers that affect both women/minority groups and majority groups. It is important to note that general barriers may interact with barriers that disproportionately affect women/minority groups, and that addressing general barriers to participation can empower all interested SMs, including women and minorities, to pursue careers in the examined specialties/units.

Also note that we describe SMs’ *perceptions and personal experiences* regarding barriers to participation in the examined units/specialties. Participants’ experiences reflect their time in service and may not account for recent changes in policy, processes, or practices. Additionally, participants’ perspectives may, on some occasions, be based on inaccurate information or misperceptions. This report points out some misperceptions and recommends further research to explore the validity of others.

Finally, the existence of a barrier, for example selection or training standards, does not necessarily mean that the barrier is unwarranted or should change. It is nonetheless important to identify these barriers to develop strategies and resources to ensure that individuals, regardless of their background, have the tools they need to overcome these challenges, should they so choose.

Awareness of the specific units/specialties examined in this research was low among focus group participants not serving in those specialties. Among current members of the

units/specialties examined, mass media was initially an important source of information. However, the media depictions and advertisements they saw tended to focus on narrow aspects of these roles, which they believed fail to appeal to the career interests and priorities of women and minorities, demonstrate the value of the unique perspectives these populations could bring to the role, and meaningfully display diversity within these units.

Recruiters can be an important source of information about units/specialties for individuals who are not already aware of them. However, participants noted that recruiters may not consistently present recruits with information about the units/specialties examined in this study, perhaps due to incentives to recruit individuals into open contracts or other career fields, and a focus on geographies or units (e.g., infantry) known to generate greater numbers of recruits.

Even when individuals do attempt to pursue careers in the examined units/specialties, they face significant hurdles. Completing application paperwork and meeting or obtaining waivers for specific eligibility requirements can hold prospective recruits back. For those attempting to join while already in service, a lack of support from their current command teams, insufficient time, and a lack of knowledge about required steps (e.g., cross-training or commissioning) can cause even greater difficulty. Having personal contact with SMEs and veterans with experience in the examined units/specialties can help to overcome these challenges.

Individuals who make it to the assessment and selection (A&S) and training processes for examined units/specialties face grueling mental and physical challenges. Prior preparation, including physical training and practicing strategies for managing stress and tolerating discomfort, can help candidates succeed. However, certain aspects of A&S and training negatively impact even the strongest candidates. For example, injury and illness are common issues in A&S courses, and many male and female participants believed that women are more susceptible to injury than men.

Participants also believed there to be disparate treatment of different demographic groups, though there was disagreement about whether such treatment favors women, minorities, or White men. Women and minorities often perceived that White men benefited from status quo practices and training culture, but many White male respondents indicated that due to DEI policy and practice changes, women were less stringently held to standards.

Once in the examined unit/specialty, focus group participants explained that they experience frequent deployments, high operation tempos, and physically and mentally demanding work. Male and female participants reported that this makes managing family life difficult, and they also commonly believed it to harm women's fertility. Focus group participants also raised issues related to command climate and DEI efforts.

Many participants spoke positively of command climate, but some members of the examined units/specialties described instances where they felt targeted and/or disrespected

based on their identity. Others said that DEI efforts cause friction in units, and although some members recognized the value of increasing demographic diversity, others did not or saw potential for harm.

B. Methodology

IDA's focus groups (i.e., open-ended questions discussed in a group format) covered the topics of recruitment; A&S and training; and culture and climate. Appendix E provides a sample of focus group questions. IDA obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval as well as Office of Management and Budget (OMB) approval to conduct this research (OMB Control Number 0704-0626).

The IDA team worked with the study sponsors to identify specific units and locations best suited for involvement in focus group discussions. Service liaisons recruited participants on a voluntary basis and determined focus group dates and locations so as to minimize impact on units' training and operational requirements.

IDA conducted some focus groups in person on military bases and some focus groups using online platforms that meet government compliance and security standards (i.e., Microsoft Teams or Zoom for Government). Focus group participants included members of the units and specialties specified in Section 557. Additionally, to assess awareness and interest in the Section 557 units/specialties from an outside perspective, IDA conducted focus groups with SMs from a range of other career fields.

The IDA team organized separate focus groups for each of the units/specialties examined (i.e., each SOF unit, pilots/navigators, Recon Marines, Coast Guard MSRT) as well as for other units/specialties not included in Section 557. Within these categorizations, focus groups were divided by rank strata (i.e., junior enlisted, senior enlisted/NCO, and officers O4/WO5 and below), gender, and ethnic/racial identity (i.e., White/Caucasian, and all ethnic/racial minority identities inclusive of non-White/Caucasian races and White-Hispanic/Latino ethnicities). Due to scheduling constraints and to maximize participation, focus group composition varied. Some focus groups included participants mixed by race and gender.

Furthermore, women-only groups were not divided by ethnic/racial background due to the smaller population of women available to participate. SOF operator focus groups did not include any women, as the very few women who serve in these roles (see Chapter 3) were unavailable to participate at the time of this research. The overall approach for the groupings offered the opportunity to identify unique themes based on these categories and attempted to facilitate candor by limiting possible discomfort discussing potentially sensitive topics.

Overall, the IDA team conducted 79 focus groups with a total of 340 research participants (see Table 17). Focus groups varied in size depending on participant

availability, with some focus groups including less than 5 participants and other focus groups including as many 10 participants. During focus groups, the IDA team consisted of one interviewer and one or two notetakers. All women-only focus groups but one were facilitated by a female interviewer, and a large proportion of focus groups comprising ethnic/racial minority men were facilitated by male minority interviewers.

Table 17. Focus Group Participants by Service and Unit/Specialty

	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	Coast Guard	Total
SOF operators (units specified in SEC 557) ^a	74	14	14	26	-	128
Pilots/navigators ^b	7	17	16	17	-	57
Coast Guard MSRT	-	-	-	-	20	20
Marine Corps Force Recon	-	-	23	-	-	23
Other Specialties	19	29	53	11	-	112
Total	100	60	106	54	20	340

^a Note: SOF operators are from the units specifically listed in SEC 557 (Army Rangers and SF, Navy SEALs, Marine Raiders, and Air Force Special Warfare).

^b Note: Air Force pilots and navigators (i.e., CSOs) include 11 individuals who currently serve as SOF pilots/navigators.

Following data collection, the research team derived codes using inductive and deductive methods based on a review of focus group transcripts. Codes consisted of themes related to barriers and facilitators for participation in examined units/specialties, as well as codes for the demographic characteristics of each focus group. Codes were then collected into a structured codebook, which included detailed definitions of each code and guidance on when to apply them.

After a meeting to review the preliminary codebook and practice coding a transcript as a group, three coders practiced coding two transcripts individually to ensure shared understanding and to refine codes as needed. Finally, the three coders independently coded the remaining transcripts using NVivo 12 Pro. If any uncertainty arose regarding which code to apply, the coders consulted each other in an effort to facilitate consistency.

Based on the coded results, the research team summarized findings as they relate to specific barriers and facilitators, using a qualitative approach informed by thematic network analysis.¹⁸ We highlighted salient differences by demographics and the examined

¹⁸ Attride-Stirling, Jennifer, "Thematic networks: an analytic tool for qualitative research," *Qualitative research* 1, no. 3 (2001): 385-405.

units/specialties, but we did not conduct a formal subgroup analysis due to potential for bias arising from the unequal rates of focus group participation across demographic groups. When themes arose only in focus groups with certain units/specialties examined in this study, we refer to those units or components specifically (e.g., SOF to refer to all SOCOM units; or naming specific units/specialties as relevant). When themes were shared in common across the different units/specialties examined in this study, we refer to “examined units/specialties” broadly.

In the sections that follow, we first discuss barriers to recruitment, then discuss challenges prior to and during A&S and training, and conclude by discussing perceptions of and experiences with the culture and climate of examined units/specialties.

C. Recruitment

Recruitment and application processes differ across the units/specialties examined in this paper. Certain specialties are open only to officers (e.g., pilots/navigators). Some allow direct entry (i.e., at the time of entry into the military), while others require time in service. These differences all influence recruitment into the units/specialties examined. However, many common barriers and facilitators related to recruitment arose in focus group discussions with SMs (see Table 18 and the subsections that follow).

Table 18. Barriers to and Enablers of Recruitment into Examined Units/Specialties

Barrier	Service Member Quotations
Recruitment Practices	
<u>Lack of awareness/interest</u> : Recruits and current SMs lack knowledge of examined specialties and view them as lacking diversity and opportunities to develop transferrable career skills	<i>Special ops is the last thing – I stay in and don’t have a skillset to provide for my family when I get out? No.</i>
<u>Competing recruitment priorities</u> : Recruitment quotas do not typically incentivize military recruiters to steer recruits into the units/specialties examined	<i>When they see a female come in, are they automatically thinking, “female, medical”? Or do they say, “here’s an Airman, I have all of this available”?</i>
<u>Narrow market segmentation</u> : In-service recruitment into examined units/specialties primarily recruits from units/specialties with fewer minorities/women (e.g., infantry)	<i>I don’t think infantry has a problem at all, it’s very branch-specific. Poor job of educating every other branch what [SOF] is.</i>
Career Risks and Limitations	
<u>Lack of leadership support</u> : Chains of command in originating units often do not support SM transition into the units/specialties examined	<i>This process is tough and I didn’t get support from my unit to go take the test, go to flight school [...]. They’re worried about filling that next billet.</i>

Perceived career harms of failure: Given contracts or service obligations, SMs who fail to be selected risk being stuck in an undesirable job

If you don't make it, quit and fail, you will be thrown to the winds with no say where you go.

Restrictive career options: SMs struggle to take advantage of opportunities to transfer or commission for careers in examined units/specialties

It's different for people coming into the branch than those who are already in. Switching from a different career path is more difficult.

1. Recruitment Practices

a. Barrier: Lack of awareness and interest in units/specialties examined

Broadly speaking, awareness of units/specialties addressed in this study was low among focus group participants who are not serving in those units. Many members of examined units/specialties generally agreed that awareness of their jobs is lacking among the general U.S. and military populations. In our focus group discussions, we found greater awareness of the Navy SEALs, Army Rangers and SF, and certain pilot/aviation roles. However, participants typically expressed only a superficial knowledge of these units/specialties, and little to no knowledge on the mission sets, roles and responsibilities, or skillsets of members beyond combat roles. Of lesser-known units (e.g., Navy SWCC, Marine Raiders, Air Force Special Warfare, Coast Guard MSRT), even non-members who were in the unit's/specialty's respective service expressed minimal awareness.

Some participants noted that prior experiences with and perceptions of racism and sexism in American society may reduce propensity for service in certain military roles, particularly direct combat or special operator roles. In this view, some groups may more often join the military primarily as a means to better their socioeconomic situation; by contrast, serving in combat roles may be perceived as fighting “a White man’s war,” as one participant described it. It is important to emphasize that this sentiment is not universal; many ethnic/racial minority participants expressed deep pride in serving their country in both operator and non-operator roles.

Focus group participants identified several factors that may facilitate awareness and interest in the examined units/specialties among the general population, as well as among women and ethnic/racial minorities specifically. These factors include: meaningfully conveying diverse representation in advertising and recruitment events, featuring the broader skillsets used and benefits of serving in the examined units/specialties, and personal contact with members of the units/specialties examined.

1) Enabling practice: Meaningful depictions of diverse representation

Participants who belonged to examined units/specialties and those who did not frequently reported learning about the examined units/specialties through popular media

(e.g., movies, books, video games) and military recruiting advertisements. However, others attributed the lack of awareness of particular units/specialties to a lack of media and advertising that features those units. Further, many focus group participants from minority backgrounds noted the importance of seeing individuals who look like them in those roles, to demonstrate inclusion and assist with overcoming challenges related to entry. However, participants across demographic groups held a wide range of opinions on diverse representation in advertising – noting its importance, but acknowledging problems associated with real or perceived tokenization. Two participants described this dynamic:

Take someone who made it through training and then showcase them. But I don't know if I want to be showcased. I'd have to get over my personal thing. But it could show it's possible, increase interest.

If a standard Raider is looking at five ads and they all have a Black person, then they know it's contrived.

Media and recruitment advertisements could feature successes of individual ethnic/racial minority and women members/veterans, while ensuring that generic advertisements or depictions do not tokenize or overrepresent these groups. Participants named commercials that featured a well-known Black/African American Navy SEAL and Air Force TACP veteran named David Goggins¹⁹ and the film *Act of Valor*²⁰ as examples of meaningful representations of ethnic/racial minority men. Other examples include a U.S. Army tweet that featured the first female Army Ranger to lead a Ranger platoon in combat²¹ and the Air Force's Rise Above campaign, which provides education about historical contributions of Black Airmen (Tuskegee Airmen) and female Airmen (Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs)).²²

2) Enabling practice: Display the broader skillsets utilized in, and benefits of, careers in examined units/specialties

Oftentimes, focus group participants speculated that some underrepresented groups are simply uninterested in careers as operators or pilots. This was particularly true of their

¹⁹ David Goggins, *Can't Hurt Me: Master Your Mind and Defy the Odds*, (Austin, TX: Lioncrest Publishing, 2018)

²⁰ "Act of Valor," IMDb Website, accessed October 5, 2022, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1591479/>.

²¹ U.S. Army (@USArmy), "The journey to become an infantry leader. This is Capt. Shaina Coss' Story. [video camera emoji] by Capt. Thomas Stanford," Twitter, September, 6, 2021, https://twitter.com/USArmy/status/1435045537074585604?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etwetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1435045537074585604%7Ctwgr%5E05fc75b8317e76658db2cb64034f918d9c3aa490%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Ftaskandpurpose.com%2Fnews%2Farmy-shaina-coss-75th-ranger-regiment%2F.

²² "Home Page," CAF Rise Above Website, accessed October 6, 2021, <https://cafriseabove.org/>.

perspectives on women's participation in SOF units and Marine Corps Force Reconnaissance, with many participants also expressing the belief that women are less interested in combat roles. Others assumed that especially physically fit women and minorities may have more lucrative professional opportunities in sports, outside of the military.

However, some participants said there are many operator roles that may appeal to women and ethnic/racial minorities, but they are not well known. They noted that representations of SOF career fields in popular media and recruitment advertising usually only show a narrow aspect of the job, appealing to a subset of the population. They suggested that highlighting the diversity of skillsets SOF operators use, and the various functions their jobs entail, may appeal to more diverse populations:

Mostly people view it as jumping out of planes and shooting people in the face. That's an aspect of the job, but it's not all.... There are so many teams downrange that can be done better by men and women. Jumping out of planes and underwater jobs, if that's the image of what it is, it's going to turn off women.

Portraying a more nuanced picture of SOF careers could not only attract broader groups to these units/specialties, but also demonstrate that their participation would be valued. Participants cited areas where the identities and life experiences of women and minorities may be particularly valuable, such as when gathering intelligence from other women or engaging in cross-cultural communication. Further, ethnic/racial minority participants said there may be a lack of interest in SOF/Force Recon in their communities due to a perception that operator roles do not prepare members for successful civilian careers. They explained that racial and ethnic minorities may seek to leverage military service as an avenue to build job skills, gain financial security, and access opportunities such as college education, or they may face more external pressure to do so.

Advertising and recruitment efforts that highlight a fuller picture of the skills developed in SOF/Force Recon and the benefits of joining the military could draw more individuals whose interest may be outweighed by practical considerations for their and their families' long-term needs. For example, one minority male SOF operator said:

I think the individual that we're recruiting to us is smarter and more sophisticated, and we need to stop pretending like "hey you can do all these cool things." We need to say "this is what you could have if you could join us – mission, lifestyle of day to day. Bonuses, pay, places you could live, people you could meet." I think we should have more incentive programs. Because the recruitment has been dumbed down, instead of spending the effort on education about the opportunity it provides.

Others said that intangible benefits of serving in these units could attract more people with better advertising. Many described the strong comradery, challenging and meaningful nature of the work, and higher standards of excellence as unique benefits of their jobs.

3) Enabling practice: Personal contact with members of examined units/specialties

Contact with former or current SMs, especially in the units/specialties examined, appears to have been an important factor that helped many focus group participants overcome barriers to entry. Family relationships with current or former SMs were commonly cited as inspiring an interest in military service among focus group participants in all specialties. For those without family with military experience, teachers, coaches, friends, and other members of their communities provided the personal connection that got them interested in military service.

Contact with members of examined units/specialties once in the military also promotes awareness of these specialties. Some focus group participants from units/specialties other than those specified in Section 557 had previously worked alongside the units/specialties examined, such as during deployments or in support roles, and so had more information about them. Some members of examined units/specialties who participated in focus groups said that such contact inspired their interest to join. Outreach to current SMs after deployments or assignment at bases with a prominent presence of the examined units/specialties could thus be a productive medium of recruitment. As one interviewee said:

I had multiple touchpoints. Dad was in the military but never told me to join. But having touchpoints in SOF throughout my life, it was just natural to move towards it. My drill Sergeant was a Ranger and he was the toughest man I know. I wanted to be like him.

Pilots often noted that exposing individuals to flying itself could help increase interest among underrepresented groups. Many pilots and aviators spoke of how much they loved the experience of flying. They noted that some potential recruits may have never been in an airplane before, let alone piloted an aircraft, and may therefore be fearful of flying or unaware of the satisfaction derived from an aviation role. One said, for example:

Need to give people in these groups more aviation exposure. Having the goal of being a pilot got me through college. It works with troubled youth, sometimes they don't see a path out. They need mentors. You don't always get that in poor areas.

Facilitating access to those experienced in familiar with paths to joining the units/specialties examined may be important for overcoming the negative perceptions

(discussed in the previous section) of military service and roles in the units/specialties examined, particularly among underrepresented demographics.

b. Barrier: Competing recruitment priorities; recruiters are not incentivized to recruit for the units/specialties examined

Recruiters are strictly held to quotas, and they do not receive credit for recruits that do not pass initial SOF screening. Some participants characterized this as a disincentive for recruiters to share information about or encourage recruits to pursue the examined SOF specialties. Focus group participants described varying experiences with recruiters as they navigated joining the military. Some members of examined units/specialties first learned of these opportunities at the recruiter's office, but other participants believed their recruiter did not have information about these specialties or the process for joining and so directed them to more familiar jobs.

Participants, especially from the enlisted ranks, said recruiters directed them into certain specialties based on the recruit's interests and qualifications, but many felt that recruiters steered them into specialties other than those examined in this paper, or convinced them to enlist on an open contract (not tied to any specialty) to meet recruitment quotas and broader military needs. It is important to note that participants varied in seniority; thus, many did not have exposure to more recent improvements in recruiting, such as specialized SOF recruiters or the Air Force's aviation-focused recruiting detachment.

Promoting recruit awareness of specialties may help to balance demands on recruiters to meet quotas. Participants who entered the recruiter's office with prior intentions of pursuing a career as SOF operators described feeling better prepared to push for opportunities that fit their interests. Indeed, some focus group participants believed that recruiters served a rightful filtering function, as recruits who are truly interested in the examined units/specialties will do their own research and resist pressures to take a different path. Continuing to broaden awareness through mass media, social media, and other online resources, and increased personal contact may boost interest among recruits in seeking out careers in examined units/specialties.

Concomitantly, Services should continue to educate recruiters about careers and ensure that recruiters are unbiased in sharing this information with everyone who shows interest or aptitude. Although the Navy and Air Force have specialized SOF direct-accession recruiters, general direct-accession recruiters must still refer recruits to correct information and resources about examined units/specialties. Further, while the Coast Guard does not recruit directly into MSRT, discussions with Coast Guard staff revealed a need for recruiter education on MSRT so they would be prepared to recruit for the specialized skills required.

c. Barrier: Narrow market segmentation; in-service recruitment focused on narrow career fields that are less likely to include women and ethnic/racial minorities

Participants believed that women and ethnic/racial minority groups were more likely to enter the military into roles such as logistics, communications, and maintenance that do not typically feed into in-service recruitment for SOF, Force Recon, or pilots/navigators. One way to address this barrier could be to facilitate entry of broader groups into fields that do feed into SOF or Force Recon, particularly infantry. Still, while individuals serving in infantry units may have greater propensity for a career in SOF or Force Recon, participants in several focus groups spoke of the importance of broadening outreach beyond typical career fields.

The recruiters [...] keep going to these infantry regiments where these young guys who are in shape are bored. [...] They're not going to these niche commands, supply regiments where there could be a higher group of minorities.

Some recruiting aspects in aviation are not pushed much. Pilots don't go out to ground units and show them the aircraft. There is no integration from aviation to ground guys. That doesn't happen. Sometimes guys don't know how to go about it and my understanding is, that's what aviation wants, having people go out of their way to become a pilot.

The Marine Corps and Army publicize information about SOF to all active SMs who meet eligibility requirements, but participants believed that additional outreach could improve the effectiveness of this approach. This includes sharing information about resources available to help interested individuals meet the qualifications to join these units/specialties.

For pilots, the need for broadened outreach includes publicizing opportunities for enlisted SMs to become commissioned or warrant officers – an eligibility requirement for most pilot specialties.

The fact that kids come to us and say "how do I become a pilot?" is a problem, they shouldn't have to come to us. The Army community doesn't know it's an option to become a pilot from enlisted.

There's a missed opportunity to push the Seaman to Admiral programs - enlisted to officer transitions.

Personal outreach to members of underrepresented groups may ensure information reaches women and ethnic/racial minorities and reinforce that a path into the examined

specialties is truly attainable. To believe they can be successful in these fields, participants said that personal contact with members or veterans, especially ones who look like them, was essential. Individuals in an infantry unit, for example, may have greater exposure to peers who are pursuing SOF careers, but those in other career fields may not have access to individuals knowledgeable about SOF.

2. Career Risks and Limitations

a. Barrier: Lack of support from leadership/chain-of-command in originating unit for career transition to examined unit/specialty

Many participants who attempted to pursue careers in the examined units/specialties while already in service perceived it as an uphill battle. Several focus group participants discussed the importance of support from leadership/the chain of command in their unit while they prepared to pursue joining an examined unit/specialty. Leadership can inform SMs of opportunities, support access to trainings to prepare for A&S processes, and sign required orders or other paperwork necessary to starting these processes.

However, participants from examined units/specialties in all Services said that such support from the chain of command is typically lacking in the unit that stands to lose an SM to one of the examined units/specialties. Participants reported not getting time or approval to pursue training opportunities, receiving extra work to prevent interested SMs from training, and struggling to find leaders who would sign required application forms. Participants often attributed this lack of leadership support to reluctance to lose high-performing unit members. This reportedly creates an environment that discourages pursuing a lateral career change into SOF, Force Recon, or pilot/navigator specialties. SMs in examined units/specialties as well as those in other units/specialties described this dynamic:

My command discouraged it. I heard about Little Creek, you can go and train. It's supposed to help you get into Special Forces, but my command didn't let me ever leave. I'm sure every command is different. My leadership didn't like me to leave work and have other interests.

Speaking from 20 years in military, it's not popular to apply to leave. To have a letter of recommendation from a commander...you might not have relationship with that person, and trying to leave that unit makes you look not loyal.

b. Barrier: Interest in examined specialties outweighed by perceived consequences of failure arising from service obligations and harm to career

Focus group participants often said that pursuit of the specialties examined in this research carries risk, given that it entails significant service obligations and may not result in one's desired outcome. This possibility convinced some participants to pursue other specialties.

In discussions of interest in SOF, participants shared concerns about ending up on an open enlistment contract if they failed the A&S process, particularly for units with direct-entry programs (e.g., SEALs). They believed they were likely to get stuck in an undesirable specialty if they were not selected for SOF. Given high attrition rates during A&S, this is not a risk some are willing to take.

I think you'd get more people, forget Big Navy, if you add in their contract that they got a contract to be a SEAL and if they didn't make it through SEAL training, they'd get put back into civilian life. More people would try out, it'd skyrocket. If there's one thing these two generations can agree on – if you cut away the risk of 4 years of chipping paint...

Lack of career mobility after successfully entering the unit/specialty also dissuaded some individuals from pursuing this path. If an individual's job turns out to be a poor fit for them, it may be difficult to change to a different role. Focus group participants often discussed not having a clear sense of what SOF/Force Recon roles entail prior to joining. Some also mentioned that changes related to evolving mission-sets and shifting engagement in the Middle East have led current operators to feel unfulfilled in their jobs. The risk of being unhappy in one's job, but unable to leave it for another job, may affect both recruitment and retention.

Similarly, pilots' lack of control over their career path was a significant concern for prospective recruits. Participants explained that becoming a pilot comes with a lengthy service obligation after flight school, which intensifies the perceived risk of being in a job one does not want (i.e., flying an undesired platform). The lengthy application process and training pipeline for these careers reportedly compound issues related to long service obligations. Focus group participants who declined to pursue careers as pilots said protracted timelines influenced their decisions, and pilots themselves wondered whether there were ways to shorten the process.

Challenges related to the time it took to complete application materials and the A&S and training pipelines were also discussed among SOF/Force Recon focus groups, though these units/specialties do not share pilots' long service obligations. In both the Navy and Coast Guard, participants further expressed concerns that pursuing careers in SEALs or

MSRT could impede advancement opportunities if they failed to make it through. In the Navy, one non-operator noted:

Anything like not making it sets you back, you're a year behind where you should be, and that reflects on the promotion board. If you try to get in after washing out, that creates a bigger career risk.

In the Coast Guard, MSRT participants explained that MSRT was not conducive to career growth and promotion in some circumstances:

For certain ratings, it doesn't help you advance...it's a gamble for professional growth.

c. Barrier: Restrictive careers and limited mobility/flexibility in other specialties can prevent interested individuals from accessing opportunities to join examined specialties

Focus group participants also said various aspects of career mobility limited their access to careers in examined specialties. In particular, current SMs interested in joining an examined unit/specialty may struggle to obtain the required cross-training. In the Air Force, for example, participants reported that cross-training opportunities for Special Warfare, pilot, and CSO roles are only available at certain times during the year, which may not align with when an SM is able (or supported by his or her unit) to cross-train.

There are certain timelines where you can actually cross-train. The problem is whether there's availability at the time you're able to cross-train.

Participants from other Services also pointed out the difficulty of becoming special operators or pilots while serving in another specialty. For example, in the Marine Corps, some participants pointed out that Raider A&S and Individual Training Course (ITC) may conflict with the timing when an individual is expected to complete the professional military education required for promotion to the next rank. Failure to complete professional military education could result in Marines being passed over for promotion, which could preclude them from continuing their service. In the Coast Guard, certain ratings are simply not eligible to join the MSRTs, which precludes joining altogether.

Issues of timing and career mobility can be exacerbated if an SM needs to obtain a waiver to join a particular specialty. The length of time it takes for a waiver to be approved could push SMs out of their eligibility window or disrupt the timing relative to job demands in his or her current specialty.

So, there's this finite window, and so many things that can go wrong. A guy can come to assessment and get selected, but he has to attend the

next individual training course to become a Raider. If they don't make it here within a year, they can never come over here.

Timing and career mobility issues reportedly affect both officers and enlisted SMs, but enlisted SMs who want to become pilots may face additional barriers, as they must first become officers. Beyond the timing difficulties already discussed, focus group participants said that it was difficult for enlisted SMs to find out how they could become a pilot. Even those who pursue commissioning may not be selected, as the process is competitive.

I didn't see a clear pathway offered and had to pursue it myself. If you want to become a pilot/CSO, you need to figure out how to do it for yourself and get your base commander to sign off on it. It's much more difficult and takes longer to cross over from enlisted to become a pilot or CSO than it is to try to come in from outside the service as a civilian and become a pilot.

The degree to which such barriers impeded interested SMs in their pursuit of examined specialties convinced many focus group participants that they were part of a deliberate strategy to filter out potential recruits who are not suited for a career in these specialties, whether due to lack of interest, motivation, or ability. Participants spoke of the importance of taking initiative and persevering in the face of challenges to succeed in these fields.

Nonetheless, reducing bureaucratic barriers to joining examined specialties could broaden the pool of applicants that decide to put themselves through the rigors of A&S and training. With improved outreach, such a pool could include greater numbers of ethnic/racial minorities and women. Personal contact with members of examined units/specialties, who can offer guidance and support, can also help interested individuals gain the knowledge they need to navigate these barriers.

D. Assessment, Selection, and Training

Each of the examined units/specialties requires recruits to meet specific eligibility criteria and then proceed through an assessment and/or selection process. Those who are selected are then required to participate in further training, out of which some may be dropped (either administratively or by choice). Requirements for physical and mental abilities vary between the specialties addressed in this study, but participants agreed that A&S and training processes are incredibly mentally and physically challenging.

In this section, we discuss barriers related to individuals' mental and physical abilities to meet requirements for joining the examined units/specialties and barriers related to specific selection practices. Table 19 provides a summary of these barriers.

Table 19. Summary of Barriers Related to Assessment, Selection, and Training

Barrier	Service Member Quotations
Mental and Physical Standards	
<u>Baseline eligibility requirements</u> : Prior disciplinary issues, difficulty obtaining security clearance, non-U.S. citizenship, health and medical issues, and low test scores restrict eligibility	<i>Everyone takes the [ASVAB] in high school. Who knows what the situation was. And unless you go retake it, that sticks with you. And that's something we use as a hard gate.</i>
<u>High physical standards</u> : Exceptional grit, motivation, and physical ability are necessary to meet standards	<i>When they say it's 90% mental, that's not underselling the physical. It's grueling, but it's mental. You can't prepare for it, you just withstand.</i>
<u>Injury and illness</u> : Grueling physical challenges during A&S and poor nutrition lead to high rates of disqualifying illness and injury, forcing candidates to drop out	<i>I'd say medical too, people get hurt. Most of the time if you get dropped for medical, you can come back, but most people don't do that because of time.</i>
<u>Stringent academics for flight school</u> : SMs doubt their ability meet testing and academic requirements of flight school. Pilots/navigators countered that completing flight school is more attainable than people think.	<i>The only thing that made me question was my own capabilities. [...] I don't have an engineering brain.</i>
<u>Lack of preparatory training</u> : Obtaining flying experience prior to flight school is cost-prohibitive or inaccessible to many potential candidates	<i>Paying for flying yourself is not cheap. [...] You get higher PCSM (Pilot Candidate Selection Method) scores if you have more flight hours. I remember I had to choose between braces and private pilot lessons.</i>
Selection Practices	
<u>Disparate treatment in A&S and training</u> : SMs perceived biased application of standards in evaluations of White men, minority men, and women candidates	<i>It used to be "you need X push-ups," and now it's, "go do this task." The idea is you're getting a more holistic view of a person, but part of that subjectivity is that it's unclear if people are just getting pushed through.</i>
<u>Subjective personality assessments</u> : Even if candidates meet other standards, they may not ultimately be selected due to perceived personality fit	<i>If you're viewed as weird or selfish you'll get crushed even if you're physically fit. And people who are at the bottom, if they're hard workers, others will help them carry their weight. And there's nothing more outsider than being the only female in a class filled with men.</i>

1. Mental and Physical Standards

a. Barrier: Disqualification by baseline eligibility criteria

To be eligible to pursue a career in both the military and the career fields examined in this study, individuals must meet specific eligibility criteria. Participants described

several requirements that may preclude some individuals from service in the examined specialties, including a clear disciplinary record, security clearance eligibility and U.S. citizenship status, high test scores, and a clear medical history. It is important to note that such eligibility requirements are not necessarily inappropriate barriers to entry, and many participants viewed them as a necessity. However, they believed that racial and ethnic minority populations may disproportionately experience disadvantages in areas that intersect with eligibility requirements. The barriers to entry that this dynamic creates are perhaps a reflection of broader societal issues and DOD policies.

1) Disciplinary issues

Civilian criminal history and military judicial non-judicial punishments (NJP)²³ both affect individuals' eligibility for careers in examined specialties. Civilian criminal history can disqualify individuals from joining the military altogether, while non-judicial punishment disqualifies individuals from joining SOF/Force Recon. Some SOF/Force Recon participants questioned whether this was necessary, as individuals with these histories may both benefit from and perform well in those roles.

Why is a guy with an NJP not eligible? Because if you take a guy from the SEALs and put him in the fleet, he'll get an NJP, I guarantee.

2) Security clearance and citizenship status

Individuals interested in SOF may also have difficulty meeting requirements to obtain particular security clearances and/or to hold U.S. citizenship. Participants believed that this may be an obstacle for Hispanic/Latino individuals in particular, who may be living in the U.S. without citizenship or who may have difficulty obtaining security clearances given their parents' citizenship status.

3) Health and medical

A wide variety of medical requirements affect individuals' ability to join the military and to serve in certain career fields. Medical qualifications were particularly salient in discussions of eligibility to serve as a pilot or navigator. Poor vision, color blindness, and other vision problems can disqualify an individual from serving in these roles. Some participants pointed out that corrective surgery can allow an individual to pursue aviation;

²³ A GAO report found ethnic/racial disparities in investigative and justice actions and further noted that the services do not track race and ethnicity in all their systems, making it difficult to determine whether disparities exist for some investigative, judicial, and non-judicial actions. United States Government Accountability Office, "Report to the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives: DOD and the Coast Guard Need to Improve Their Capabilities to Assess Racial and Gender Disparities," *Military Justice* (May 2019), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-19-344.pdf>.

however, recruits may lack awareness about this, and/or obtaining corrective surgery may be difficult given career timing challenges.

Marine Corps does provide Lasik, but it requires a waiting list, you would have to reenlist. It's definitely provided in the military, it's just harder to get. I heard you have to wait until you're 21. It's an issue for young guys just starting from high school, they're not allowed to get it yet.

Beyond vision, height and weight requirements prevented some focus group participants from pursuing careers in examined specialties. More broadly, some female participants noted that general military height and weight requirements are difficult for women to meet, and may disproportionately affect females of minority ethnic backgrounds due to differences in body fat distribution.

Women furthermore perceived conflict between height/weight standards and physical fitness standards. Gaining muscle caused some women to fall out of height/weight requirements, but without adequate muscle mass, they had difficulty meeting basic physical fitness requirements. They believed that higher physical fitness standards in certain career fields, including SOF, would exacerbate this issue.

Past diagnoses of medical conditions can also disqualify new recruits and current SMs from joining examined specialties. Participants described various diagnoses earlier in their lives, including traumatic brain injuries, asthma, and heart murmurs, that created additional hurdles for pursuing their desired specialties. Some felt particularly frustrated by this, as the condition had resolved by the time of their application. Others said that the process of obtaining waivers or medical clearance to join was very cumbersome and at times appeared to vary by doctor or location.

Medical. It's the single biggest barrier. They can never agree on anything. They disqualify some people for things that other people get waivers for. If a Commander calls over, advocates, etc., that can help. There is a long list of things wrong with flight medical. Waivers can take months.

Providing medical examinations that verify recovery from past conditions could help address these hurdles. Clearly communicating whether certain medical conditions are disqualifying or waiverable, sharing information on other units/specialties examined (including in other Services) that may have different qualification criteria, and facilitating options for remediation (e.g., corrective surgery) could also prevent some recruits from giving up after initial disqualification.

4) Test scores

Test scores are another barrier to entry into both the military and careers in examined specialties. Focus group participants from SOF/Force Recon units commonly described the high level of intelligence needed to succeed in their roles. When screening for eligible enlisted recruits, intelligence is measured using the ASVAB.

Many participants took the ASVAB in high school. Based on their score, they were presented with various career options after deciding to pursue military service. This may have precluded SOF/Recon career fields for those with scores that did not meet minimum requirements. Some participants noted that these initial scores may not accurately reflect the individual's intellectual ability. Some cited evidence that ethnic/racial minorities tend to perform more poorly on standardized tests; others said they were given the ASVAB in high school with no knowledge of the implications their score could have for career options.

The military offers opportunities to improve one's ASVAB score, but this may not realistically be accessible to all SMs. Facilitating improved access to these courses, confirming the validity of minimum required test scores, and improving awareness of testing requirements for certain careers could help to reduce this barrier.

b. Barrier: Challenges meeting high physical standards

Exceptional physical ability is required across multiple performance domains in the units and specialties examined, particularly SOF, Force Recon, and MSRT. Focus group participants frequently noted that candidates' ability to pass the various components of A&S depends on physical ability as well as physiology. Being large and muscular, or small and fast, can be strengths or weaknesses depending on the event.

A lot of times bigger guys have trouble in BUD/S (Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL), especially with pull-ups because they have so much more weight. And then smurfs, smaller guys, are usually some of the toughest guys. But then the weight of a boat is that much more on them, wears them down, makes them more prone to getting hurt.

Participants said that water events are typically the biggest challenge for almost all candidates during A&S, and often discourage individuals from pursuing a career in SOF, Recon, or MSRT at all. Both Black/African American and White focus group participants often cited lack of swimming ability and comfort in the water as contributing to the underrepresentation of Black/African American SMs in these roles. Participants believed that Black/African American communities have less access to pools, preventing them from building these skills in adolescence. Some also believed that Black/African American individuals have greater bone or muscle density than White populations, which can make tasks such as treading water and floating more difficult for the former.

For female candidates, male and female participants commonly emphasized that biological differences between males and females make all physical requirements more difficult for women. In particular, men and women said that rucking and other events that require candidates to bear weight over long distances or periods of time are typically a major challenge for women. They believed that these challenges may deter some women from attempting to join SOF/Force Recon, or MSRT at all, and expose those that do try to greater risk of injury, such as pelvic fractures. Given these biological differences, a few participants suggested that physical training programs tailored to women could help to improve their chances of meeting physical fitness requirements.

Maybe if they offer specific PT [Physical Training] programs for women to help them specifically. Doing PT with a bunch of guys, not specific to my body...we're completely different biologically and have to prepare in different ways...I'm not saying we shouldn't do the same PT, 100% we should, but I think we would need to prepare differently.

Among men in SOF/Force Recon/MSRT, focus group participants said that prior physical training was critical to their success. Many said that while they had limited access to information on approaches to preparing for A&S at the time they joined, a wealth of information is now available online. As such, new recruits are less dependent on recruiters to offer training guidance. There was some disagreement about the impact of this expanded access to information. While it enables recruits to prepare to meet requirements, some participants said that testing recruits' ability to handle unknown and unexpected challenges is a critical part of the process. However, general training programs could improve recruits' physical fitness without providing too much information about specific A&S tasks.

Participants in multiple Services asserted that requirements to go through their service's basic training caused them to lose some of their physical fitness before going to A&S. The physical components of basic training were too easy for them, and they did not always have the time, resources, or permission to do anything more. Poor food quality reportedly also hurt their fitness. Some participants said that recruits would be better off skipping basic training.

I came out of basic training in the worst shape I'd ever been in, because exercise and nutrition was so poor.

A couple focus group participants suggested that there could be separate bootcamp tracks for those pursuing special operations or ground combat specialties. The Navy previously separated Navy Special Warfare Command (NSW) candidates at boot camp to provide enhanced physical training, but recently reversed this practice in favor of integrating NSW recruits with the general Navy population. Although this may have the benefit of exposing NSW recruits to a diverse group of sailors and the broader Navy culture

early in their career, it may also reduce their readiness for NSW A&S. Coast Guard staff noted that they lacked a mechanism to prepare Coast Guard members for their screener to select into DSF (of which MSRT is a part). They suggested moving the DSF screener to boot camp to promote awareness and preparation to join MSRT at an earlier career stage.

Focus group participants identified several factors that facilitated endurance through A&S and training, in particular mental toughness and intrinsic motivation to serve.

1) Enabling practice: Developing mental toughness

Participants in SOF, Force Recon, and MSRT commonly asserted that only individuals with strong grit or mental toughness can perform well in intensely demanding conditions. They believed that, for most operators, such mental toughness typically grew out of life experiences, including youth sports, but especially growing up in difficult family environments or lower socio-economic communities.

We've had starting quarterback college athletes who don't make it, and a 160-pound kid who reads books and you can't make that kid quit. A lot of time the best athletes – when they're not the best, like in drowning – that's the personality that does the worst sometimes. And the people who had hardship, they don't quit.

Still, in units that allow recruits to enlist directly, some participants believed that younger recruits (e.g., age 18 or 19) may not have the maturity or life experience they need to tolerate intense mental and physical trials.

Many participants described concrete strategies they used to mentally prepare and endure challenges, including focusing on one's intrinsic motivation or larger goal; keeping a positive mindset; breathing and relaxation techniques; and exposing themselves to mental discomfort through endurance training. This highlights a potential avenue to improve the ability of all groups to pass A&S: training potential recruits on mental toughness. Resilience may develop naturally through past experiences with adversity, but it can also be developed and cultivated.

Myriad physical training programs to prepare for A&S processes exist in public domains; where these are published by military organizations, they could include guidance or strategies for building and maintaining grit. Formal training programs could also include instruction and practice on building coping skills, managing stress, maintaining a positive mindset, and tolerating discomfort or uncertainty. Although Special Operations Commands (SOCOM) offers such training to SOF members, it is unclear whether this training is provided to prepare SOF candidates before they enter A&S. The Navy provides Warrior Toughness training to all new recruits; this program was originally developed for Navy SEALs to build psychological and character strengths.

Some focus group participants from SOF/Force Recon units believed that the grit necessary to succeed in A&S cannot be taught. If Services implement programs to teach mental toughness, it may be important to address these perceptions among recruits (to facilitate uptake) and current operators (to reduce perceptions of lowered standards).

Why would we want those guys? We want guys who go 100%. I don't think you can help people out mentally before joining. I don't know if there is a way to teach it. If you are looking for a pool to grab them from, these pools are going to get smaller and smaller.

Pilot/navigator focus group participants also described the intense stress they experienced while in flight school, given long hours and rigorous learning requirements. As in operator roles, the ability to manage stress is not only necessary to selection and training, but also to continued service as a pilot/navigator. Incorporating training on stress management techniques early in the training process may help improve performance at multiple aviation career stages.

2) Enabling practice: Leveraging the intrinsic motivation to serve

Given the grueling nature of the A&S and training processes, focus group participants often emphasized that in order to succeed, recruits must have strong intrinsic motivation. For many, this motivation included striving for excellence or a greater challenge, comradery with equally motivated SMs, and service to nation. They believed that candidates who join for other reasons, such as prestige or vanity, are unlikely to make it through assessment and selection.

You really want to have... I'm not saying patriotism, because everyone who joins the military has some patriotism, but you have to really want to fight for your country and being able to say you did that, like a pride aspect. You have to really want to do that. If you didn't choose that field you're probably not as inclined to join them.

I came from high school and then college. I've had this conversation so much, I talk about this every other week. I'm second generation American. In high school, the military...I have gratitude for everything I've been afforded. It's wanting to give back and finding a greater identity through military service.

Along with motivation to succeed, participants also discussed the importance of self-confidence in one's ability to succeed. Participants noted that seeing other people who look like them (i.e., ethnic/racial minorities and women) succeed could increase their confidence in their own ability to do so. Further, countering stereotypes and negative outcome expectancies among recruits from underrepresented demographic groups and those around

them (e.g., recruiters, fellow recruits, instructors and training cadre) could support the development of the confidence and mental toughness necessary to selection.

c. Barrier: Injury and illness force recruits to quit during A&S and training

Even among those with strong mental and physical abilities, injury and illness can force recruits to wash out of A&S and flight school. Those who sustain injuries may not be permitted or physically able to re-try the process, and those who are eligible may face problems related to time away from their main career or families, exacerbating issues described in Section E of this chapter. Even those who do re-attempt A&S and training may have expended the motivation or mental endurance they needed to complete it.

There are also a lot of injuries in pipeline. Those who get injured, the motivation they had comes to a stop. They sit around for months recovering, and that brings them down low physically and mentally, and they never get back. That happened to my best friend, he broke his foot, spiraled down, quit.

Some participants believed that women are more susceptible to injury than men, even if they have exceptional physical ability. Male and female participants specifically noted women's risk of pelvic fractures resulting from carrying heavy weights and high-impact events, such as jumps. They also worried that low body fat percentages, which can result from intense physical training and/or under-nutrition, increased women's injury risk when pushing their physical limits. Participants noted that these issues were not necessarily specific to special operations A&S or flight school; they also arose during basic training and officer candidate school.

Preventing injury is therefore of critical importance for improving completion of A&S and training among qualified individuals. Operator focus group participants described more recent adjustments to A&S intended to prevent injury and promote improved recovery between phases, and Coast Guard MSRT participants spoke of specific care they received. Focus group participants in non-aviation careers also perceived pilots to have better access and quality of medical care than other SMs.

d. Barrier: Self-doubt about ability to meet stringent academic requirements

Physical requirements were a commonly discussed barrier for SOF, Force Recon, and MSRT, but intelligence and academic ability were commonly discussed barriers for aviation specialties. Participants discussed the high level of intelligence and academic ability necessary to pass flight school, and many non-aviation participants doubted their own ability to succeed for this reason. However, focus group participants from aviation specialties emphasized that completing flight school is more attainable than most people may think. Indeed, they said most candidates complete flight school.

The movies make it seem like if you're not the best of the best or the smartest it's not possible. It's hard but it's attainable – this message needs to be out there.

Pilots said that while flight school is a difficult, rigorous process, it is intended to equip candidates with the knowledge and skills that they need to succeed. Instructors give candidates concrete feedback on how they can improve, and candidates have multiple opportunities to practice and demonstrate their knowledge and abilities.

As with physical requirements, some pilots said that prior preparation is helpful to qualifying for and completing flight school, particularly for passing required tests. They noted that study guides and practice books are available to help candidates prepare.

I failed my first time, that was a barrier. I didn't prepare, I just took it. People told me - just take it on a Wednesday, it's not that hard. I didn't pass it. After that, I got a book and studied for 30 minutes a night for a week and then I passed. If you're not a good test taker, get a book.

To pass flight school, pilots agreed that studying in peer groups and having contact with more senior candidates or current pilots is critical to success. Most relied on personal contacts, often met during flight school, and doubted whether it would be possible to pass without having access to a network of other candidates.

The intensity of pilot training is not to be discounted, but countering misconceptions about the process and raising awareness about concrete strategies to succeed could improve potential recruits' confidence in pursuing this path. Furthermore, facilitating access to preparatory courses and networks of peers pursuing careers in aviation could increase success among those who attempt it.

e. Barrier: Lack of access to formal preparatory training

Even if interested candidates pass the academic portions of flight school, focus group participants emphasized that obtaining flight hours prior to flight school is an important contributor to success. In the Air Force, the Pilot Candidate Selection Method (PCSM) gives a selection advantage to those who have prior flight hours. Some participants obtained flight hours by purchasing private flying lessons, which is often cost-prohibitive for individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Others received lessons while students at a military academy, where ethnic/racial minorities are underrepresented relative to the general population. As such, flight time is a significant hurdle that disproportionately affects racial and ethnic minority populations. Expanding access to formal preparatory training could help to address this issue, as would increasing diversity at military academies.

The Air Force is exploring options to reduce this structural barrier, to include Aim High Flight Academy, which provides flight training and mentorship for youth from all demographic backgrounds as well as several modifications to the selection process intended to address barriers (e.g., only considering the first 60 flight hours in the PCSM score; and, allowing candidates to take the Test of Basic Aviation Skills (TBAS) three times). In addition, the Air Force's Rated Preparatory Program, for enlisted members and officers, prepares individuals interested in becoming pilots and navigators by providing the flight training needed to make them competitive for selection.

Despite efforts to expand access to preparatory training, it is not likely that all individuals will have the awareness or ability to take advantage of it. This raises the importance of recruiting from diverse populations. For example, service populations that have prior exposure to flying, such as flight crews, may be well-placed to transition into careers as pilots. Reducing roadblocks related to entry requirements (e.g., commissioning as an officer) could help balance out barriers related to flying experience. Given that ethnic/racial minorities are represented in greater numbers in enlisted and support occupations, this may be a productive avenue for increasing representation in aviation specialties.

2. Selection Practices

a. Barrier: Perceptions of disparate treatment in A&S and training processes

Some focus group participants believed that A&S and trainings for SOF, Force Recon, and aviation roles were fair and standards-based. However, others held one of two opposing views: a) that women and minorities are treated more leniently compared to White men in an effort to increase diversity of selected candidates; or b) that women and/or minorities have to try harder or exceed standards due to biases against them.

The individuals who held either of these views came from a variety of demographic backgrounds (i.e., the two opposing views did not fall clearly along racial/ethnic or gender lines). However, compared to White men, women and racial/ethnic minority focus group participants more commonly described specific instances in which they perceived there to be a bias against them. In this section, it is important to note that the *perception* of disparate treatment may be a barrier to participation, regardless of veracity. Given that focus group participants spoke of their own experiences and/or perceptions, IDA was unable to fact-check these claims of disparate treatment. This suggests that efforts to promote trust in the fairness of selection processes should accompany efforts to ensure fairness.

Many focus group participants believed the A&S process to be highly objective. Several who had high confidence in the process described specific practices as evidence of objectivity. This included clearly measurable metrics and the reduced influence of any one

individual evaluator's input on the ultimate selection decision. In Raider A&S, for example, one participant explained:

With very few exceptions, they've done a good job of removing biases about individuals and using measurable metrics to evaluate people on a myriad of things. And the way the candidates rotate around, you'll get a bunch of observations from 30-plus evaluators on over 100 candidates. So you'll never have a disproportionate weight from one evaluator.

Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) Special Warfare and Marine Corps Raider participants also spoke of anonymized evaluations as reducing the risk of bias.

Other participants believed that changes in practices and lowering of standards (even if only informally in practice) have resulted in greater leniency toward underrepresented groups. In particular, participants believed that pressures to increase diversity in selections has led female candidates to be pushed through the pipeline when male candidates would have been cut. Such perceptions – accurate or not – may be influenced by greater visibility of candidates from underrepresented demographics. In AFSOC for example, perceptions of unfairness appear to be driven in part by rumors circulating on social media at the time of IDA's focus groups about a female Special Warfare candidate.²⁴

They're trying too hard. You can ask around the MAJCOM, the whole social media incident that went down a few months ago... That should've never been a thing, you finish or not, it's black and white....Somebody called me saying AFSOC is wondering if there are problems with equipment for pipeline students. What it really was asking if there was equipment that's not suitable for females. We've trained people – if it's a grown man or woman, and the kit you have isn't working for you, then you shouldn't be in this career field.

Concerns about bias during A&S also seemed to arise in part from a lack of clarity in how standards were applied or how candidates were evaluated. For example, participants said that some components of the evaluation are subjective. This will be discussed further in the next section. Others believed that official standards had been lowered over time to facilitate greater diversity, either in examined units/specialties or in the military more broadly.

²⁴ David Roza, "Air Force's botched integration of women in special ops ignites firestorm of controversy," *Task & Purpose*, January 14, 2022, <https://taskandpurpose.com/news/air-force-special-tactics-women/>.

Beyond evaluation against standards, perceptions of more lenient treatment of women by instructors also affected the perceived fairness of A&S and training. Instructors may be tasked with testing individual candidates' will and abilities in deliberately harsh ways, but they may treat some candidates more harshly than others. One participant, for example, believed that disparate treatment of female candidates was inevitable, given conflicts between social expectations regarding respectful treatment of women and the harsh treatment candidates experience during A&S. As one male special operator explained:

People going through, maybe even instructors, will feel like you can't treat a woman the same way you'd treat a man, because it'll be like you're singling out a woman and you're sexist. But if this person isn't carrying their weight, I don't want to work with them. It has nothing to do with being female. But they'll let it slide because they don't want to be viewed as prejudiced.

By contrast, another subset of participants countered that women and ethnic racial/minorities must exceed standards to overcome prejudice against them. Some participants believed that, informally, women faced sexism or were more harshly scrutinized. This may effectively set a higher bar for their success. Participants from all demographic groups expressed such beliefs:

Women, it's the Marines. I wouldn't let my daughter join. But if they are matching all of the requirements then hell yeah! But right now, she would need to be better than the top man to make it.

Two participants' personal experiences of being made to do extra work during A&S illustrate the divergence between these two conflicting impressions of disparate treatment. One participant saw a clear justification for his punishment and perceived it to match the punishment others' received (first quotation). By contrast, another participant saw no justification for his punishment and felt singled out, which left him feeling unsure whether the treatment he received was actually due to his race/ethnicity (second quotation):

The girl who went with us, she was doing the same workouts we were, she never got called out. When she was doing good, she was doing good, and when she did bad she got the same as us. Both of us weren't the best at pushups, so we got extra pushups at the end of... workouts.

Every time we went out there, without having done anything wrong, they'd tell me 'you, to the graves.' ...Everyone is resting, drinking water, and I was still out. That pissed me off because I never knew what I did wrong. It was the running joke, they did it once and they continued until I graduated.

Perceptions of fairness may thus improve if clear justifications are given when different treatment of candidates is warranted. Furthermore, a few participants from other units described the standardization of instructor interactions as potentially facilitating greater objectivity.

Even down to like if a candidate comes up to any instructor, they'll get the same set of responses. There's only so many things you can tell people, and get told. So the interaction with the instructors... instructors are not allowed to show any personality.

b. Barrier: Personality does not fit in with the unit or specialty

Focus group participants agreed that one important determinant of success in A&S and training is personality fit. Focus group participants from examined units/specialties believed that individuals who do not have the personality necessary to succeed in their specialty (namely, assertive, “alpha”, type-A, high-achieving personalities) are unlikely to seek out opportunities to join it, let alone succeed during A&S and training.

Lack of personality fit could also result in non-selection of a candidate who may have met other standards. Focus group participants explained that this could manifest in multiple ways. Individuals who do not fit in well with their team may receive harsher treatment or be ostracized during A&S, potentially resulting in poorer performance. While A&S can be a “cut-throat,” competitive environment, participants explained that teamwork is an essential component of success, both in terms of a candidate’s ability to endure and in terms of qualities needed for selection. Those who otherwise excel, but whom leaders decide do not have the right personality, may be dropped at the end of A&S or training.

I knew folks who attrited at the upper end of the skill level, whose personality didn't mesh. They rubbed folks the wrong way, and performance won't outweigh that if they don't want to have you in squadron. Some came across one way that maybe they weren't, but the instructor doesn't see all sides, just your awkward side.

Some said that female candidates are less likely to have personalities perceived as fitting in with the unit. The belief that female candidates are dropped due to personality issues was perceived as a deterrent for some women to attempt A&S processes.

In RASP [Ranger Assessment and Selection Program] we had a female in our unit who had the mindset to persevere and did well, but she didn't get along with everyone. She got peer'd out because of her attitude and commitment. Didn't jive with others.

Furthermore, some women focus group participants said that decision-makers discouraged or prevented them from pursuing certain paths due to perceived personality mismatches – treatment they characterized as gender-based.

Getting to AFSOC, leadership at pilot training did a lot of dissuading for me and another girl because we wanted to go a different route. They said our personalities wouldn't be great there and that we'd be eaten alive. I wholeheartedly believe I made the right call in coming to AFSOC. I felt that I was told because I was a female I couldn't make it.

Unit cohesion and personality are critical factors to readiness and lethality in all military units. Evaluating individuals based on personality, however, could open potential for bias. Rather than relying on subjective assessments of personality fit, some participants viewed more measurable qualities, including teamwork, leadership, and character, with greater importance. Using formal, validated approaches to measuring these personal qualities could help mitigate the risk for bias perceived as arising from assessments of personality fit. SMs held positive views of using formal psychological assessments to identify individuals with greater likelihood of completing the A&S and training pipelines and succeeding in examined units/specialties.

The use of our embedded psychologist and personality traits, we do a lot. The traits that the units grade individuals on...we objectively grade them as a number.

E. Experiences in and Perceptions of Units/Specialties Examined

Put simply, special operations and aviation jobs are hard, and they take a toll on those who hold them. Focus group participants described frequent deployments, high operation tempos, and intense physically and mentally demanding work in the examined units/specialties. For some, positive perceptions of command climate, comradery, and serving an important mission outweigh these ongoing challenges; for others, these challenges reduce interest to serve in these roles. An individual's willingness and ability to manage these challenges can also shift over time, impacting retention. Summarized in Table 20 and the two sections that follow, we discuss barriers in two areas related to experiences in or perceptions of examined units/specialties: family life and command climate and inclusion.

Table 20. Barriers Related to Experiences in and Perceptions of Examined Units/Specialties

Barrier	Service Member Quotations
<p><u>Impacts on family life:</u> High operational tempo, frequent deployments, and rigid career trajectories keep members away from their families, and physical demands are perceived to harm women’s fertility</p>	<p><i>There are a lot of females who struggle with getting pregnant, maybe because of the radar. [...] Do I have to start freezing my eggs?</i></p> <p><i>I thought about [becoming a SOF operator] highly but I didn’t want to be gone that long and didn’t want to put my wife and family in that position</i></p>
<p><u>Command climate and inclusion:</u> Perceptions of non-inclusive climates and resistance to culture change may demoralize women and minority members and deter potential recruits</p>	<p><i>We can only get the mission done. Everything else is a distraction. We can’t have a female there in these missions when there are so many issues that come with it</i></p> <p><i>Drugs, there’s a zero tolerance policy. Same with sexual harassment and discrimination. But it’s not really zero tolerance [...]. DOD looks away because these guys are getting the mission done. Why take someone away because they put their hand on a girl?</i></p>

a. Barrier: Family life difficult to manage given high op-tempos and rigid career trajectories

Across examined units/specialties, participants said that service in special operator or aviation roles is difficult – if not impossible – to balance with family life. Focus group participants believed that this barrier disproportionately affects women operators and pilots, given social norms surrounding men’s and women’s roles in raising children, as well as many women’s desires to have pregnancies. Focus group participants commonly worried about the impact careers in SOF and aviation units/specialties may have on women’s fertility. Some pilots, for example, believed flying could negatively affect women’s egg count or quality. In discussions about special operators, male and female focus group participants believed that wear and tear on women’s body’s over time would harm women’s ability to bear children.

Exacerbating concerns about fertility, several women focus group participants discussed poor reproductive and maternal health care. Women participants believed that medical staff are not adequately trained to address women’s health needs and that women SMs face significant barriers to accessing reproductive and maternal health care.

Rigid promotion timelines required for continued service in the military more broadly contributed to perceived conflicts between women’s ability to plan families or bear children while simultaneously serving in examined units/specialties. Pilot career trajectories in particular include required flight hours and specifically timed milestones

necessary for promotion. Focus group participants said that limitations on flying during pregnancy impede women pilots from flying adequate hours and achieving milestones.

Our paths are very structured on how to promote and continue in aviation or as a 1310. Even if you don't fly those billets, to stay on path, you need to hit your milestones. Being Department head falls at your primary child-bearing years. Hate to say it, but it's just science.

The high operational tempo of special operations and aviation units can also severely limit the time men and women have to spend with their families. Participants explained that many military practices and policies reflect outdated assumptions about division of labor, when predominantly male service members had wives who took care of children and the home. This vision no longer reflects the typical American household, however. Dual-military couples face even greater challenges with balancing their work and family lives. In addition to the disproportionate demands managing family life places on women SMs, some focus group participants from ethnic/racial backgrounds explained that they faced significant conflict between cultural expectations regarding family obligations and frequent deployment schedules or overseas duty stations.

Participants commonly felt that challenges related to pregnancy and family obligations may be insurmountable, but a few pointed out means of addressing them. Ensuring that leaders and other decision-makers are correctly informed about policies relating to pregnant and postpartum women can help protect women from some negative career impacts, such as through waivers. Participants also asserted that new policies and practices must be developed to better support women and parents in general. They hoped that increased representation of women, particularly among pilots, would eventually lead to structural change and normalization of SMs managing both their careers and family lives. Facilitating opportunities to highlight pilots who have had children and successful careers could also better enable more junior SMs to follow their example.

May come to a reckoning with more females in the helo (helicopter) community. When we were junior officers there weren't many, but now a lot more. All the younger LTs will move up, they will need to figure it out. A lot will want to have families. There are a lot more female COs (Commanding Officers) now, it's coming, Navy will need to deal with it. Women will not all get out, people will demand better.

Finally, pilots commonly discussed a heavy burden of additional duties, which took away time spent with their families and limited their ability to get in their required flying time. Assessing whether these additional duties could be shifted to support roles could be a step toward alleviating both of these challenges.

The high operation tempo of the units/specialties examined may exacerbate challenges related to balancing family life and having children, but some participants noted that these challenges are a broader military issue as well. Addressing these barriers could increase women's propensity for military service more broadly.

b. Barrier: Negative perceptions of and experiences with command climate and inclusiveness

During focus groups, the research team asked participants from specialties/units not specified in Section 557 about their perceptions of command climate within the examined units/specialties. Most participants had little familiarity with examined units/specialties, and they expressed a mix of positive and negative views.

Those who held positive views perceived special operators and pilots to be among the best of the best, with primarily combat-focused roles and demanding but fulfilling work environments. Those who held negative views expressed concerns about unit cultures, including poor treatment of women and ethnic/racial minority groups, lack of respect for women's capabilities, and impunity for harmful behaviors. Some said that this contributed to their lack of interest in these fields, but participants also noted these issues are present in the broader force.

I made sure to avoid certain areas because of things I read about their cultures. That was a big thing for me. I didn't have any particular job in mind I wanted. Finding a culture that wasn't toxic was one of the main reasons I came into the job I did.

Notably, some participants believed that the lack of women and ethnic/racial minorities in certain specialties/units meant that those units were unlikely to be inclusive of underrepresented groups, even in the absence of discriminatory or toxic behaviors. They believed that being the only, or one of a few, women or ethnic/racial minorities in a unit would feel isolating and uncomfortable. Participants said that exposure to women and ethnic/racial minorities serving in the examined units/specialties would not only increase confidence among underrepresented groups that they could succeed in those roles, but also that they would be included and respected.

Some also said that exposure to examined units/specialties more broadly could help to dispel negative assumptions about diversity, equity, and inclusion within these units. Indeed, many focus group participants in examined units/specialties believed that their units had positive cultures and command climates. Frequently, they said that their cultures were performance-driven – people are judged and respected based on their performance.

Still, a number of participants from ethnic/racial minority groups described specific negative experiences they were concerned might be due to their racial or ethnic background. Elevating positive experiences may help to alleviate concerns about

discrimination or mistreatment, but harmful cultures and behaviors must also be addressed. Climates that are unwelcoming to ethnic/racial minorities and women may be the result of behaviors and cultures that have traditionally built cohesiveness and comradery. Several focus group participants asserted that aspects of their units' culture, such as race-related jokes or other behaviors that may be bothersome or offensive to women and/or minorities, should not change. These groups are expected to "take the joke" to become part of the team.

They will have to assimilate to the culture. There are plenty of women who joke around, and [men] like them, but some [women] say, "you can't say that," and people don't like that.

However, other members and non-members of examined units/specialties did believe there was room for change.

Some things we just have to beat out of our lexicon. We have to be proactive about rooting things out. Seeing a big confederate flag or seeing Trump stuff makes me feel unwelcome.

Compounding resistance to change within examined units/specialties, many focus group participants held negative perceptions of DEI efforts within DOD. Some worried that these efforts would lead decision-makers to force increases in representation of women and ethnic/racial minorities at the expense of standards and, as a result, compromise on recruit quality. Even if increased diversity does not reflect lowered standards, participants believed that the high visibility of diversity efforts would lead to the perception that standards had been lowered.

The problem with looking at numbers, they start thinking, "Am I only here because I'm a number?" That's an issue, at some prior jobs I was thinking this. "Do I deserve to be here?" Imposter syndrome. You need to outperform others to prove that you deserve to be here.

Force Recon and almost none of the SOF units/specialties included in IDA's focus groups had women members. However, many said that if a woman were to join, she would likely not be respected due to beliefs that she did not meet the same rigorous standards to which males were held.

There was a time where most of the community was 100% against women coming in. Now they say, "as long as they meet standards, do the same thing and the standards are not lowered, I'm cool with it." But when the first woman makes it through, the initial thought will be, "she got pushed through." I can relate in that when I went through BUD/S... people in my class thought I didn't get dropped because I was

Black and they pushed me through. There's nothing Navy can do to control that, I think that's people's mindsets sadly.

To a lesser extent, these views were also held of aviation specialties, where women's participation has historically been higher than in operator specialties.

There are some crusty old instructors that will say some sexist things [...]. Everyone deals with some sexism, but not that many people are like that.

Other participants believed that DEI efforts are creating problems where they previously did not exist. They argued that DEI was being forced on the examined units/specialties for political purposes to the detriment of individual SMs as well as readiness and mission accomplishment.

Their reasons are to increase diversity across the force, and they'll do it by any means necessary.

Indeed, some focus group participants from examined units/specialties were not sure there were any concrete benefits to having greater diversity in their units/specialties. Their unit's sole purpose is to accomplish the mission, and they are highly effective in doing so at current levels of diversity.

At the end of the day, what is the purpose of the DOD – to keep the nation safe, at the behest of the government against a foreign entity. Does that foreign entity give two shits about diversity?

Notably, some members had concerns about increasing women's representation in Force Recon and special operations units. They believed that the jobs they do are not suited to women's strengths and that in foreign operational contexts, women operators would not be respected by in-country nationals. Others believed that women's presence would be disruptive. They worried that the presence of women in their teams would lead to romantic or sexual relationships that degrade unit cohesion, due to accusations of mistreatment, or sow conflict in male operators' marriages. Furthermore, some argued that the presence of women operators would put all operators at greater risk in combat situations or make their units less effective in general.

Overseas, the alphas will try to protect the women and some of the opponents will specifically target them.

In addition to addressing these concerns, some participants said that communication needs to improve to increase awareness among current members of the benefits of gender and ethnic/racial diversity, particularly to the extent that there are concrete impacts on readiness or mission accomplishment.

Show us why that would make us better at our job. Ok. How? There are ways but they're not explaining it.

This could perhaps be achieved in part by elevating the perspectives of SMs who do see value in greater diversity – not only to increase awareness, but also to shift norms and willingness to change views and behaviors.

Although some participants expressed concerns about forced diversity, most participants affirmed the value of diversity, as long as it was achieved through legitimate means. Focus group participants believed that greater diversity was important to operational units' ability to interact with foreign communities during deployments. For example, they believed that women may be better able to extract intelligence from other women. Others said that ethnic/racial minorities are better equipped to interact with and blend into foreign communities, particularly if they speak local languages and resemble location populations. Beyond this, some ethnic/racial minority participants explained that their cultural backgrounds and experiences as minorities or living in urban environments equipped them with strong cross-cultural skills.

Yes, given NSW's mission, if you want to take a platoon or task force of dudes and have effective operations in Africa, who will you send, a White guy or me? You want that relationship, even someone with a cultural background like me, who knows different languages and cultures, that is the key.

Even outside of operational environments, focus group participants believed diversity to be important for soft skills, such as problem solving and leadership. These perspectives may be important to convey among pilot/aviation specialties, where participants sometimes had greater doubts about the utility of diversity.

Having that diversity when you rise up helps with motivating kids. It helps build kids back up and integrate them into the team. It's not about having 20% of this group, that doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what you look like. But to be a good leader, you need all the different backgrounds.

Efforts to highlight these positive perspectives could have effects beyond shifting normative beliefs about the value of diversity and the legitimacy of adopting strategies to increase diversity. In particular, doing so could also help demonstrate that women and ethnic/racial minority SMs are valued in units where they are underrepresented. This may both improve inclusion of minorities and women in the units/specialties examined, as well as reduce prospective recruits' hesitance about joining.

F. Conclusion

Figure 7 summarizes the barriers and enabling practices discussed in this chapter.

Recruitment	Selection and Training	Culture and Climate
<p><i>Outreach and communication</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of awareness and/or interest among minorities • Recruiters disincentivized to recruit to examined specialties • In-service recruitment focused on narrow career fields with fewer minorities <p><i>Career risks and limitations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of support from leadership in originating units for in-service career transitions • Perceived harm to career upon failing to qualify (e.g., stuck in undesirable job) • Lack of career flexibility limits ability to transfer to units/specialties examined 	<p><i>Physical and mental standards</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges meeting initial eligibility requirements • Challenges meeting high physical standards for selection • Injury/illness preventing progression through pipeline • Doubts about ability to meet academic requirements in flight school • Lack of access to preparatory training among minorities <p><i>Selection practices</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived biases/disparate treatment in A&S and training • Subjective assessments exclude some candidates based on “fit” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family life difficult to manage given frequent deployments and high operation tempo • Mixed perceptions of command climate (i.e., comradery and fulfilling work, but experiences of exclusion and friction related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts)

Figure 7. Overview of Perceived Barriers to Participation in Units/Specialties Examined

Many of the barriers this study identified affect both majority and minority populations, as well as men and women, but many may compound disadvantages or distinct barriers that ethnic/racial minority populations and women face. The units/specialties examined have stringent standards for entry and A&S processes designed to filter out all but the best qualified candidates – broadly speaking, this is necessary for the effectiveness of these units/specialties. However, recruitment practices that limit exposure to the examined units/specialties and roadblocks to pursuing in-service lateral moves may unnecessarily narrow the pool of candidates who consider or pursue opportunities in the examined units/specialties.

When combined with potential for disproportionate disqualification by initial entry requirements (e.g., history of legal/disciplinary issues, citizenship status) and historical lack of access to formal and informal preparatory resources among ethnic/racial minorities, early narrowing of the pool of individuals who attempt to join the examined units/specialties could restrict the representation of ethnic/racial minorities in these units.

Further, conflicts between family life, operational tempo, and physical demands of careers in the examined units/specialties affect both men and women; however, social norms regarding women's roles in family life and childbearing may exacerbate these conflicts and restrict participation of women. Issues – whether real or erroneously perceived – related to disparate treatment of minorities and women in A&S processes and their participation in the examined units/specialties could intensify the difficulty of meeting grueling physical and mental challenges during selection processes, and could further discourage underrepresented groups from pursuing opportunities to join.

These barriers may reflect societal, political, and structural factors, and efforts in each of these domains may be required to fully address them. In the next chapter, we provide recommendations of actions the Services could take to continue shifting the needle on representation of ethnic/racial minority and women in the units/specialties examined.

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7. Progress on Past Recommendations and Remaining Challenges

A. Overview

In this chapter, we review DOD's progress on recommendations made in the 1999 RAND report to improve representation of ethnic/racial minorities in SOF; where relevant, we also address progress as related to the integration of women in SOF.²⁵ This chapter focuses only on SOF because the 1999 RAND recommendations were specific to SOF.

In line with past recommendations, DOD has taken significant action to expand recruitment and outreach to underrepresented groups, ensure the validity of SOF standards and the rigor of the assessment and selection process, and track demographic variables and command climate to assess progress (see Figure 8). In total, IDA assessed progress on 18 recommendations made by RAND in 1999,²⁶ as described in Table 22 and Appendix F. Of these recommendations, seven appear to be fully complete. One recommendation is not complete but may no longer be relevant. The final ten recommendations are partially complete and/or in progress, as coordinated and sustained action on DEI in SOF has accelerated in recent years.

Over the past few years, United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) has created new offices and positions to concentrate on DEI, developed a Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Strategic Plan, and developed a comprehensive D&I Implementation Action Plan. USSOCOM's Strategic Plan and Implementation Action Plans include initiatives relevant to many of the RAND recommendations, but they also move beyond the recommendations—which predominantly focus on increasing diversity—to initiatives that promote inclusive command climates and fair/equitable opportunities, assessments, selections, and developmental processes.

It is too soon to comment on the impact or effectiveness of these recent efforts. Instead, this chapter documents progress to date and remaining challenges to serve as a baseline to inform DOD's efforts moving forward (see Figure 8).

²⁵ The 1999 RAND report did not address integration of women, as SOF career fields were closed to women at the time.

²⁶ IDA combined some RAND recommendations with similar content/themes and separated other recommendations that were described in the same paragraph but appeared to be distinct.

Progress	Specialized SOF recruiters	Operationally relevant and gender-neutral standards	D&I Strategic/Action Plans
	Inclusion of minority SOF members in outreach	Preparatory training at recruitment and before/during assessment	Focus expanded beyond diversity to inclusion
Challenges	Recruiting events in minority communities	Inclusion of women in training cadre (Navy)	Routine tracking and reporting of race/ethnicity and gender
	Some images of minority members on websites		Climate surveys and sensing sessions
	Recruitment	Selection & Training	DEI Infrastructure
	Recruiters incentivized to meet numeric targets, not to engage diverse populations	Misconceptions about lowered standards for diversity may undermine inclusion	Challenges integrating data across services and systems
	Minority SOF members disproportionately tasked with outreach	Unclear if an ongoing and transparent mechanism exists to validate/ensure relevancy of standards	Survey fatigue and concern about lack of anonymity
	Perceived need for engagement with youth at an earlier age	Minorities may have fewer opportunities to prepare/train prior to service	Some USSOCOM component staff serve in D&I roles as an additional duty
	SOF websites lack sufficient images of minorities and content on career benefits		Concerns about obtaining buy-in at all levels and encountering backlash to DEI initiatives

Note: The term “minorities” in this figure refers to women and ethnic/racial minorities.

Figure 8. Summary of Progress on 1999 RAND Recommendations and Challenges in Recruitment Assessment and Selection and Training, and DEI Infrastructure

B. Methodology

The IDA team conducted 56 interview sessions (80 participants in total, as some interview sessions included more than one attendee; see Table 21). We began by speaking with current USSOCOM staff assigned to DEI-related roles; these individuals then referred us to other staff who could speak to our primary areas of focus. We also held interviews with DOD/service personnel outside of USSOCOM to provide information about recruiting and DEI efforts.

To supplement interviews with current personnel and gain a broader historical perspective, we also interviewed former military personnel with relevant expertise and/or who previously served in SOF. Former military interviewees consisted of IDA staff or professional acquaintances of IDA staff; we primarily used these sessions to understand the historical context and generate hypotheses to explore in interviews with current DOD staff. Finally, where relevant, we pull in insights from the focus group discussions (focus group results are discussed in full in Chapter 6).

Table 21. Interview Participants

Organization	Count of Interview Sessions	Count of Interview Participants
Current military and civilian personnel	36	60
<i>U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM)</i>	27	46
Headquarters	10	11
Theater (SOCNORTH, SOCKOR, SOCPAC, SOCEUR) ^a	4	11
U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC)	3	3
Naval Special Warfare Command (NSWC)	4	11
Marine Corps Special Operations Command (MARSOC)	4	5
Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC)	2	5
<i>Other DOD/Service (Service HQ, recruiting, DEI)^b</i>	9	14
Former military personnel or others with SOF expertise	20	20
<i>Army (USA)</i>	10	10
<i>Navy (USN)</i>	5	5
<i>Marine Corps (USMC)^c</i>	0	0
<i>Air Force (USAF)</i>	3	3
<i>Other subject matter experts</i>	2	2
Total	56	80

Notes:

- a. Special Operations Command North (SOCNORTH), Special Operations Command Korea (SOCKOR), Special Operations Command Pacific (SOCPAC), Special Operations Command Europe (SOCEUR)
- b. Includes two interview sessions in the Army, one in the Navy, two in the Marine Corps, three in the Air Force, and one in DOD.
- c. IDA reached out to a convenience sample of military personnel or others with SOF expertise to supplement interviews with current personnel, but did not have connections with any Marine Corps veterans with knowledge about MARSOC.

IDA conducted semi-structured interviews with the specific focus varying depending on the interviewee’s area of expertise. After each interview, the note taker coded interview content to align with specific recommendations and more general topic areas. The interviewer for the session then reviewed the notes/coding and made edits as needed. The IDA team also conducted a review of publicly available research, reports, and articles focused specifically on information relevant to past recommendations.

1. Review of 1999 RAND Recommendations

In 1999, RAND issued recommendations to improve ethnic/racial diversity in SOF. In Table 22, we summarize each recommendation, categorized by topic. Each subsequent section of this chapter discusses progress on a set of recommendations, as noted in the table. For brevity, Appendix F includes 4 additional service-specific recommendations not addressed in this chapter.

We note recommendations as complete if the Services have taken the recommended action. We note recommendations as partial/in progress if work on the recommendation is still ongoing and/or if the recommendation has only been partially executed. Finally, we note recommendations as incomplete if the recommended action has not yet been taken.

Because many of the recommendations are quite broad and open-ended, ongoing progress on the recommendations is not a limitation; rather, it is expected and warranted given the need for long-term engagement to make an impact on diversity outcomes. Indeed, we find that the majority of recommendations are still in progress, as SOCOM has accelerated action to increase diversity in the ranks over the past few years and intends to make additional headway with its D&I Implementation Action Plan.

Table 22. 1999 RAND Recommendations by Category

Recommendation	Section
Recruitment	
– Recruiters and Outreach Personnel	C.1
Educate recruiters about SOF to better inform potential candidates	
Hold recruiters accountable by withholding credit until completion of initial SOF screening	
Ensure ethnic/racial minority SOF members attend recruiting events	
– Outreach to the Public and Current SMs	C.2
Increase SOF engagement with minority high schools and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and hold demonstrations with parachute teams in minority locations	
Engage with youth programs (e.g., swim/water polo teams, Boy Scouts), especially in minority communities	
Educate soldiers about SF early in their careers, before career plans are set	
– Recruiting Images and Messaging	C.3
Continue to include images of ethnic/racial minorities in recruiting materials	
Convey the positive attributes of SOF to include prestige, skilled teams, important missions, and transferability of skills	
Assessment and Selection (A&S) and Training	
	D
Validate that entry, assessment, and training standards are relevant for job performance	
Continue to increase awareness about swimming training programs (USA and USN)	
USA should use the Field Artillery (FA) composite of the ASVAB instead of the General Technical (GT) score	
DEI Infrastructure	
	E
Monitor SOF race/ethnicity data through entry, assessment, and training (USAF)	
Develop a database with detailed information on SOF candidates to allow for “enhanced monitoring” (USAF and USN)	
Assess presence of racist behavior in SOF through surveys and focus groups (USA)	

C. Recruitment and Outreach

With only 29 percent of the young adult population (ages 17–24) even eligible for military service,²⁷ ensuring that recruitment strategies appeal to a broader population is critical for the sustainability of the all-volunteer force. Recruiting to SOF poses an even greater challenge, as the current underrepresentation of women and ethnic/racial minorities may discourage these groups from pursuing SOF as a career. In the subsections that follow (C.1–C.3) we discuss various components of the recruitment process: (1) recruiters and outreach personnel, (2) outreach to the public and current SMs, and (3) recruiting images and messaging. Within each section, we directly address relevant recommendations from the 1999 RAND report.




1. Recruiters and Outreach Personnel

The Services have varying approaches to recruit for SOF, depending on their primary source of accessions. Nevertheless, they commonly employ personnel trained specifically to recruit for SOF. The Services also recognize the need for greater representation of women and ethnic/racial minorities in recruiting/outreach efforts and are making concerted efforts to achieve this end. However, given their underrepresentation in SOF, women and ethnic/racial minorities will carry a disproportionate share of the burden of participating in recruiting/outreach efforts.

Moreover, although service leaders are increasingly emphasizing the importance of diversity, service recruiters are incentivized to meet recruiting targets/goals, which may supersede concerns about engaging with minority populations. This incentive leads some recruiters to focus on dependable, but typically less diverse, sources/populations for achieving those targets. Table 23 and subsections C.1.a-c discuss progress on RAND recommendations relevant to recruiters and outreach personnel.

²⁷ JAMRS, “The Target Population for Military Recruitment: Youth Eligible to Enlist Without a Waiver,” PowerPoint, Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, September 2016, <https://dacowits.defense.gov/Portals/48/Documents/General%20Documents/RFI%20Docs/Sept2016/JAMRS%20RFI%2014.pdf?ver=2016-09-09-164855-510>.

Table 23. Progress on Recommendations: Recruiters and Outreach Personnel

1999 RAND Recommendations	Status	Challenges and Additional Considerations
Educate recruiters about SOF to better inform potential candidates	 Partial/In progress – The Services have recruiters that receive specialized training to recruit for SOF. However, additional education for non-specialized recruiters may be warranted.	
Hold recruiters accountable until completion of initial screening	 Complete – Direct accession recruiters for SOF do not receive credit for recruits until they pass screening needed to receive a contract/enter basic training.	Although diversity is a priority, recruiters may reach out to reliable (mostly White) recruiting populations if they are falling short of targets.
Ensure ethnic/racial minority SOF members attend recruiting events	 Partial/In progress – The Services consider diversity of SOF members participating in outreach events and are working to increase representation.	Efforts to increase diversity of SOF members engaging in outreach events could place an undue burden on women and ethnic/racial minorities.

a. Educate recruiters about SOF

In line with RAND’s recommendation to improve education for recruiters on SOF, the Services have developed tailored approaches to recruiting, allowing recruiters to focus specifically on SOF. We designated this recommendation as partial/in progress because efforts in this area are ongoing. The Services are continuing to improve recruiter efficacy by enhancing coordination between USSOCOM components and recruiting commands. Further additional education may be needed for general recruiters, especially in the Army, where there are no specialized recruiters for SF direct accessions.

Specific recruiting approaches vary by service depending on whether SOF candidates are recruited directly into the specialty upon joining the military (i.e., direct accessions; Navy, Air Force, and Army SF²⁸) or are recruited once in military service (Marine Corps and Army). The Navy’s Warrior Challenge Recruiting Command and the Air Force’s 330th Recruiting Squadron recruit for SOF direct accessions as well as a few other specialties. These specialized recruiters do not typically have SOF experience themselves but receive training about SOF and participate in SOF immersion events.

Recruiters can also leverage former SOF members (i.e., coordinators/developers) who provide mentorship and training to SOF candidates. Additionally, about 20 percent of the Air Force’s 330th Recruiting Squadron is composed of Special Warfare operators/enablers.

²⁸ Army SF are recruited as direct accessions (18X) once they are already in military service.

Naval Special Warfare Command (NSWC) recently stood up the NSW Assessment Command (NSWAC) to specifically focus on outreach, initial assessment of candidates, and direct coordination with Naval Recruiting Command. As part of this effort, NSWAC works with regional recruiting offices (Naval Talent Acquisition Groups) to support outreach events and improve recruiter understanding of SOF.

The Army takes a hybrid approach to recruiting, with some direct accessions to SF as well as in-service recruiting for SF and Rangers. In-service recruiting is specialized through the United States Army Recruiting (USAREC) Special Operations Recruiting Battalion (SORB), composed of career recruiters as well as detailees from U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) (about 40 percent of members). SORB also receives support from a USASOC team focused on marketing, recruiting, and accessions. Direct accession recruiting to SF (18X) is not specialized; however, recruiters receive support from the Special Operations Recruiting Support Division and from USASOC liaison officers.

The Marine Corps only recruits to SOF from in-service candidates. MARSOC sends its operators and Special Operations Capable Specialists to train at Marine Corps Recruiting School so they can directly recruit eligible Marines. Direct-accession recruiters do not recruit directly to SOF and do not receive any in-depth training about SOF beyond a reference book on military occupational specialties. Before the onset of COVID-19, MARSOC briefed recruiting schools; MARSOC is now seeking to reinstitute this briefing.

Focus group participants described varying experiences with direct-accession recruiters, but many noted that their recruiter did not have much information about SOF and tended to steer them to other specialties to meet their recruiting quotas. Although Navy and Air Force have specialized SOF recruiters, general recruiters may still require additional education about SOF to appropriately refer interested candidates. Army focus group participants often noted that their direct-accession recruiters did not have a strong understanding of SF or the 18X contract option; thus, additional education may be warranted for Army recruiters in particular. Although Marine Corps direct-accession recruiters do not recruit to MARSOC, knowledge about SOF may be useful when recruits inquire about future career options because advanced preparation is needed for these specialties.

b. Hold recruiters accountable

In 1999, RAND recommended withholding credit from recruiters until after recruits pass initial screening. This recommendation appears to be complete as direct-accession recruiters do not receive credit for new SOF recruits until after they pass a screening required to obtain a contract/enter basic training. For the Navy, SOF recruiters receive credit after recruits pass an initial screening by NSW Program Managers. For the Air Force,

SOF recruiters receive credit at two time points: when the recruit moves to initial development and when they enter Basic Military Training.

Although a worthwhile practice, it is unclear whether using initial screening to hold recruiters accountable affects the diversity of recruits. Instead, interviewees emphasized the importance of focused and sustained leadership attention on diversity in recruiting. Across the Services, recruiters now receive guidance from leadership about the importance of recruiting diverse populations.

Nonetheless, a key challenge is that recruiters are only held accountable for the total number of recruits they bring in, regardless of their demographic background. Several interviewees pointed out the inherent tension between recruiting diverse populations, which can be more difficult to attract to SOF, and meeting overall recruiting targets. Interviewees explained that recruiters may engage in locations with which they are most familiar or that have been fruitful in the past; with a majority of White male recruiters, this can result in a disproportionate focus on less diverse locations.

One potential strategy to focus recruiter attention on diverse populations may be to augment recruitment and outreach staffing overall and then remove or lower recruiting targets for a subset of experienced recruiters. These recruiters would then be empowered to exclusively engage with populations that may have a lower propensity for SOF service. The Services could also set diversity targets for SOF, as the Air Force has done for pilots. Specifically, the Air Force set diversity targets for pilot career field recruiting in FY 2021; this will not include specific quotas for recruiters, but rather will serve to inform and motivate recruiting efforts and marketing strategies overall.²⁹

Similarly, the USCG Recruiting Command encourages recruiters to seek out 25 percent women and 35 percent minorities, although this is not a formal goal. Such approaches could result in pushback, however, as focus group participants expressed reservations about recruiting targets. They noted that recruiting targets may further fuel misperceptions about standards being lowered to increase diversity.

c. Ensure ethnic/racial minority SOF members attend recruiting events

In line with RAND's recommendation to include ethnic/racial minorities in outreach, the Services have made concerted efforts to increase diversity among recruiters and SOF members who attend outreach events. Work in this area remains in progress, however, as ensuring adequate representation is a challenge when women and ethnic/racial minorities remain underrepresented in SOF.

²⁹ Stephen Losey, "Air Force Sets Diversity Targets for Recruiting," *Air Force Times*, September 18, 2020, <https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2020/09/18/air-force-sets-diversity-targets-for-recruiting/>.

Interviewees and focus group participants alike often remarked that women and ethnic/racial minorities are disinclined to pursue SOF because they do not see many people like them included. Recognizing the importance of representation, the Services are all diversifying their recruiting and outreach teams.

For example, a key aim of the NSWAC is to provide a diverse group of Navy special operators to attend outreach events and engage with potential recruits. Air Force's 330th Recruiting Squadron regularly includes minority Special Warfare members in recruiting events and also includes female members of related specialties (e.g., Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape and Explosive Ordinance Disposal). MARSOC aims to assemble diverse recruiting teams and often includes a mix of operators and Special Operations Capable Specialists, who tend to have greater diversity. In the last FY, SORB held Super Total Army Involved in Recruiting (TAIR) events which included demographically diverse teams of operators; however, the recruiting events were not fruitful and were discontinued.

Nonetheless, interviewees often indicated that greater diversity is needed, especially among recruiters (e.g., the Air Force's 330th Recruiting Squadron only has one female recruiter and MARSOC's recruiting team does not include any women). A few interviewees cautioned against substantially increasing assignment of women and ethnic/racial minorities to recruiting positions because it could have a negative impact on their careers by diverting them away from positions more likely to lead to promotion. Likewise, although interviewees emphasized the importance of diverse representation in outreach events, they noted that it could put an undue burden on women and ethnic/racial minorities who are underrepresented in SOF:

Problem is, to get White men on the trip, you can pick [from] 90% of [the] population. So a man can do it every two years. Whereas if you want a woman to go, now asking her to go six times per year. So we say we'd be better at it if we included minorities, but now we're taxing our minorities and they can't take advantage of other opportunities.

Other interviewees countered that those participating in outreach events have not reported feeling overburdened and tend to welcome the opportunity. In addition, assignments to recruiting or outreach-oriented organizations can be completed in between more demanding operational assignments/deployments when SOF members are routinely afforded a respite. As efforts to recruit underrepresented groups advance, DOD and USSOCOM should ensure that women and ethnic/racial minorities, who will be disproportionately tasked to support these efforts, are not overtasked.

USSOCOM should also consider a means to encourage and incentivize informal outreach. Interviewees and focus group participants emphasized the powerful impact of direct personal connections on career decisions. SOF members often discuss opportunities with members of their previous units or visit their high schools or universities. Leaders

may directly mentor high-performing SMs to consider SOF. Given that the majority of SOF members are White and male, this informal outreach may disproportionately reach their White-male networks.³⁰

Ethnic/racial minorities and women in SOF could make a significant impact by motivating their social networks to consider SOF. Indeed, minority focus group participants often noted that personal contact with SOF members or veterans who “looked like them” motivated them to join SOF. Referral reward programs, similar to existing initiatives (e.g., “Everyone is a recruiter” (USCG),³¹ Referral Rewards Program (Air National Guard)³²) but tailored to SOF, could be one mechanism to encourage informal outreach.

2. Outreach to the Public and Current SMs

The Services actively seek out recruits from a diverse range of backgrounds through recruitment events across the country (see Table 25). Current recruiting efforts are typically geared towards older adolescent or young adult populations, but interviewees frequently noted the need to reach out to youth in middle school or even elementary school to build interest, motivation, and capability at a young age.

In-service recruitment for SOF predominantly takes place in the Army and Marine Corps.³³ The majority of in-service recruitment efforts are aimed at those who strictly meet entry requirements; this approach risks overlooking motivated SMs who could meet the requirements with additional effort (e.g., ASVAB improvement class). Efforts to enhance and coordinate recruiting are underway, and recruiting is a key focus of DOD-wide initiatives to increase diversity, as well as USSOCOM’s Draft D&I Implementation and Action Plan. See Table 24 and sections C.2.a-c for details on progress and remaining challenges with respect to outreach events.




³⁰ Steve McDonald and Jacob C. Day, “Race, Gender, and the Invisible Hand of Social Capital,” *Sociology Compass* 4, no. 7 (2010): 532–543, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2010.00298.x>.

³¹ Kara Noto, “USCG Launches Everyone is a Recruiter Incentive Program,” United States Coast Guard, August 26, 2020, <https://www.mycg.uscg.mil/News/Article/2326105/uscg-launches-everyone-is-a-recruiter-incentive-program/>.

³² David Speicher, “New ANG Referral Program,” Air National Guard, December 03, 2011, <https://www.ang.af.mil/Media/Article-Display/Article/435797/new-ang-referral-program/>.

³³ The USN and USAF offer some limited opportunities to transfer into SOF (both within and outside their respective services).

Table 24. Progress on Recommendations: Outreach to the Public and Current SMs

1999 RAND Recommendation	Status	Challenges and Additional Considerations
Engage with minority high schools and HBCUs; hold demonstrations with parachute teams in minority locations	 Partial/In progress – Recruiting in schools and communities with minority populations occurs, to include parachute demonstrations. Initiatives are underway to coordinate/enhance outreach.	Regional best practices for recruiting are not always centralized and shared. Some interviewees identified the need for more targeted and nuanced approaches to reach diverse populations.
Engage with youth programs in minority communities	 Partial/In progress – Some engagement with youth organizations is evident, but greater emphasis is placed on older adolescents or young adults.	Interviewees emphasized the need for engagement at an earlier age (elementary/middle school) to build sufficient interest, motivation, and capability.
Educate soldiers about SF early in their careers (also relevant to MARSOC)	 Complete – USA SF and MARSOC recruitment includes general advertising and briefings open to all as well as early engagement with officers and recruits in basic training.	Recruitment focused on the eligible population may miss those who would be close to qualifying. Recruiters do not typically consider race/ethnicity of eligible SMs, which could limit their ability to tailor their approach.

a. Engage with minority high schools and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), hold parachute demonstrations

Consistent with RAND’s recommendations, the Services “go where diversity lives”³⁴ by engaging with minority communities in recruitment efforts, to include minority-serving institutions (MSIs) (e.g., HBCUs, Hispanic-serving Institutions (HSIs), indigenous colleges, women’s colleges) and high schools with large ethnic/racial minority populations. However, this recommendation remains in progress as USSOCOM and the Services are still developing plans to advance outreach to diverse populations and improve outreach coordination between recruiting commands and USSOCOM components.

Although many large recruiting events do not focus on SOF specifically, SOF members participate in some events and SOF-specific recruiters are available to engage with interested recruits (Table 25). For example, the Air Force held outreach events at the Southern Heritage Classic (football game at a HBCU), Florida A&M University, and Florida State University, which included a diverse team of Air Force Special Warfare members, including female and ethnic/racial minority speakers.

³⁴ Lolita Baldor, “US Military’s Elite Commando Forces Look to Expand Diversity,” ABC News, June 16, 2021, <https://abcnews4.com/news/nation-world/us-militarys-elite-commando-forces-look-to-expand-diversity>.

In the past year, NSWAC engaged in 60 outreach events in partnership with Navy recruiting, including engagements at 6 high schools and multiple events at HBCUs. Notably, Rear Admiral (RADM) Howard, NSWAC's Commander, engaged with students and leaders at several HBCUs. In the Army, SOF units may directly engage in recruiting efforts; for example, the 7th Special Forces Group recruits at colleges and universities with Spanish-speaking populations as their mission area includes Central and South America.³⁵

All the Services include SOF aerial demonstrations in recruiting events (e.g., professional and collegial sporting events, air shows).³⁶ NSWAC's Naval Parachute team engaged in 38 demonstrations in 2021, including an event at a women's soccer game. The Services also provide other SOF-related demos. For example, the Army has a special operations "adventure" truck featured at various recruiting events that includes interactive activities and education about SOF.³⁷ The Services are increasingly exploring online/digital mechanisms for engagement, using geofencing to target recruiting messages in specific locations and holding online events. This could be a promising avenue to extend outreach to diverse populations.

³⁵ Davis Winkie, "Army Special Operations Command Aims to Reverse Recruiting Woes," *Army Times*, October 19, 2022, https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2022/10/19/army-special-operations-command-aims-to-reverse-recruiting-woes/?utm_source=sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=army-dnr.

³⁶ "United States Special Operations Command Parachute Team 'The Para-Commandos'," United States Special Operations Command Website, accessed October 20, 2021, <https://www.socom.mil/pages/para-commandos.aspx>.

³⁷ U.S. Army Marketing & Engagement Brigade, "#adventuresemi," Facebook, accessed October 20, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/adventuresemi>.

Table 25. Examples of Outreach Events with Diverse Communities

Outreach Event	Service
Outreach at the Southern Heritage Classic with diverse keynote speakers	USAF
Air Force GO Inspire program brings General Officers to recruiting/outreach events; General Officers can request diverse teams to join them	USAF
The Patton and Cavazos Internship Programs provide education for armor/infantry lieutenants and embeds them in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Hispanic-serving Institutions (HSIs) to mentor cadets and encourage greater minority participation in infantry/armor	USA
Strategic Officer Recruiting Detachment (SORD) and United States Military Academy (USMA) provide workshops in high schools and aim to increase awareness and support for ROTC in Black/African American and Hispanic communities ^a	USA
USASOC identified ROTC programs with diverse populations and plans to engage with 15 ROTC campuses, including 5,000 cadets	USA
Junior Officer Diversity Outreach (JODO) provides training to diverse groups of leaders to enable them to recruit and engage within the fleet; ^b NSWAC has engaged in three events with JODO in 2021	USN
RADM Howard, Commander, NSWC, engaged with students and leaders at two HBCUs and one Historically Black Women’s College	USN
NSWC’s Naval Parachute team engaged in 38 demonstrations in 2021, including an event at a women’s soccer game	USN
MARSOC social media Questions and Answers (Q&A) series features diverse members, including Special Operations Capable Specialists who are more ethnically diverse than operators	USMC
MARSOC recruiters directly engage with the eligible population, including those from diverse backgrounds, through Headquarters Marine Corps Marine Corps SOF Screening Team events.	USMC

Notes:

a) Derived from U.S. Army Cadet Command Army, “SORD HOUSTON,” accessed September 14, 2021, https://www.cadetcommand.army.mil/sord_new.aspx.

b) Derived from Navy Recruiting Command, “Lt. Cmdr. McNeal on the JODO Program,” America’s Navy video, America’s Navy video, 1:09, Feb. 19, 2021, <https://www.navy.mil/Resources/Videos/video/784102/>.

As discussed in the previous subsection (7.C.1), recruiters are not always incentivized to reach out to locations with diverse populations. Although the Services provided examples of targeted engagement with ethnic/racial minority populations, the extent to which these efforts are widespread and inclusive of SOF is unclear.

When recruiters do reach out to diverse populations, a few interviewees noted the need for a more nuanced approach—specifically, moving beyond a broad focus on areas with the highest concentrations of minorities (e.g., HBCUs, basketball/football teams) to

more targeted engagement with minorities that have the skillset needed for SOF (e.g., other universities with diverse populations, wrestlers, swimmers).

Although individual recruiters may develop more nuanced strategies on their own, knowledge about regional recruiting efforts is not typically centralized and shared. To address these challenges, the Services are developing mechanisms to enhance coordination of and support for specialized recruiting. USSOCOM's D&I Implementation Action Plan includes numerous efforts to improve engagement with and recruitment of women and ethnic/racial minorities, in coordination with service-wide initiatives.³⁸

b. Engage with youth programs in minority communities

The Services engage with and support youth programs, consistent with RAND's recommendation (e.g., through partnerships with the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC), youth sport teams and competitions, local swim clubs, and robotics competitions). For example, Air Force Special Warfare recruiters host youth swim clubs at AFSOC training locations, organize JROTC obstacle course competitions, and sponsor high school wrestling. However, this recommendation remains in progress as interviewees frequently noted the need to expand outreach to youth, particularly among elementary and middle school students.

Interviewees emphasized the importance of informing youth about SOF at an early age, with some individuals noting that they personally became interested in their SOF specialty in middle school. Interviewees and focus group participants observed that people are often motivated to pursue service at an early age through friends or family who served; ethnic/racial minority and female youth may have fewer veteran role models or may receive warnings from individuals who experienced racism or sexism during past service.

Pursuing a career in SOF requires an enormous level of fortitude and dedication; cultivating interest at an early age may help sustain the motivation needed to succeed. Interviewees also noted that early engagement is necessary to help young people build the skills needed to succeed in SOF (e.g., academic ability, athleticism, swim skills) and to introduce SOF as an option before alternative career plans are made. A few interviewees also noted the need for greater engagement with family members of potential recruits, especially among immigrant populations who may not view the military as a prestigious career choice. Ensuring availability of recruiting materials in other languages is especially important for this reason.

A few individuals pointed to NASA's efforts to engage with and develop curricula for youth in grade school as a potential model to consider. Others noted the importance of

³⁸ United States Special Operations Command, *SOCOM Diversity and Inclusion: Implementation Action Plan FY 2022-2023*, Unpublished draft, September 22, 2021.

SMs volunteering to tutor or coach at local schools and community centers to provide positive military role models. Headquarters Air Force is exploring options to evaluate commanders' performance in advancing DEI, including how they establish community relations in garrison; this may be a promising avenue to enhance military-civilian relations and engagement with youth at all ages.

c. Educate SMs about Special Forces and MARSOC early in their careers; conduct in-service recruiting

RAND recommended that the Army educate soldiers about Special Forces early in their careers. Although MARSOC did not exist at the time of the 1999 RAND report, this recommendation is relevant for MARSOC as well, because it also recruits in-service. This recommendation appears complete as the Army and Marine Corps provide opportunities for members to learn about SOF throughout their careers.

The Army and Marine Corps take similar approaches to in-service recruiting for SOF. MARSOC and SORB recruiters receive a roster of the eligible population that meets entry requirements and engage with these individuals through direct messages and briefings in their commands and/or on their installations. These briefings occur on large installations and are advertised and open to all individuals to attend, even if they do not qualify, but only eligible members are directly notified. The roster of eligible members targeted for recruitment only includes those who meet the exact requirements; this may artificially limit the talent pool available.

It may be fruitful for USASOC and MARSOC to expand the roster to include those who are close to meeting requirements (e.g., ASVAB score near the cutoff) to ensure that all those who are interested can seek training opportunities to meet standards. Nonetheless, the Army and Marine Corps noted that those who do not meet the ASVAB cutoff regularly attend recruiting events and receive guidance from recruiters on resources they can access to help raise their score.

The Army and Marine Corps also noted that they do not typically include race/ethnicity information in rosters provided to recruiters as recruiters target all eligible individuals. However, MARSOC is considering options to more purposefully target and engage with minorities eligible for the Raiders during recruitment efforts. It may be important to consider race/ethnicity in recruitment efforts to help recruiters better engage with eligible members (e.g., connect ethnic/racial minorities with SOF operators who share a similar background).

The Army and Marine Corps also inform SMs about SOF early in their careers, before they become eligible. Both Services include billboards and advertising on installations about SOF. The Marine Corps provides information cards about MARSOC to all recruits during the third phase of boot camp to "plant the seed" about SOF. The Army's Strategic

Officer Recruiting Detachment (SORD) works with USASOC to educate Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) cadets about SOF during summer camps and sends high performers a message from USASOC about their potential eligibility.

Army and Marine Corps focus group participants noted that they often saw information about USASOC and MARSOC through flyers, posters, and e-mails around base. Focus group participants also cited informational sessions and direct recruiter engagement (e.g., SMs contacting recruiters directly, recruiters circulating on base and asking about people's interest). Some participants, however, expressed the need for more direct engagement beyond e-mails (e.g., through more frequent roadshows, and recruitment of minorities by minorities). Focus group participants also identified a need for greater engagement with units outside of infantry, which may be relatively more diverse.

In-service recruiting is relatively less frequent in the Air Force and Navy but does occur. As of 2016, the Air Force allows airmen to move from their current career field to cross-train for special tactics. Those who do not pass assessment and selection or training can move back to their prior career field without penalty,³⁹ however, openings for cross-training are fairly limited. Last year, the Air Force conducted briefings at nine bases about cross-training opportunities. Similarly, NSWAC conducts briefings in San Diego and Norfolk on the Navy Fleet Transition Program for NSW. The program offers mentorship and training opportunities (e.g., fitness, swim) to prepare sailors to transfer into NSW.

Air Force Recruiting Service also seeks to recruit individuals who previously served (prior service) or currently serve in another service (inter-service) but identified a number of barriers to doing so. Specifically, officers from other Services assume a Temporary Duty status during A&S and only apply for transfer to the Air Force if selected. However, enlisted members from other Services must transfer before A&S and risk losing enlistment in their original Service and in the Air Force if they are not selected. Further, recruiters do not receive credit for recruiting prior-service or inter-SMs, which may disincentivize them from engaging with these individuals. Air Force Recruiting Service developed an action plan to be implemented in FY23 and FY24 to address these challenges.

3. Recruiting Images and Messaging



IDA reviewed official SOF websites and SOF-specific recruiting websites to understand the images and messages that may shape people's initial impressions of SOF. Although SOF websites featured some images of ethnic/racial minorities and women, most

³⁹ Ryan Conway, "Policy Changes Allow Airmen to Retrain into Special Ops," *U.S. Air Force*, July 16, 2016, <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/858167/policy-changes-allow-airmen-to-retrain-into-special-ops/>.

pictures featured long-distance action scenes or faces obscured by headgear, making gender and race/ethnicity ambiguous.

A more direct and meaningful portrayal of ethnic/racial minorities and women in marketing materials may be needed; Department-wide efforts are underway to do so. Messaging on SOF websites could also be augmented to attract a broader range of talent by conveying not only the prestige and skill of SOF but also the transferability of skills and other positive features of service in SOF (see Table 26. and sections C.4.a-b for details on progress and ongoing challenges relevant to recruiting communication materials).

Table 26. Progress on Recommendations: Recruiting Images and Messaging

1999 RAND Recommendation	Status	Challenges and Additional Considerations
Continue to include images of ethnic/racial minorities in recruiting materials	 <i>Partial/In progress</i> – Photographs on SOF websites feature some ethnic/racial minorities and women, but images are often ambiguous or feature only White men. A DOD-wide effort is ongoing to review recruiting imagery and ensure diverse representation.	The race/ethnicity and gender of individuals in images are often obscured by headgear or distanced/shadowed action scenes, for operational security reasons.
Convey the positive attributes of SOF to include prestige, skilled teams, important missions, and transferability of skills	 <i>Partial/In progress</i> – SOF websites highlight specialized training and prestige, but most lack content on transferability of skills and other positive career/personal features of SOF service.	

a. Continue to include images of ethnic/racial minorities in recruiting materials

RAND recommended that DOD continue to depict ethnic/racial minorities in recruiting materials. Although some depictions of ethnic/racial minorities and women on SOF websites is evident, greater representation is needed. This recommendation remains in progress as the Department is reviewing and revising its recruitment materials to ensure greater diversity in imagery and is developing a plan to track and measure diversity in

public materials.⁴⁰ Several of our interviewees confirmed that USSOCOM is in the process of reviewing and revising the images it displays in communication materials.

The Army, Navy, and Air Force SOF websites include a few images of Black male SMs.⁴¹ However, depictions of ethnic/racial minorities and women are limited across SOF websites, mainly because the majority of images include individuals at a distance, in shadows, or wearing headgear that obscure their faces (see Figure 9). Although distanced/obscured images may be considered neutral, because race/ethnicity and gender are unclear, audiences may assume that the images represent White males who are disproportionately represented within SOF.

As our interviewees and focus group participants frequently noted, ethnic/racial minorities and women do not see themselves represented among current SOF members; thus, neutral images are unlikely to convince underrepresented groups that there may be a place for them in SOF. Instead, direct depictions of ethnic/racial minorities and women may be necessary. However, as some focus group participants pointed out, the Services should avoid presenting unrealistically diverse images that appear forced. Rather than generic images of diversity, focus group participants found meaningful depictions of minority individuals and their accomplishments to be more effective.

⁴⁰ Office of the Secretary of Defense, “Actions to Improve Racial and Ethnic Diversity and Inclusion,” (memorandum, Washington, DC: DOD, December 17, 2020), https://diversity.defense.gov/Portals/51/ACTIONS%20TO%20IMPROVE%20RACIAL%20AND%20ETHNIC%20DIVERSITY%20AND%20INCLUSION%20IN%20THE%20U_S_%20MILITARY%20OSD011769-20%20RES%20Final.pdf.

⁴¹ “Who We Are,” Naval Special Warfare Website, accessed September 5, 2022, <https://www.sealswcc.com/navy-seal-swcc-training-main.html>; “Tactical Air Control Party Specialist (TACP),” U.S. Air Force Website, accessed September 5, 2022, <https://www.airforce.com/careers/detail/tactical-air-control-party-specialist-tacp>; “Special Forces,” U.S. Army Website, accessed September 5, 2022, <https://www.goarmy.com/careers-and-jobs/specialty-careers/special-ops/special-forces.html> Special Forces | goarmy.com.



Figure 9. Images on SOF websites

Note: Derived from “U.S. Army Special Operations Careers: Choose Your Path To Excellence,” U.S. Army Special Operations Recruiting Website, accessed July 27, 2021, <https://www.goarmysof.com/index.html>; “Marine Forces Special Operations Command,” United States Marine Corps Website, accessed July 27, 2021, <https://www.marsoc.marines.mil/>; “Pararescue,” U.S. Air Force Website, accessed August 2, 2021, <https://www.airforce.com/careers/detail/pararescue>.

Faces are obscured for operational security reasons in the publicly released media so as not to divulge identities; that said, Services have included less obscured images of minority SOF in recruitment videos that can be shared in a more controlled environment with candidates. In addition, the Services are taking concerted efforts to expand diversity in a range of SOF promotional materials.

For example, Air Force Special Warfare recruiting recently modified their field brochures and developed career field videos with ethnic/racial minorities depicted; NSW issued two press releases in the past year that featured women and/or ethnic racial minorities; and MARSOC developed a Questions & Answers (Q&A) social media series that includes diverse representation.

b. Convey the positive attributes of SOF in recruiting materials

Consistent with RAND’s recommendation to portray the positive aspects of SOF, SOF websites very effectively convey the prestige, honor, and exceptional skill associated with membership. However, websites lack content on transferability of skills and other positive features of SOF service, making progress on this recommendation only partially complete.

All SOF websites emphasize the prestige associated with selection (“only an elite few will succeed” – Navy SEALs⁴²); the highly specialized training received (“most specialized warriors on the planet” – Air Force Special Warfare⁴³), and the important missions completed (“we go forward to win the war before it starts” – Marine Raiders⁴⁴).

However, there is greater variance among the Services on the emphasis their websites place on financial, career, and personal benefits of SOF membership. The Army, Navy, and Air Force mention eligibility for special pays, bonuses, and educational benefits on their websites, but the information is not always on the main page, and only the Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) website includes benefits beyond financial incentives (e.g., “increased family time (1:2 dwell time) and station longevity and stability”⁴⁵).

The Marine Raiders website also directly addresses family life, noting the resources available to support adjustment,⁴⁶ but does not mention any other benefits. Across Services, IDA observed very little direct discussion of transferability of skills to civilian careers on SOF websites, with the exception of a video series that featured former SEALs and SWCC discussing their career path post-service⁴⁷ (see Table 27 for additional examples of positive attributes).

Interviewees and focus group participants noted that communications about the potential to develop skills that can transfer to civilian careers may especially resonate with ethnic/racial minority audiences. One transferrable skill that may warrant greater emphasis is leadership; a few interviewees noted the relatively greater opportunities for promotion and leadership development in SOF compared to other occupations. Other transferrable skills could be highlighted by portraying a broader range of SOF mission areas (e.g., cyber, robotics, intelligence, diplomatic roles, language and cultural expertise).

⁴² Navy Recruiting Command, “Warrior Challenge Program,” PowerPoint presentation, accessed October 6, 2021, <https://www.cnrc.navy.mil/eToolbox/assets/presentations/Warrior%20Challenge%20Presentation.pdf>.

⁴³ “The Specialty in Special Warfare,” U.S. Air Force Website, accessed July 27, 2021, <https://www.airforce.com/careers/in-demand-careers/special-warfare>.

⁴⁴ In line with its broader service culture, the Marine Corps does not emphasize the distinctiveness of its SOF specialty to the same extent as the other services (e.g., “Marines have always fought our nation’s small wars, its irregular wars—the wars of the future. Marine raiders are Marines first, and we build on our Corps legacy”).

⁴⁵ “Special Forces: Liberate the Oppressed,” U.S. Army Special Operations Website, accessed July 27, 2021, <https://goarmysof.com/specialforces/sfreuiting.html>.

⁴⁶ “Way of Life,” Marine Raiders Website, accessed August 2, 2021, <https://www.marsoc.com/way-of-life/>.

⁴⁷ “Life After the Teams,” Naval Special Warfare Website, accessed October 6, 2021, <https://www.sealswcc.com/video/pages/seal-swcc-video-life-after-the-teams.html>.

Table 27. Positive Attributes of SOF Featured on Websites

Attribute(s)	Statements
Prestige/Highly skilled	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “...these elite heroes go where others won’t because they’re trained to do what others can’t” (AFSOC)^a “It takes intense courage to be a Navy SEAL, and that’s what makes them the best of the best.” (SEAL)^b “Becoming a Ranger is an honor shared by a distinct few... To become a Ranger is no easy task...” (Ranger)^c
Important missions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Today’s quiet professional operates in autonomous environments as the most trusted force in America’s Army” (SF)^d “The lives of my teammates and the success of our mission depend on me - my technical skill, tactical proficiency, and attention to detail.” (SEAL)^e “Saving the lives of fellow airmen” (USAF Pararescue)^f “Marine Raiders are Marines first, and we build on our Corps legacy: we go forward to win the war before it starts” (MARSOC)^g
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Increased family time (1:2 dwell time); Station longevity and stability; Choice of assignment; Accelerated promotions; Special duty pay” (SF)^h “As a MARSOC family, you’ll have access to a robust network of Family Readiness Officers (FROs) and volunteers who provide support for your new way of life.” (MARSOC)ⁱ <i>Discussion of bonuses, special, and specialized training for USA, USAF, and USN</i>^j
Transferability of skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Life after the Teams” - <i>videos about civilian career successes of former SEALs/SWCC</i>^k

Notes:




- a) “The Specialty In Special Warfare,” U.S. Air Force Website, accessed July 27, 2021, <https://www.airforce.com/careers/in-demand-careers/special-warfare>.
- b) “NAVY SEALs,” U.S. Navy Website, accessed September 9, 2022, <https://www.navy.com/seals>.
- c) “Army Rangers Lead The Way, No Matter The Mission,” U.S. Army Website, accessed September 9, 2022” <https://www.goarmy.com/careers-and-jobs/specialty-careers/special-ops/army-rangers.html#:~:text=As%20the%20Army's%20premier%20infantry,Ranger%20is%20no%20easy%20task>.
- d) “Special Forces,” U.S. Army Special Operations Website, accessed October 7, 2022. <https://www.goarmysof.army.mil/SF/>.
- e) “SEAL Ethos,” U.S. Navy Website, accessed September 6, 2022, <https://www.nsw.navy.mil/NSW/SEALethos/>.
- f) “Pararescue,” U.S. Air Force Website, accessed September 6, 2022, <https://www.airforce.com/careers/detail/pararescue>.
- g) “Who We Are,” Marine Raiders Website, accessed September 9, 2022, <https://www.marsoc.com/who-we-are/>.
- h) “Special Forces,” U.S. Army Special Operations Website, accessed October 7, 2022, <https://www.goarmysof.army.mil/SF/>.
- i) “Way of Life,” Marine Raiders Website, accessed August 2, 2021, <https://www.marsoc.com/way-of-life/>.
- j) “Special Forces,” U.S. Army Special Operations Website; “The Specialty in Special Warfare,” U.S. Air Force Website; “Who We Are,” Naval Special Warfare Website, accessed September 6, 2022,
- k) “Life After the Teams,” Naval Special Warfare Website, accessed September 6, 2022, <https://www.sealswcc.com/video/pages/seal-swcc-video-life-after-the-teams.html>.

D. Assessment, Selection, and Training

Assessment and selection (A&S) is the multi-week process through which SOF candidates are evaluated to identify individuals most likely to succeed in the training pipeline and as a SOF operator. Once selected, only a fraction of trainees will make it through the months or year(s) of intensive training required to become a SOF operator. The USSOCOM service components work to ensure that A&S is conducted in a rigorous and systematic manner and that entry, assessment, and training standards are gender neutral and operationally relevant.

The service components also offer a range of recruitment and pre-accession training opportunities to increase readiness for A&S. However, access to critical preparatory experiences prior to military service (e.g., service academies, flight hours, swim training) remains unequal, and misconceptions about lowered standards to promote diversity may undermine inclusion.

Table 28. Progress on Recommendations: Entry, Assessment, and Training Requirements and Preparation

1999 RAND Recommendation	Status	Challenges and Additional Considerations
Validate that entry, assessment, and training standards are relevant for performance	 <i>Complete</i> – According to USSOCOM, independent research has confirmed all standards are operationally relevant and gender neutral; however, IDA did not receive this research for review.	Misconceptions about lowering standards for diversity may undermine inclusion. Unclear if an ongoing and transparent mechanism exists to validate standards.
Continue and increase awareness about swimming training programs (USA and USN) ^a	 <i>Partial/In progress</i> – The Services have extensive preparatory opportunities for SOF applicants, including but not limited to swimming training. Self-directed SOF training guides are provided online, but only the USN mentions in-person training.	
USA should consider using the Field Artillery (FA) composite of the ASVAB instead of the General Technical (GT) score	 <i>Not complete</i> – USASOC did not make this change but is in the process of reviewing prerequisites. All the Services, except the Navy, use the GT score.	Broader DOD and service-wide efforts are ongoing to evaluate the ASVAB to potentially reduce barriers for minority groups.

Note: a) The full RAND recommendation is to “continue programs with small payoffs;” however, the report provided swim training as the only example of a small payoff program.

1. Validate the Relevancy of Standards for Performance

In 1999, RAND confirmed the objectivity of AFSOC, USASOC, and NSWC entry, assessment, and training requirements (physical standards in particular), but recommended an assessment of standards to ensure relevancy for operator performance.⁴⁸ USSOCOM indicates that independent research has since been conducted to confirm that standards are “operationally relevant and gender neutral.” However, IDA did not receive these reports for review from all of the Services; we are therefore unable to independently assess and confirm these findings.

It is important to note that SOF standards change over time to meet evolving operational requirements (e.g., Army SF recently shortened and modified its land navigation test).⁴⁹ However, despite leadership assurances that standards are tied to mission requirements, interviewees commented that SOF members often express concerns that standards have been or will be changed to increase participation, particularly among women and ethnic/racial minority groups. Indeed, focus group participants expressed these concerns, noting that DEI priorities could push decision-makers to change standards *or* that their peers may incorrectly assume that standards had been lowered and/or unevenly applied to promote diversity.

This reflexive suspicion of DEI as a threat to standards may undermine USSOCOM’s efforts to foster inclusion. USSOCOM’s strategic plan tasks leaders with directly addressing concerns about standards: “Leaders at all echelons must work to challenge narratives that equate diversity with lowered standards and replace those with a narrative that diversity equates to maximized capability.”⁵⁰ To effectively “change the narrative,” USSOCOM should ensure that future modifications to standards are clearly communicated, associated with a specific rationale, and transparently validated.

Although most interviewees maintained that SOF standards are necessary and fair, a few questioned whether the current standards overvalue particular physical skills (e.g., swim skills) and thereby limit the pool of applicants who have other critical characteristics (e.g., language skills, cultural competency, empathy/capability to perform humanitarian work). Some individuals also noted that the subjective psychological or character-based standards that exist could be unfairly applied by primarily White assessors.

⁴⁸ MARSOC did not exist at the time of the 1999 RAND report.

⁴⁹ Lolita Baldor, “Big Changes to Grueling Special Forces Course Draw Scrutiny,” *Army Times*, October 14, 2019, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2019/10/15/big-changes-to-grueling-special-forces-course-draw-scrutiny/>.

⁵⁰ Headquarters, United States Special Operations Command, *Headquarters United States Special Operations Command: Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan 2021*, <https://www.socom.mil/Documents/Diversity%20Mag%202021%20final.pdf>.

Focus group participants echoed this sentiment, explaining that people perceived as not fitting in (i.e., not having the right personality for SOF) could fail selection, even if they otherwise met standards. Some focus group participants favored formal, validated approaches to measure personal qualities like teamwork, leadership, and character, to reduce the potential for bias.

Interviewees described measures the Services have taken to minimize the potential for bias in evaluating subjective criteria; for example, double-blind officer selection and assessment boards (NSWC, MARSOC),⁵¹ aggregating evaluations from multiple raters and student peer reviews (MARSOC, USASOC), including psychologists (MARSOC, AFSOC, USASOC) or human performance specialists (AFSOC) in the assessment and selection process, and briefings on decision-making biases for selection boards (MARSOC). A promising approach to improve integration of women in training is NSWC's Women in SOF cadre program; women from the special operations enabler community join the training cadre to ensure equity and to shift the culture to be more inclusive of women.

Although many focus group participants and interviewees viewed processes as fair and standards-based, a subset described biases in the application of standards during A&S and the training process that follows selection. Some participants believed that underrepresented groups were treated with more leniency; conversely, other participants asserted that underrepresented groups had to work harder to exceed standards to overcome biases against them.

Interviewees and focus group participants also described how a lack of preparatory experiences prior to service can impede women, minorities, and/or individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds from meeting certain standards. Participants frequently referenced the perception that Black individuals may have fewer opportunities to develop swim skills in childhood due to limited access to facilities. Interviewees indicated that increasing service academy representation may be a way to advance equity in preparatory experiences needed to meet standards.

Women and minorities are currently under-represented at service academies relative to the U.S. young adult population and relative to enrollment at four-year colleges and universities; minorities are also underrepresented at the academies relative to the active-

⁵¹ Bart Randall, "Naval Special Warfare Center: Operator and Leader Production and Development," Briefing at Naval Special Warfare Center, June 30, 2021.

duty enlisted corps.⁵² Furthermore, women and ethnic/racial minorities are also underrepresented among those congressionally recommended for academy enrollment.⁵³

2. Increase Awareness of Swim Training and Other Preparatory Opportunities

To address potential disparities in preparatory experiences coming into service, the Services offer a number of support resources available to train new recruits and those going through assessment and selection. These support resources include, but are not limited to, swim training. RAND recommended that the Services continue swim training programs and ensure awareness of these resources. This recommendation remains only partially complete, however, as training/preparation programs are not fully described on SOF websites.

At the recruitment stage, recruiters or liaison officers (USA⁵⁴) or coordinators/developers (USAF and USN) work with recruits to provide mentorship and physically prepare candidates to qualify. Because these individuals are often former or current Special Warfare operators, interviewees noted that they are disproportionately White and male. Efforts to diversify the coordinator/developer/liaison pool may be beneficial to ensure that female and ethnic/racial minority recruits see themselves represented at this early stage.

The Air Force's developers are not restricted to SOF operators and thus should aim to include former female members of related career fields (e.g., Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) or Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE)). The Navy previously supplemented its coordinator pool with contractors (former SOF operators) but discontinued this program. Instead, members of their new NSWAC will provide a more diverse group of current operators to help prepare new recruits.

Beyond the recruiting stage, USASOC, NSWC, and AFSOC offer pre-accession training opportunities to physically prepare SMs for the A&S (e.g., Pass the PAST

⁵² Connecticut Veterans Legal Center and Veterans Inclusion Project, "Gatekeepers to Opportunity: Racial Disparities in Congressional Nominations to the Military Service Academies," March 17, 2021, <http://ctveteranslegal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/3.16.2021-Final-Embargoed-Gatekeepers-to-Opportunity-Racial-Disparities-in-Congressional-Nominations-to-the-Service-Academies.pdf>; Connecticut Veterans Legal Center and Veterans Inclusion Project, "Gatekeepers to Opportunity: Gender Disparities in Congressional Nominations to the Military Service Academies," July 26, 2019, available at: https://law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/area/clinic/document/gatekeepers_to_opportunity_-_gender_disparities_in_congressional_nominations_to_the_military_service_academies_7.26.19.pdf

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Recruiters can request additional support for recruit training through Army SOF selectees; Headquarters, United States Army Recruiting Command, *USAREC Techniques Publication 3-10.3 Special Operation and In-Service Recruiting* (Fort Knox, KY: USAREC, March 15, 2021).

(Physical Ability and Stamina Test),⁵⁵ NSW Preparatory School, Pre-RASP (Ranger Assessment and Selection Program) and ARSOF Assessment and Selection Preparation Course for non-Combat Arms Soldiers (in development)⁵⁶). MARSOC used to have an A&S preparation school but discontinued the program and instead split A&S into two phases, with Phase 1 including preparatory features (e.g., one-on-one mentorship, multiple attempts given to complete physical standards).

During A&S, the service components offer training to improve swim skills. For example, MARSOC recently implemented a program to improve swim skills during A&S and training; additionally, swim performance is not used as an elimination criterion early on in the process, so Marines are afforded sufficient time to prepare. Similarly, the Rangers removed the water test from RASP 1, and Army SF moved its swimming requirement to later in the selection/training process (from SF A&S to the SF Qualification Course) to allow additional time for preparation. NSW provides weekly physical fitness training for Fleet Transition Program (FTP), including swim instruction and a running program.

Although the service components provide ample training and support for SOF candidates, to include swim and physical fitness coaching, it is unclear whether these opportunities are sufficiently advertised. The Army,⁵⁷ Navy,⁵⁸ Air Force,⁵⁹ and Marine Corps⁶⁰ all provide easily accessible training guides on their websites, and the Marine Corps offers training videos.⁶¹ Only the Navy specifically mentions in-person training opportunities to prepare.⁶² Focus group participants who did not belong to SOF lacked a deep understanding of SOF units overall and had minimal awareness of training and resources available to prepare candidates for A&S or training.

⁵⁵ Dan Hawkins, “Air Force Changes Path of Entry for Enlisted Special Warfare Operators,” AFSOC, February 20, 2020, <https://www.afsoc.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/2113585/air-force-changes-path-of-entry-for-enlisted-special-warfare-operators/>.

⁵⁶ USASOC 1st SFC WDI Initiatives Final Brief, provided to IDA.

⁵⁷ “Special Forces: Training,” U.S. Army Website, accessed September 27, 2021, <https://m.goarmy.com/special-forces/training.html>.

⁵⁸ “Training,” SEAL|SWCC: Official Naval Special Warfare Website, accessed July 7, 2021, <https://www.sealswcc.com/navy-seal-swcc-training-main.html>.

⁵⁹ “Tactical Air Control Party Specialist (TACP),” U.S. Air Force Website.

⁶⁰ “A&S Fitness Preparation,” Marine Raiders Website, accessed September 27, 2021, <https://www.marsoc.com/fitness-preparation/>; , “Swim Preparation,” Marine Raiders, accessed September 27, 2021, <https://www.marsoc.com/swim-preparation/>.

⁶¹ “Swim Preparation,” Marine Raiders Website.

⁶² “Training,” SEAL|SWCC: Official Naval Special Warfare Website.

3. Consider Changes to ASVAB Entry Standards

USASOC did not follow through with RAND's 1999 recommendation to use the Field Artillery (FA) composite for qualification; however, it is unclear whether this recommendation is still relevant today in light of more recent reviews of the ASVAB. Specifically, aptitude test standards are currently under review at the service and DOD levels, per the recommendation of DOD's D&I board.⁶³ If not already doing so, USSOCOM should participate in and align its own efforts with these broader DOD and service-wide processes.

Currently, all the USSOCOM component commands except for NSW use the General Technical (GT) score of the ASVAB as a qualification criterion,⁶⁴ with specific cut-offs varying.⁶⁵ Army SF waived the GT score criteria down to 100 for FY21 through FY23. The Navy is also considering modifications to ASVAB criteria through research to identify ASVAB standards that better align with NSW training outcomes.

Reviewing ASVAB prerequisites to ensure they are adequate for optimal training outcomes may be a fruitful option for all components to consider. Just as the service components provide swim coaching to help candidates meet swim standards, they could allow individuals who are close to the ASVAB cut-off to request a waiver or attend improvement classes to raise their scores up to standards after passing A&S. As noted in Chapter 3, relaxing ASVAB requirements will have the greatest impact for SWCC, as the population of SMs eligible for these specialties is less diverse than the overall service population due to more stringent ASVAB requirements for SWCC than SEALs.

E. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Infrastructure

USSOCOM and the service components have a wealth of data on SOF trainees and members; however, aligning data across disparate systems and comparing data across Services poses significant challenges. To assess command climate and experiences of harassment, USSOCOM relies on the Defense Equal Opportunity Climate Survey

⁶³ Department of Defense Board on Diversity and Inclusion, "Recommendations to Improve Racial and Ethnic Diversity and Inclusion in the U.S. Military," U.S. Department of Defense, December 2020, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Dec/18/2002554852/-1/-1/0/DOD-DIVERSITY-AND-INCLUSION-FINAL-BOARD-REPORT.PDF>.




⁶⁴ NSW provides a few options for combinations of composite scores that could be used to qualify; AFSOC uses the Mechanical Comprehension section, in addition to the GT score, as entry criteria.

⁶⁵ "Enlisted: Combat Control," U.S. Air Force Website, accessed October 12, 2021, <https://www.airforce.com/careers/detail/combat-control>; "Special Forces," U.S. Army Special Operations Recruiting Website; "Becoming A Special Operations Officer," Marine Raiders, Website, accessed October 12, 2021, <https://www.marsoc.com/career-paths/special-operations-officer/>; "Active Duty Enlisted Seal or SWCC Application Steps," SEAL|SWCC: Official Naval Special Warfare Website, accessed October 12, 2021, <https://www.sealswcc.com/apply/active-duty-seal-swcc-application-steps.html>.

(DEOCS). However, the DEOCS is designed for use at the local level and cannot provide trend data on command climate and the prevalence of discrimination across the organization.

With the D&I Implementation Action Plan underway, it is more important than ever to have robust data systems and survey tools to assess USSOCOM-wide progress. Table 29 and subsections 7.E.1-2 of this chapter describe progress on relevant recommendations and additional challenges. Moving beyond past recommendations, USSOCOM is working to foster inclusion in its commands and advance fair and equitable processes. To ensure successful implementation of its ambitious Action Plan, USSOCOM should provide sufficient full-time staffing and actively work to address and prevent backlash (see subsection 7.E.3.).

Table 29. Progress on Recommendations: DEI Infrastructure

1999 RAND Recommendation	Status	Challenges and Additional Considerations
Monitor SOF race/ethnicity data through entry, assessment, and training (for USAF)	 <i>Complete</i> – The service components track race/ethnicity and provide quarterly updates to Headquarters USSOCOM.	Difficulties aligning data across systems and Services to assess the full career cycle.
Consider developing a database with detailed information on SOF candidates (for USAF and USN)	 <i>Complete</i> – Recruiting commands maintain detailed information about recruits (e.g., race/ethnicity, medical and criminal history, test scores).	Detailed information collected about recruits is not always linked to data on SOF trainees/members.
Assess presence of racist behavior in Army SOF	 <i>Partial/In progress</i> – DEOCS provides relevant data, but unit-level data cannot be aggregated across the enterprise to track progress over time; “listening tours” provide qualitative data, but responses may be biased with leaders present.	Survey fatigue and fears about loss of anonymity among women and minorities may negatively affect data quality.

1. Monitor SOF Race/Ethnicity Data and Develop a Database with Information on SOF Candidates

Consistent with RAND’s recommendations, the service components all routinely track and report on race/ethnicity and gender of current SOF members. Recruiting commands also appear to have detailed databases with information about potential recruits, including but not limited to race/ethnicity, gender, education history, medical history, and criminal records. Although these data-related recommendations appear to be complete, key challenges remain—for example, linking data across disparate systems to gain a full picture

of the entire career cycle and determining where and for whom attrition occurs along the way.

The service components vary in the extent to which they merge data across systems and conduct attrition analyses. USASOC examines attrition rates through assessment and selection by demographic and has a set of dashboards including data on demographics, A&S, promotions, recruiting, and survey/focus group data on climate/culture. NSW has data on recruits from the point they receive a contract, but lack “beginning to end tracking” that directly links recruiting data to SOF trainee/member data (although they can merge data on an ad hoc basis). MARSOC only recently (FY21) began collecting demographic data on candidates entering the selection process, but plans to begin trend analyses once sufficient data are collected. Both the Navy and Army also indicated some difficulty tracking data historically. As one interviewee noted, the problem is not a lack of data, but the ability to make sense of the detailed information they already collect.

USSOCOM recently instituted a quarterly data call to collect information on current SOF members and individuals in the training pipeline. These data will be housed within the SOF Demographic and Readiness Dashboard, which is currently in development and meant to be an authoritative database that will automatically pull relevant data (e.g., enterprise-wide diversity, court-martials, reassignments, extremism investigations, sexual assault, and sexual harassment), rather than relying on ad hoc data calls in response to requests for information. An authoritative database is a positive first step; USSOCOM should conduct advanced analyses to understand factors associated with success and attrition at various accession, training, and career stages.

2. Assess Presence of Racist Behavior

In response to focus group findings that some SMs perceive Army SOF members to hold racist attitudes/engage in racist behavior,⁶⁶ RAND recommended additional research to determine the validity of these perceptions, including both surveys and focus groups. In line with this recommendation, and extending beyond Army SOF, USSOCOM has various mechanisms in place to assess command climate across all SOF specialties, predominantly relying on the DEOCS. However, this recommendation remains partially complete/in progress as there are challenges in using the DEOCS. For example, additional qualitative and quantitative sources of data may be needed to fully assess experiences of racism within SOF as well as external perceptions of SOF.

⁶⁶ IDA’s focus groups revealed some experiences of racism and sexism, as well as concerns that SOF units are less likely to be inclusive compared to other parts of the military, because of underrepresentation of women and minorities. These concerns, however, appeared to be distributed across SOF units and not limited to Army SF.

Although the DEOCS provides useful information at the local level to inform leadership action (e.g., experiences of racial or sexual harassment, perceived inclusion), it cannot be used to determine the population-level prevalence of harassment or level of inclusion across USSOCOM as a whole. The biennial Workplace and Equal Opportunity Survey (WEOS) provides extensive information about the prevalence of ethnic/racial harassment/discrimination across the force and on D&I climate; however, results are tabulated by service and not for USSOCOM specifically.⁶⁷

To provide generalizable USSOCOM-wide data on perceptions of D&I and experiences of discrimination, USSOCOM could work with the Office of People Analytics (OPA) to assess the feasibility of sampling the USSOCOM population to enable USSOCOM-specific estimates on the WEOS. It could also explore mechanisms to adapt and expand component-specific surveys (e.g., Women in Army Special Operations Survey⁶⁸) across all components. With the D&I Action Implementation Plan soon underway, it is more important than ever to have a standardized and uniform mechanism to assess enterprise-wide progress.

Interviewees also described specific challenges in using the DEOCS. For example, interviewees noted that although the DEOCS is anonymous, underrepresented groups may be reluctant to provide honest answers because they fear their leadership will be able to identify them when responses are broken down by race/ethnicity or gender. DEOCS reports do not provide results by race/ethnicity and gender when counts are small; nonetheless qualitative responses can identify individuals and concerns about loss of anonymity persist. Interviewees also mentioned that survey fatigue may undermine the quality of data received.

A few individuals pointed out the value of the open-ended DEOCS questions to yield actionable insights. The Department's recent leadership "listening tours" are another way to collect qualitative data about common challenges. However, while listening tours are important for demonstrating leadership commitment to DEI, the lack of anonymity and self-selection of participation could bias responses. It may be beneficial to develop a systematic mechanism to collect qualitative data, such as through biennial focus groups conducted by researchers.

⁶⁷ Samantha Daniel et al., U.S. Department of Defense Office of People Analytics, *2017 Workplace and Equal Opportunity Survey of Active Duty Members: Executive Report*, Report No. 2018-023, (Washington, D.C.: DOD, August 2017), <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1113643.pdf>.

⁶⁸ Haley Britzky, "'Stop the Social Experiment' — New Survey Spotlights Bias against Women in Army Special Ops," *Task & Purpose*, May 18, 2021, https://taskandpurpose.com/news/army-special-operations-women-survey/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=EBB%2005.19.21&utm_term=Editorial.

Finally, although the DEOCS provides important information about the environment within SOF, it cannot assess external perceptions of SOF that may deter SMs from joining. The Army Recruiting Command conducts a biennial survey of soldiers who are qualified to pursue SOF, and it includes a question about their level of concern about discrimination in SOF. In the last survey, over 15 percent of respondents were concerned about discrimination. The Army survey is an important mechanism to understand perceptions about the SOF climate and to discover misconceptions and concerns to inform recruiting efforts. If not already doing so, the Services should explore implementing similar strategies or options to add SOF-specific questions on Joint Advertising, Market Research and Studies (JAMRS) surveys.⁶⁹

3. Beyond Diversity to Equity and Inclusion

Recruitment, A&S, and training determine the diversity of SOF members coming through the door, but the climate upon their arrival and the fairness of selection/developmental processes determine whether members are included, treated equitably, and developed to their full potential. Moving beyond RAND’s 1999 recommendations that call for expanded diversity, USSOCOM is also working to promote an inclusive climate and ensure selection and developmental processes are fair and equitable. Much of this work is just beginning, as specified in USSOCOM’s D&I Implementation and Action Plan. Nonetheless, many promising initiatives are already underway. Table 30 presents current practices described in our interviews, and USSOCOM’s D&I Strategic Plan highlights additional strategies deployed.⁷⁰

Table 30. Examples of Initiatives to Promote an Inclusive Climate and Reduce Bias

Description of Initiative	Component
USSOCOM D&I Strategic Plan and D&I Implementation and Action Plan	USSOCOM
D&I advisory panel composed of military and civilian SOF community	USSOCOM
AFSOC developmental teams receive unconscious bias training, view demographics of command, and receive briefing on typical barriers that minorities experience (based on barrier analysis conducted)	AFSOC
Symposium of Leadership, Equity, Advocacy, and Development (COMMANDO LEAD)	AFSOC
Created new role for wing-level DEI advisors	AFSOC

⁶⁹ The 2003 “Youth Poll 5” includes specific questions about SOF, but we could find no other examples of JAMRS surveys with SOF-specific questions; Matt Boehmer et al., “Overview Report June 2003 Youth Poll 5,” U.S. Department of Defense Human Resources Joint Advertising, Market Research And Studies, December 2003, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA420365.pdf>.

⁷⁰ Headquarters United States Special Operations Command, “Special Operations Command: Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan 2021,” <https://www.socom.mil/Documents/Diversity%20Mag%202021%20final.pdf>.

NSW leadership assessment program (NLAP) includes surveys to capture peer and subordinate views on leaders and uses a double-blind interview process	NSWC
Women in SOF cadre includes women from the special operations enabler community in training to ensure female trainees are treated fairly and to normalize the presence of women	NSWC
Women’s professional network provides networking and professional opportunities (Government-wide, but led by NSWC DEI officer)	NSWC
Unconscious bias training and associated tools as part of MARSOC onboarding	MARSOC
SharePoint page with DEI information, including guidance on how to have difficult conversations	MARSOC
MARSOC DEI Strategic Plan	MARSOC
Internal command “pulse” on inclusion of women in progress, including surveys and interviews to inform recommendations for improvement	USASOC
Podcasts with leaders, often addressing D&I (e.g., AFSOC unfiltered, SOFCast)	Multiple
D&I task forces, committees, and action plans	Multiple

Advancing DEI comes with significant challenges. USSOCOM’s D&I Implementation and Action Plan provides a comprehensive foundation for action, with four lines of effort and 26 initiatives, many of which have multiple sub-components. However, the Services and USSOCOM must ensure that USSOCOM has sufficient personnel throughout the organization to deploy its plan. Several of the individuals we spoke with at the service component and Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC) headquarters levels served in the D&I role as an additional duty rather than a full-time position (e.g., USASOC, MARSOC,⁷¹ Special Operations Command Europe (SOCEUR), Special Operations Command Pacific (SOCPAC)). Additional-duty D&I positions at the headquarters levels limit capacity for progress and pose an undue burden on individuals filling these roles, many of whom are ethnic/racial minorities and women.

Beyond the headquarters/leadership level, several interviewees cautioned about the difficulty of fully implementing DEI policies and establishing buy-in at the lowest levels:

If memos and task forces are not aggressively implemented at the company level, it won’t change anything.... Need to figure out how to get down to the operator, otherwise we will continue to have problems with racism, sexism, and sexual assault.

Just as the Services/USSOCOM should ensure USSOCOM has the personnel at the headquarters levels to deploy its Action Plan, it should also ensure that any resulting

⁷¹ MARSOC does not have a full-time billet for D&I, but hired a contractor to provide support to the collateral duty military position.

requirements and policies are feasible to implement at all levels. Increased D&I requirements, without corresponding reductions of other requirements or a personnel increase, may do more harm than good by generating resentment and inconsistent execution.⁷²

Interviewees also described indifferent or markedly negative responses to DEI initiatives across the force. As described to IDA, some individuals fail to understand the value of diversity, believe that the existing diversity of thought in their organization is sufficient, or view DEI initiatives as a threat to high standards. These sentiments were reflected in discussions with some focus group participants who contended that DEI initiatives may create problems where they previously did not exist. Many focus group participants understood and described the value of diversity for mission accomplishment, but others noted that communications about diversity should more concretely describe the benefits.

Interviewees described messaging to reverse misconceptions about DEI, including reframing DEI as broader than race/ethnicity and gender (e.g., diversity of thought, experience, geographic location). Furthermore, the USSOCOM Action Plan calls for the development of communication strategies to convey the value of D&I for mission accomplishment. USSOCOM should take an evidence-based approach to develop these communications, drawing from research literature in this area,⁷³ but also rigorously evaluating SOF members' responses to communications.

Top-down communication initiatives alone may be insufficient to counter deep-seated skepticism, discomfort, or feelings of threat experienced by some individuals in response to DEI initiatives.⁷⁴ Bottom-up approaches that develop peer leaders of all demographic groups to promote the value of diversity, intervene against racist/sexist behaviors, and model inclusive behavior may also have value.⁷⁵ Although mentoring/advocacy often occurs informally, USSOCOM could prepare rising leaders to reach out to mentees from

⁷² Leonard Wong and Stephen J. Gerras. *Lying to Ourselves: Dishonesty in the Army Profession* (Carlisle, PA: United States Army War College Press, 2015).

⁷³ Molly Carnes, Eve Fine, and Jennifer Sheridan, "Promises and Pitfalls of Diversity Statements: Proceed with Caution," *Academic Medicine: Journal of the Association of American Medical Colleges* 94, no. 1 (2019): 20–24, <https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000002388>.

⁷⁴ Tessa L. Dover, Brenda Major, and Cheryl R. Kaiser, "Members of High-Status Groups are Threatened by Pro-Diversity Organizational Messages." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 62 (2016): 58–67, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2015.10.006>; Victoria C. Plaut et al., "'What about Me?' Perceptions of Exclusion and Whites' Reactions to Multiculturalism," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 101, no. 2 (2011): 337–353, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022832>.

⁷⁵ Plaut et al., "'What about Me?'"

different backgrounds, emphasize the value of diversity with their mentees, and share strategies to promote inclusion.

Backlash to DEI initiatives is not a new problem and certainly not unique to SOF or the military. Although some civilian research identifies strategies to reduce backlash,⁷⁶ additional research may be needed to inform a SOF-specific approach.

⁷⁶ Frank Dobbin and Alexandra Kalev, “Why Doesn’t Diversity Training Work? The Challenge for Industry and Academia,” *Anthropology Now* 10, no. 2 (2018): 48–55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19428200.2018.1493182>.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

More than twenty years after RAND's study and associated recommendations to address barriers to minority participation in SOF, ethnic/racial minorities remain underrepresented across all SOF units examined. Participation in combat positions (including SOF) was restricted to women 20 years ago, but in the six years since these positions have been open to women, only a handful of women have joined. The current study expanded beyond SOF to examine ethnic/racial minority and female participation in other high-profile and selective units/specialties, including those with missions and skill sets similar to SOF (i.e., Force Recon and MSRT) as well as pilots and navigators.

The pattern of findings for Force Recon and MSRT mirror that of SOF, with underrepresentation of ethnic/racial minorities and minimal participation of women. Women participate much more extensively as pilots/navigators, but are still underrepresented, especially as pilots. Ethnic/racial minorities are also underrepresented as pilots and navigators.

To understand why women and ethnic/racial minorities may be underrepresented in the units/specialties examined, IDA conducted focus groups with SMs. Focus group participants discussed a range of perceived barriers to participation, to include recruitment experiences, selection and training processes and practices, as well as culture and climate within examined units/specialties. Our discussions with Service staff revealed similar barriers as well as specific actions SOCOM is taking to improve representation in SOF.

In the sections that follow, we propose recommendations to address barriers to minority and female participation in the units/specialties examined. These recommendations aim to address barriers and improve access and participation among women and ethnic/racial minorities specifically, but many recommendations are geared towards reducing general barriers to participation that all SMs may experience. Addressing general barriers will serve to increase access to the examined units/specialties for all SMs, including women and ethnic/racial minorities.

Progress in increasing representation in the examined units/specialties will take significant time and resources, and sustained leadership attention. This is no simple task, as many barriers that ethnic/racial minorities and women experience are not specific to the military and may reflect broader societal inequities and cultural norms which the military alone cannot address. Finally, given the exceedingly low participation of women in SOF,

Force Recon, and MSRT, a longer time course and more fundamental changes than the recommendations stated here may be needed to significantly increase female participation.

We begin by highlighting the 1999 RAND recommendations regarding SOF on which USSOCOM should continue to make progress (Section 8.A.). Then we provide new recommendations, many of which are relevant to all units/specialties examined and some of which are specific to certain units/specialties (Section 8.B.).

A. Continued Progress Needed on 1999 RAND Recommendations for SOF

- a. **Continue to educate recruiters about SOF and improve coordination between recruiting commands and USSOCOM components.** The Services have tailored approaches to recruiting such that recruiters focus directly on SOF and have recently implemented mechanisms to improve coordination of recruiting (e.g., NSWAC, Special Operations Recruiting Support Division). Focus group participants often noted a lack of familiarity with SOF among general recruiters. Although the Air Force and the Navy have specialized direct-accession recruiters for SOF, general recruiters may still require more education about SOF (e.g., roles/missions, resources to prepare, selection processes) and how and when to refer to specialized recruiters. Direct accession recruiting to SF is not specialized; thus, recruiters in the Army may especially require further education. Finally, although the Marine Corps does not recruit to MARSOC at accessions, recruiters may benefit from greater education to respond to recruit inquiries and present future options as advanced preparation is needed for SOF.
- b. **Continue to engage with minority high schools, HBCUs, and other minority-serving institutions about SOF, and hold demonstrations in minority locations.** The Services routinely engage with ethnic/racial minority communities in recruitment efforts, including high schools with large ethnic/racial minority populations, HBCUs, HSIs, indigenous colleges, and women's colleges. All the Services also include SOF aerial demonstrations in recruiting events as well as other SOF-related demonstrations and interactive activities. The Services are taking action to improve engagement with ethnic/racial minority populations and enhance coordination and support for specialized recruiting. The Services should also ensure that they are engaging with diverse universities/colleges beyond minority-serving institutions (MSIs), as MSIs only enroll a fraction of the

ethnic/racial minority college student population.⁷⁷ In addition, if not already doing so, the Services should engage with national-level minority professional organizations with a presence on college campuses.

- c. **Continue to support youth programs and expand engagement.** The Services engage with and support youth organizations (e.g., YMCA, JROTC, robotics competitions, civil air patrol) to support development of mental and physical skills and to raise awareness about military service and SOF specifically. However, interviewees frequently noted the need for, and intention to pursue, additional outreach to youth, particularly at an earlier age (i.e., elementary and/or middle school). See B.2.e. for a related recommendation relevant to all examined units/specialties.
- d. **Continue to ensure ethnic/racial minority SOF members attend recruiting events.** The Services make concerted efforts to include women and ethnic/racial minorities in outreach events; however, interviewees indicated that greater diversity is needed. Focus group participants stressed the importance of seeing women and ethnic/racial minorities represented in SOF to encourage participation (see B.1.b for a related recommendation about incentivizing/rewarding participation in outreach).
- e. **Continue to include/expand images of ethnic/racial minorities in recruiting materials.** SOF websites include some images of ethnic/racial minorities and women; however, most photographs include White men or are ambiguous/neutral. DOD is reviewing and updating all recruiting imagery across specialties to ensure diverse representation. Caution should be taken to ensure that minorities and women are not overrepresented in these images or tokenized. As focus group participants noted, there is a need for more meaningful representation that features accomplishments of individuals from underrepresented demographics.
- f. **Continue to convey the positive attributes of SOF and add content on transferability of skills.** SOF websites heavily focus on the prestige and skill involved in SOF service, but lack detail about other positive features. SOF should add content about positive aspects of SOF service, beyond prestige and financial incentives; for example, by emphasizing increased

⁷⁷ Of the undergraduate college students identifying as Black/African American in 2016, only 9 percent were enrolled at HBCUs per 2020 and 2021 data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_306.10.asp.

dwelling time, cohesive and stable units, and available resources/Services. SOF websites and outreach materials should also specify how members can leverage their SOF careers to succeed after service. The SEALs/SWCC video series on “Life after the Teams” is a promising approach other Services could adopt.⁷⁸ Leadership experience is one transferrable skill that may warrant greater emphasis. Other transferrable skills could be highlighted by portraying a broader range of SOF mission areas (e.g., cyber, robotics, intelligence, diplomatic roles, and language and cultural expertise).

- g. **Continue to recruit prior-service and inter-service members for Air Force Special Warfare.** RAND recommended cross-service advertising for Air Force Special Warfare; however, before such efforts can have a significant impact, administrative barriers to inter-service transfer must be addressed. The Air Force should implement the action plan recommended by Air Force Recruiting Service to facilitate inter-service transfer for enlisted SMs, incentivize recruiters to engage with prior-service or inter-service members, and increase awareness about Air Force Special Warfare across the Services.
- h. **Continue to increase awareness about swim training programs and other opportunities to prepare for SOF.** The Services provide a range of support resources to train new recruits and those going to A&S; this includes, but is not limited to, swim training. However, these opportunities are not sufficiently advertised. The Services all provide training guides and/or videos on their websites, but only the Navy specifically mentions in-person training.
- i. **Continue to review ASVAB entry standards, particularly for SWCC.** USASOC did not follow through with RAND’s recommendation to use the FA composite of the ASVAB for qualification, but it is unclear if this recommendation is still relevant today given more recent reviews of the ASVAB. Specifically, aptitude test standards are under review at the service and DOD level.⁷⁹ USSOCOM should participate in and align its own efforts with these broader DOD and service-wide processes. Ultimately the SOCOM components should ensure that ASVAB standards are aligned to optimally predict and enable high performance. NSW’s internal research to assess how ASVAB standards relate to training outcomes is promising and should be considered by the other components. Reviewing ASVAB

⁷⁸ “Life After the Teams,” Naval Special Warfare.

⁷⁹ Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Board on Diversity and Inclusion Report*.

requirements for SWCC should be prioritized, as the population eligible for SWCC, after adjusting for ASVAB scores, is less diverse than the general military population.

- j. **Continue to assess command climate, discrimination, and racism/sexism, and consider implementing streamlined, Component-wide survey mechanisms to measure progress on USSOCOM's D&I Implementation Action Plan.** USSOCOM predominantly assesses command climate in SOF through the DEOCS as well as leader "listening tours." The USSOCOM components also conduct their own research efforts. USSOCOM should ensure that it has consistent and streamlined evaluation tools in place across the components to assess progress on its D&I implementation. For example, USSOCOM could work with OPA to potentially sample the USSOCOM population (through USSOCOM-specific estimates on the WEOS) to obtain generalizable data on inclusion and discrimination. It may also be beneficial to develop a systematic mechanism to collect qualitative data, for example, through biennial focus groups conducted by researchers. Recruiting commands should also consider fielding surveys of the eligible population to ascertain perceptions of SOF, as the Army Recruiting Command does. Finally, given that focus group participants expressed concerns about fairness in A&S/training, USSOCOM should extend climate survey administration to the selection and training pipeline to determine whether these views are consistent and widespread.

B. Recommendations for SOF, Force Recon, MSRT, and Pilot/Navigator Specialties

In the following sections, we propose additional recommendations to improve representation in the units/specialties examined. Many of these recommendations are relevant to all the units/specialties examined, while some are specific to certain units/specialties. Recommendations for particular units/specialties are noted as such in the recommendation text; all other recommendations apply to all the units/specialties examined.

1. Recruitment and Outreach

- a. **Expand awareness of examined units/specialties before and during service, particularly Navy SWCC, Marine Raiders, Air Force Special Warfare, and Coast Guard MSRT, and highlight mission areas beyond combat.** Focus group participants who did not belong to examined units/specialties had only a superficial understanding of these specialties, with knowledge about Marine Raiders, Air Force Special Warfare, and

Coast Guard MSRT particularly lacking. Additional advertisement and media representation of these specialties may be needed to foster greater understanding. For MSRTs, Coast Guard staff we interviewed noted the need for greater awareness of DSF/MSRTs among recruiters and suggested having a specialized recruiter to educate other recruiters. Although public awareness of SEALs, SF, Rangers, and pilots/navigation may be relatively more extensive, focus group participants noted that media representations are narrowly focused on combat missions. A more nuanced and holistic representation of the examined units/specialties, conveying the full range of mission areas (e.g., intelligence, cyber, robotics, diplomatic, language/culture) and platforms (i.e., aircrafts beyond fighter jets), may appeal to a broader population.

- b. **Incentivize participation in recruitment/outreach efforts and ensure that women and ethnic/racial minorities are not overtasked to support these efforts.** As efforts to recruit underrepresented groups advance, women and ethnic/racial minorities are disproportionately tasked to support recruitment and outreach. Leadership should ensure that women/minorities are not overburdened in their support for these efforts and that recruiting/outreach-oriented positions are viewed as prestigious by assigning high-performing members of all backgrounds to these roles. Ultimately, recruitment/outreach activities should be formally recognized and visible to promotion boards.
- c. **Encourage and incentivize informal outreach and mentorship.** New recruits, members, and leaders often informally discuss opportunities in the units/specialties examined with their social networks. However, given that the majority of members in the examined units/specialties are White and male, this informal outreach may disproportionately reach White males.⁸⁰ Ethnic/racial minorities and women in examined units/specialties could make a significant impact by motivating their social networks to consider these career fields. Referral reward programs could be one mechanism to encourage informal outreach. Beyond encouragement to consider examined units/specialties, more intensive mentorship and support may be needed to help candidates navigate physical, mental, and bureaucratic challenges to joining. As the Services expand and formalize mentorship across their forces, they should prepare members of examined units/specialties to connect with prospective candidates through multiple channels (e.g., in-person, online).

⁸⁰ Steve McDonald and Jacob C. Day, "Race, Gender, and the Invisible Hand of Social Capital," *Sociology Compass* 4, no. 7 (2010): 532–543, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2010.00298.x>.

- d. **Consider strategies to incentivize recruiter engagement with diverse populations.** Interviewees pointed out the inherent tension between recruiting diverse populations — which can be more difficult to attract to examined unit/specialties — and meeting overall recruiting targets. One strategy to focus recruiter attention on diverse populations may be to increase recruiting and outreach staffing overall and then remove or lower recruiting targets for a subset of recruiters. These recruiters would then be empowered to exclusively engage with populations that may have a lower propensity for service in the units/specialties examined. The Air Force’s implementation of diversity targets to inform and motivate recruiting/marketing for pilots could also be constructive and should be considered by the other Services.⁸¹ However, caution should be applied as focus group participants noted the potential for backlash as diversity targets may fuel misperceptions about lowered standards to increase diversity. If not already doing so, the Services could also consider targets for the number of ethnic/racial minorities and women *reached* through advertising and outreach events.
- e. **Increase awareness and access to opportunities for enlisted members to commission to become pilots/navigators.** Focus group participants described the challenges enlisted SMs experience when pursuing a career as a pilot/navigator as they first must become an officer, a competitive process that can be difficult to navigate. Increasing access to opportunities for commissioning among enlisted SMs who seek to become pilots/navigators may be an important mechanism to diversify these career fields, as the enlisted corps is more demographically diverse than the officer corps. The Air Force’s approach to preparing enlisted members and officers for pilot/navigator selection through the Rated Preparatory Program is especially promising and should be considered by the other Services.
- f. **Educate and incentivize leaders from originating units to improve support for subordinates who seek to join examined units/specialties.** Focus group participants discussed the importance of command support for transitioning to the units/specialties examined, but noted that it was often lacking. In-service recruitment efforts should engage with leaders who do not belong to the specialties examined to ensure they have accurate information about these specialties and related training opportunities, and are motivated to support promising candidates. Because leaders may be concerned about losing

⁸¹ Stephen Losey, “Air Force Sets Diversity Targets for Recruiting,” *Air Force Times*, September 18, 2020, <https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2020/09/18/air-force-sets-diversity-targets-for-recruiting/>.

capable subordinates without a guarantee of timely replacement, the Services should consider policies to provide priority replacement of positions vacated by SMs seeking to join examined units/specialties.

2. Assessment, Selection, and Training

- a. **If/when SOF standards change in the future, clearly communicate the rationale.** Focus group members often expressed concerns about standards changing or being unevenly applied to increase diversity. To counter this misperception, USSOCOM via its service components should ensure that future modifications to standards are clearly communicated and associated with a specific rationale, such as an evolving mission focus. Further, USSOCOM should develop a mechanism to transparently validate and ensure relevancy of standards on an ongoing basis (rather than one-off studies). An internal committee of diverse SOF members could help legitimize the process.
- b. **Consider options to improve preparation for DSF/MSRTs.** The Coast Guard recently implemented a selection screener for DSF. However, Coast Guard staff we interviewed noted that the Coast Guard does not have a mechanism to prepare members for DSF at an early career stage. A few interviewees suggested that moving the DSF screener to boot camp may help promote awareness and preparation to join DSF at an earlier career stage.
- c. **Embed guidance related to psychological and cognitive skills in preparatory materials and training provided prior to selection and training.** Focus group participants emphasized the extraordinary grit and mental toughness needed to cope with the demands of A&S/training for SOF, Force Recon, and MRST, as well as the stress of flight school. Although the Services offer extensive resources to prepare for the physical challenges of A&S and training (e.g., online training guides, pre-accession training programs), these resources should also incorporate strategies to help all candidates prepare for psychological challenges (e.g., coping skills, breath regulation, maintaining positive mindsets) and build cognitive skills and soft skills required for success (e.g., problem solving, leadership, teamwork). In flight school, training on stress management should be incorporated early in the process. Facilitating development of psychological and cognitive skills before selection and training will address barriers that impact both minority and majority populations, thus broadening the pool of candidates competitive for selection into examined units/specialties.
- d. **Review current physical training, nutrition, and injury-prevention strategies for SOF, Force Recon, and MSRT pre-accession, A&S, and training to ensure relevancy to women.** Focus group participants perceived

women to be more prone to musculoskeletal injury during high-impact events. They surmised that training, nutrition, and injury-prevention techniques more tailored to female physiology would better prepare women to meet the same standards as men. SOCOM, Force Recon, and MSRT should assess current health standards and physical training, nutrition, and injury-prevention practices to maximize the physical capabilities of female candidates and ensure suitability to a diverse range of body types. As feasible, training should be personalized to apply evidence-based approaches to preparing male and female candidates to meet standards in the manner best-suited to their body type.

- e. **Continue to expand access to preparatory training for the units/specialties examined prior to service and during service.** Focus group participants and interviewees often noted that minorities may not have access to the same opportunities to prepare for service in examined units/specialties, to include advanced swim skills and obtaining flight hours. The Services should continue and expand ongoing efforts to improve equity in pre-service preparation, such as efforts to increase diversity at service academies, provide youth with flight training (e.g., Aim High Flight Academy), and engage with youth groups and sports teams to build physical capabilities and motivation at an early age. Focus group participants and interviewees noted specific sports, such as wrestling and water polo, that tend to feed into SOF/Force Recon/MSRT careers; supporting these sports in communities with greater demographic diversity, as well as facilitating greater participation of girls in these sports, could be a fruitful approach. To prepare SMs during service, the Services should continue pre-accession training for SOF and the Air Force's Rated Preparatory Program, but also consider strategies to incentivize development of stepping-stone skills. Examples of this could include implementing SOF-related competitions or challenges, as the Army does with the Best Ranger Competition, or offering additional badges or qualification tabs that provide a career benefit and prepare SMs, should they later choose to join SOF.

3. Culture and Climate

- a. **Develop strategies to reduce and prevent backlash to DEI initiatives.** Interviewees and focus group participants described indifferent or markedly negative responses to DEI initiatives. The Services should rigorously test top-down communications intended to counter negative perceptions of DEI. Additionally, there may be benefits to bottom-up approaches that develop peer leaders of all demographic groups to promote the value of diversity, intervene

against racist/sexist behaviors, model inclusive behavior, and normalize discussions about race/ethnicity and gender.⁸² The Services should embed content on DEI in mentorship training for members of examined units/specialties to ensure mentors reach out to mentees from different backgrounds and share strategies to advance DEI as a rising leader.

- b. **Continue to provide opportunities to add flexibility to career trajectories and support families.** Focus group participants expressed significant concerns about demanding and rigid career trajectories that limit time for family and conflict with women's childbearing years. The Services should continue to explore and promote options to help members of examined units/specialties balance family life. For example, the Services should encourage and normalize, among both men and women, use of the Career Intermission Program (i.e., sabbatical of up to three years) within examined unit/specialties while also ensuring there is a mechanism to refresh skills during sabbatical and upon return. Additionally, DOD should consider covering advanced fertility services through Tricare including in-vitro fertilization and egg/sperm freezing services (a Tricare pilot program was planned in 2016 but never implemented).⁸³ Finally, the Services should ensure that when SMs do take advantage of alternative career trajectories, their promotion outcomes are not affected.
- c. **Assess the personnel required to successfully implement SOCOM's D&I Implementation Action Plan and hire/develop billets accordingly.** The Services and USSOCOM should ensure that it has the personnel in place to successfully deploy its Action Plan. Several D&I roles at the headquarters levels are additional duty rather than a full-time position (e.g., USASOC, MARSOC, SOCEUR, SOCPAC). USSOCOM should also ensure that emerging DEI requirements and policies are feasible to implement at all levels. An increase in requirements, without a corresponding reduction of other requirements or an increase in personnel, may result in resentment and inconsistent execution.⁸⁴

⁸² Plaut et al., "What about Me?"

⁸³ Patricia Kime, "Nonprofits are Filling a Void of Fertility for Service Members, but Hope Congress Steps Up," *Military.com*, June 29, 2022, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2022/06/29/nonprofits-are-filling-void-of-fertility-help-service-members-hope-congress-steps.html>.

⁸⁴ Wong and Gerras, "Lying to Ourselves."

Appendix A. SOF Specialties Not Named in Section 557

This section contains quantitative analyses of diversity among SOF specialties not specifically named in Section 557 or the 1999 RAND report: Army’s Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations (PSYOP) and Air Force’s SOF enlisted aircrew. Civil Affairs and PSYOP are part of USASOC and work with foreign governments, militaries, and populations. SOF enlisted aircrew are the aircrew for AFSOC.

Figure A-1 shows the proportion of different ethnic and racial groups among the enlisted of these specialties, with the proportions among the enlisted in the Services overall included for comparison.

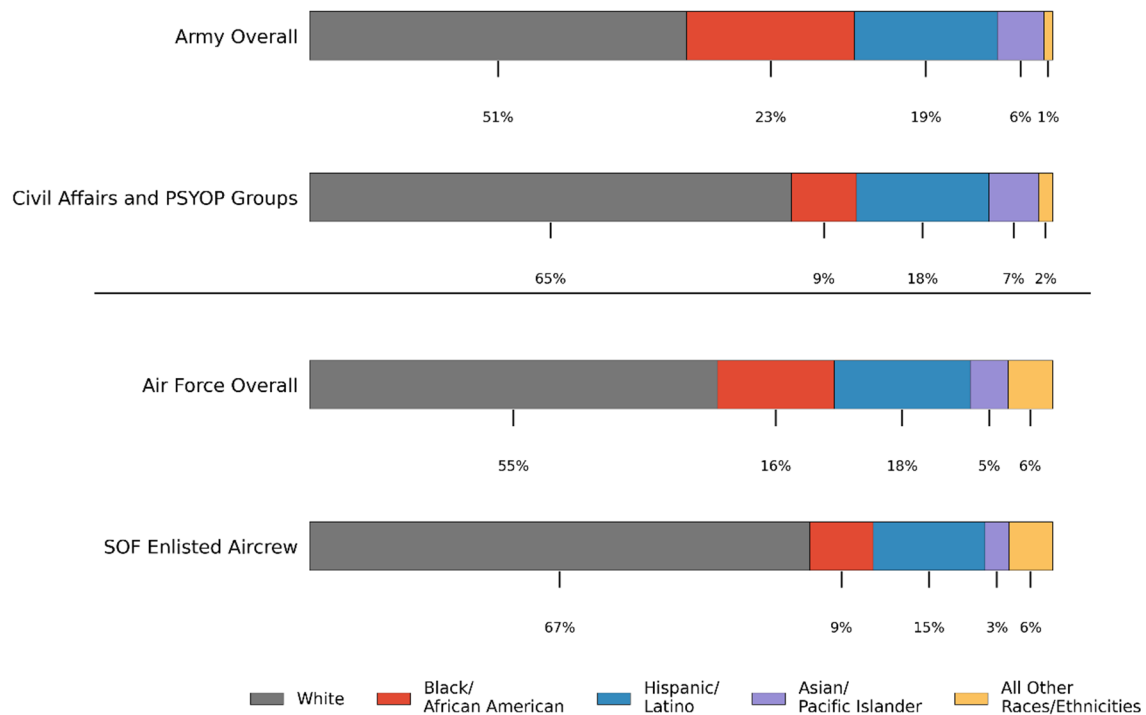


Figure A-1. Enlisted Race/Ethnicity in SOF Specialties Not Named in Section 557, Compared to Service Population (March 2022)

Table A-1 presents the participation and representation of ethnic and racial groups among the Civil Affairs/PSYOP and SOF enlisted aircrew, broken down by enlisted and officers. We measure participation as the percent of members of each racial ethnic/racial

group in each specialty, and we measure representation by means of the representation quotient (RQ). The RQ compares the percentage of ethnic/racial group members in each specialty to the percentage of members of that group in the officers of the corresponding service overall. See Chapter 2.B.3 for more detail.

Representation quotients (RQs) less than 100 indicate that the group is underrepresented relative to their representation in general population with smaller values denoting greater underrepresentation; RQs greater than 100 indicate the group is overrepresented.

White enlisted are overrepresented relative to the service in both specialties, and Black/African American enlisted are underrepresented, with an RQ of 38 in Civil Affairs/PSYOP and 54 in SOF enlisted aircrew. There is no clear evidence of underrepresentation of Hispanic/Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, or American Indian/Alaskan Native enlisted in Civil Affairs/PSYOP. Hispanic/Latino and Asian/Pacific Islander enlisted are underrepresented in SOF enlisted aircrew, with RQs of 82 and 63, respectively.

Among the officers of Civil Affairs and PSYOP, the population is generally too small to determine over/underrepresentation for most groups. However, Black/African American officers are underrepresented, with an RQ of 28.

Women comprise 6 percent of enlisted in Civil Affairs/PSYOP, compared to 15 percent of the enlisted in the Army, with an RQ of 42. Twelve percent of the SOF enlisted aircrew are women, compared to 21 percent of the Air Force enlisted overall, with an RQ of 55. Women comprise 14 percent of the officers in Civil Affairs/PSYOP, compared to 18 percent of the population of Army officers, with an RQ of 74.

Table A-1. Percentage of Reported Race/Ethnicity by Members of SOF Specialties Not Named in Section 557, RQ, and Statistical Significance (March 2022)

Race	Army Overall (Enlisted)	Civil Affairs and PSYOP (Enlisted)	Air Force Overall (Enlisted)	SOF Enlisted Aircrew	Army Overall (Officers)	Civil Affairs and PSYOP (Officers)
White	51%	65% RQ: 128*	55%	67% RQ: 123*	69%	73% RQ: 105
Black/African American	23%	9% RQ: 38*	16%	8% RQ: 54*	12%	3% RQ: 28*
Hispanic/Latino	19%	18% RQ: 93	18%	15% RQ: 82*	9%	12% RQ: 137
Asian/Pacific Islander	6%	7% RQ: 106	5%	3% RQ: 63*	7%	10% RQ: 132
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.7%	0.7% RQ: 94	0.4%	0.4% RQ: 93	0.5%	0.4% RQ: 86
Multiple			4%	4% RQ: 95		
Not Reported	0.5%	1% RQ: 262*	1%	1% RQ: 111	2%	2% RQ: 70
Total	373,538	1,318	262,157	6,593	93,072	242

Source: Derived from DMDC Active Duty Master file, March 2022.

Note: RQ refers to representation quotient. An RQ greater than 100 indicates that the group is overrepresented in the specified specialty relative to their representation in the service overall whereas an RQ less than 100 indicates that the group is underrepresented; Asterisk (*) indicates that the over- or under-representation is statistically significant with p<.05..

Note: Percentages displayed in this table are rounded whereas RQs were computed using percentages before rounding.

Note: "Hispanic/Latino" refers to all SMs who reported a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, regardless of race. All other ethnic/racial groups include only SMs who did not report a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. "Asian/Pacific Islander" includes Native Hawaiian.

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Appendix B. Participation by Foreign-Born Service Members

Section 557(a)(2)(D) includes a requirement to investigate the barriers to participation for English language learners. We provide a limited quantitative analysis in this appendix.

The data available for this project do not include information on proficiency with English or close proxies, such as whether English is the service member’s first language. The closest proxy available in the personnel data is whether the service member’s citizenship at birth was the United States or another country. We refer to those who were not born with U.S. citizenship as “foreign-born.”

Table B-1 provides the percentages of foreign-born enlisted and officers among the examined SOF specialties, pilots and navigators, and the full active duty force. We find that the percentage of foreign-born service members is lower among the examined SOF specialties and the pilots and navigators, both among the enlisted and the officer populations. However, it is not clear the extent to which language specifically leads to this difference, as other factors are likely linked to being foreign-born, such as eligibility for a security clearance.

Table B-1. Percentage of Foreign-Born Service Members among SOF Specialties, Pilots, and Navigators (March 2022)

	Active Duty (Enlisted)	Examined SOF Specialties (Enlisted)	Active Duty (Officers)	Examined SOF Specialties (Officers)	Pilots and Navigators
Percent Foreign-Born	4.3%	2.7%	2.8%	0.7%	1.6%

Note: Derived from DMDC Active Duty Master file, March 2022.

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Appendix C. Additional Details on SOF Pilots and Navigators

Table C-1. Percentage of Reported Race/Ethnicity by SOF Pilots and Navigators, RQ, and Statistical Significance (March 2022)

Race	Army Overall	Special Operations Aviators	Air Force Overall	SOF Air Force Pilots	SOF Air Force CSOs
White	69%	85% RQ: 124*	72%	83% RQ: 115*	82% RQ: 113*
Black/African American	12%	2% RQ: 16*	6%	1% RQ: 25*	2% RQ: 41*
Hispanic/Latino	9%	6% RQ: 70*	8%	6% RQ: 75*	7% RQ: 83
Asian/Pacific Islander	7%	2% RQ: 24*	6%	3% RQ: 54*	3% RQ: 47*
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.5%	0.4% RQ: 92	0.4%	0.5% RQ: 121	0.3% RQ: 72
Multiple			3%	2% RQ: 62*	4% RQ: 114
Not Reported	2%	4% RQ: 178*	4%	4% RQ: 85	2% RQ: 52*
Total	93,072	455	60,975	2,173	729

Source: Derived from DMDC Active Duty Master file, March 2022.

Note: RQ refers to representation quotient. An RQ greater than 100 indicates that the group is overrepresented in the specified specialty relative to their representation in the service overall, whereas an RQ less than 100 indicates that the group is underrepresented; Asterisk (*) indicates that the over- or under-representation is statistically significant with $p < .05$.

Note: Percentages displayed in this table are rounded, whereas RQs were computed using percentages before rounding.

Note: "Hispanic/Latino" refers to all SMs who reported a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, regardless of race. All other ethnic/racial groups include only SMs who did not report a Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. "Asian/Pacific Islander" includes Native Hawaiian.

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Appendix D. Data Sources and Identification

Our study uses administrative personnel data from the DMDC, which IDA receives regularly as part of an institutional data sharing agreement and maintains in its Personally Identifiable Information (PII) Enclave. IDA's data holdings span January 2000 to March 2022. We build our analytic set from the Active Duty Master file and the Military Entrance Processing Command (MEPCOM) file.

The specialties studied are identified according to the individual's occupation code as well as Unit Identification Codes (UICs) for some SOF specialties. The occupation codes⁸⁵ used to identify the specialties were provided by USSOCOM and verified by USASOC, NSWC, AFSOC, and MARSOC. The IDA research team identified occupation codes for Marine Corps Force Reconnaissance⁸⁶ as well as non-SOF pilots and navigators.⁸⁷

Because some SOF specialties are only considered SOF when assigned to AFSOC units, AFSOC provided a list of UICs for AFSOC units. Army UICs were identified using a dataset of UICs available through DMDC's Data Request System.⁸⁸ IDA provided a separate document to ODEI and ASD (SO/LIC) with a complete description of these processes.

⁸⁵ Army MOS/WOMOS/AOC, Navy designator/rating, Air Force AFSC, Marine Corps MOS.

⁸⁶ Reconnaissance Training and Readiness Manual NAVMC3500.55C W/CH 1-4, Headquarters United States Marine Corps, November 8, 2017, <https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/Publications/NAVMC%203500.55C%20W%20CH%201-4.pdf?ver=ZmE7K1-6IFJM-teQKaKopQ%3d%3d>.

⁸⁷ Air Force Personnel Center, "Air Force Officer Classification Directory (AFOCD)," October 31, 2021. Validated in conversations with AFSOC.

⁸⁸ DMDC, "Report 544," July 23, 2021.

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Appendix E. Sample Focus Group Questions

A. Questions for members of examined units/specialties

These sample questions are oriented to SOF members, but all questions were tailored to the specific unit/specialty (i.e., SOF would be replaced with the particular unit or specialty name).

1. What made you decide to apply to SOF?
2. Tell me about your recruitment into SOF.
3. In your opinion, are some groups of people more or less likely to join SOF? Why do you think that is?
 - a. Ethnic/racial minorities?
 - b. Women?
4. What, if anything, could your service do to more effectively recruit women and ethnic/racial minorities?
5. How did you prepare for SOF pre-screening, assessment, selection, and training?
6. Why do you think some people are unable to make it through the assessment and selection and training process?
7. What, if anything, do you think your Service could do to prepare a broader group of people to be able to meet the standards and make it through training?
8. Are there any standards or selection practices that make it harder for some groups to join? Which ones?
9. What, if anything, do you think SOF leaders should be doing to promote greater diversity and inclusion?
10. In what ways do you think greater diversity may help SOF? In what ways do you think greater diversity may hurt SOF?

B. Questions for SMs who were not members of the examined units/specialties

These sample questions are oriented towards SOF but participants were also asked a parallel set of questions about pilots/navigators.

1. What made you decide to select your occupational specialty?
2. When you hear SOF, what specific units come to mind?
3. What are your impressions of SOF members?
4. Have you ever considered joining a SOF? Why or why not?
5. If you wanted to join SOF, what steps would you need to take?
6. In your opinion, are there some groups of people that are less likely to join SOF – why do you think that is?
 - a. Ethnic/racial minorities?
 - b. Women?

Appendix F. Progress on Additional Service-Specific Recommendations

Table F-1. Progress on Additional Service-Specific Recommendations

Recommendation	Status	Challenges and Additional Considerations
Consider providing a job guarantee for USAF SOF candidates	☑ Complete – Air Force Special Warfare candidates are now guaranteed a chance to participate in accession and selection.	Special Warfare Operator Enlisted vectoring is a promising approach to allow for greater flexibility in selection to specific Special Warfare career fields after assessment and selection.
Continue shipboard briefings about SEALs	🔄 Partial/In progress – Our interviewees indicated that shipboard briefings about or featuring SEALs were rare and that in-service recruiting (Fleet Transfer Program) is increasing its focus on SWCC. However, the new NSW Assessment Team is working to expand in-service outreach, including engagement with ROTCs and presentations to the fleet.	Interviewees noted that recruiting for SEALs did not focus on current sailors because of their relatively higher attrition rate through BUD/S, compared to direct accessions.
Continue to advertise across service newspapers to recruit across Services (particularly for USAF CCTs)	🔄 Partial/In progress – The Special Warfare branch of AFRS identified administrative barriers to inter-service and prior-service recruiting and developed an action plan to address these challenges, to be implemented in FY23 and FY24 (see p. 94 for details).	N/A
Update Navy recruiting materials to include photographs instead of drawings	☑ Complete – Navy online recruiting materials include photographs instead of drawings.	N/A

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Appendix G. Illustrations

Figures

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Appendix I. Abbreviations

AFSOC	Air Force Special Operations Command
AIM	Aviation Inspiration Mentorship
ARSOF	Army Special Operations Forces
ASD SO/LIC	Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict
ASVAB	Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery
BUD/S	Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL
CCT	Combat Controller
CO	Commanding Officer
CSO	Combat Systems Operator
D&I	Diversity and Inclusion
DEI	Diversity, Equity, And Inclusion
DEOCS	Defense Equal Opportunity Climate Survey
DMDC	Defense Manpower Data Center
DOD	Department of Defense
DSF	Deployable Specialized Forces
EOD	Explosive Ordnance Disposal
ET	Electronics Technician
FA	Field Artillery
Force Recon	Force Reconnaissance Fleet Transition Program
FY	Fiscal Year
GOFO	General Officers and Flag Officers
HBCU	Historically Black Colleges and Universities
HSI	Hispanic-Serving Institution
IDA	Institute for Defense Analyses
IRB	Institutional Review Board
ITC	Individual Training Course
JAMRS	Joint Advertising, Market Research and Studies
JODO	Junior Officer Diversity Outreach
JROTC	Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps
MARSOC	Marine Corps Special Operations Command

MEPCOM	Military Entrance Processing Command
MC	Marine Corps
MSRT	Maritime Security Response Team
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
MSI	Minority Serving Institutions
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
NJP	Non-Judicial Punishments
NSW	Naval Special Warfare
NSWC	Naval Special Warfare Command
ODEI	Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
OPA	Office of People Analytics
Ops	Operations
PAST	Physical Ability and Stamina Test
PCSM	Pilot Candidate Selection Method
PII	Personally Identifiable Information
PSYOP	Psychological Operations
PT	Physical Training
Q&A	Questions & Answers
RADM	Rear Admiral
RASP	Ranger Assessment and Selection Program
ROTC	Reserve Officers' Training Corps
RPA	Remotely Piloted Aircraft
RQ	Representation Quotient
SEAL	Sea, Air, and Land
SERE	Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape
SF	Special Forces
SM	Service Member
SOAR	Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne)
SOCEUR	Special Operations Command Europe
SOCKOR	Special Operations Command Korea
SOCNORTH	Special Operations Command North
SOC PAC	Special Operations Command Pacific
SOCOM	Special Operations Commands
SOF	Special Operation Forces
SORB	Special Operations Recruiting Battalion
SORD	Strategic Officer Recruiting Detachment
SWCC	Special Warfare Combatant Craft Crewmen

TBAS	Test of Basic Aviation Skills
TSOC	Theater Special Operations Command
UIC	Unit Identification Code
USA	United States Army
USAF	United States Air Force
USAREC	United States Army Recruiting
USASOC	United States Army Special Operations Command
USCG	United States Coast Guard
USCGHQ	United States Coast Guard Headquarters
USMC	United States Marine Corps
USN	United States Navy
USSOCOM	United States Special Operations Command
WASP	Women Airforce Service Pilots
WEOS	Workplace and Equal Opportunity Survey
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

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