

Hispanics in the Military

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Introduction

The war in Iraq has again raised questions about the level of Hispanic representation in the U.S. military. This fact sheet presents several means to assess that issue. The simplest method for determining whether a given racial or ethnic group is under or overrepresented in a particular form of employment involves comparing the number of individuals in the job category with the number of individuals from that group in the overall labor force. To assess representation in the military, this methodology can be further refined by making comparisons to the labor force in the appropriate age range and with the necessary educational credentials. Calculations of the available Latino labor force can be further refined by subtracting the estimated number of individuals who are not eligible because they lack the necessary immigration status to enlist.

In sum, Latino enlisted personnel are underrepresented when compared to the size of the civilian labor force of the appropriate age. They are on par when compared to civilian labor force of the appropriate age that possess the necessary educational credentials. And, they are overrepresented when compared to the civilian labor force of the appropriate age that possess both the necessary educational credentials and immigration status.

The key source for statistics on social representation in the U.S. armed forces is an annual Department of Defense report, "Population Representation in the Military Services" which is published by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy) and which is widely known as the "PopRep." This is a lengthy, detailed and highly accessible document with a vast amount of information about representation by gender and racial or ethnic groups in the U.S. military. The most recent published report covers Fiscal Year 2000 and it can be downloaded at <http://www.defenselink.mil/prhome/poprep2000/> or at www.pewhispanic.org. For the purposes of this fact sheet the Department of Defense provided as yet unpublished data for Fiscal Year 2001, which ended on September 30, 2001. An extensive set of tables

with the FY2001 data can be found at www.pewhispanic.org. The PopRep 2001 draws comparisons to the civilian population using data from September 2001 Current Population Survey (CPS), the monthly survey by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Census Bureau that is best known for its reporting on the unemployment rate. Much of the data on Hispanics from CPS surveys in 2001 is being revised upward to account for higher than expected Hispanic population numbers in the 2000 Census.

The Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute produces a semi-annual statistical report on representation in the military that has considerable data on Hispanics. A copy of the March 2002 report is available at www.pewhispanic.org. This appears to be the most up to date source of general statistics on Hispanics in the military.

This fact sheet also cites data from a recent briefing by the Pentagon's Defense Manpower Data Center on historical trends in Hispanic representation in the military. In sum, that data shows the extent to which the number of Hispanics in uniform grew during the 1990s even as the overall size of the military was shrinking following the end of the Cold War.

Enlisted Personnel

At the end of September 2001 there were 109,487 Hispanics in the enlisted ranks, and they made up 9.49 percent of the active duty enlisted force. In contrast, Hispanics made up 13.35 percent of the civilian labor force 18 to 44 years old, the typical age range for enlisted service. Table 1 shows significant variations in the extent of Hispanic representation among the armed services from a high of 13.99 percent in the Marine Corps to a low of 5.57 percent in the Air Force.

Table 1

FY 2001 Active Component Enlisted Members by Race/Ethnicity and Service with Civilian Comparison Group						
RACE/ ETHNICITY	ARMY	NAVY	MARINE CORPS	AIR FORCE	TOTAL DoD	18-44 YEAR OLD CIVILIANS
a. Number						
White	219,610	188,915	102,236	203,466	714,227	60,390,091
Black	115,698	66,982	24,484	51,762	258,926	11,168,705
Hispanic	38,937	33,316	21,636	15,598	109,487	11,718,194
Other	26,058	28,922	6,334	9,426	70,740	4,475,010
TOTAL	400,303	318,135	154,690	280,252	1,153,380	87,751,999
b. Percent						

White	54.86%	59.38%	66.09%	72.60%	61.92%	68.82%
Black	28.90%	21.05%	15.83%	18.47%	22.45%	12.73%
Hispanic	9.73%	10.47%	13.99%	5.57%	9.49%	13.35%
Other	6.51%	9.09%	4.09%	3.36%	6.13%	5.10%

Source: PopRep 2001 Table B-25

An important characteristic that differentiates the Hispanic population from other racial and ethnic groups is its lower levels of high school completion. The armed forces each set criteria for enlistment that involve applicants' educational attainment, measured in three "tiers," and their scores on a standardized aptitude test (for details see Chapter 2 of PopRep 2000.) The result is that virtually all enlisted personnel (99 percent in FY2001) are either high school graduates (Tier 1) or hold an alternative credential such as a General Education Development (GED) certificate (Tier 2).

Comparing the number of Hispanic enlisted personnel to the size of the educationally qualified civilian workforce yields a different measure of Latino representation in uniform. While there are 11.7 million Latinos in the civilian workforce of military age, only 7.5 million have the educational credentials that qualify them for military service.

Table 2

FY 2001 Active Component Enlisted Personnel, Total DoD by Education with Civilian Comparison Group			
	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
RACE/ ETHNICITY	Tier 1 & 2: number	Tier 1 & 2 as % of group	Tier 1 & 2 as % of total
ACTIVE COMPONENT ENLISTED PERSONNEL			
White	707,675	99.08%	61.88%
Black	257,415	99.42%	22.51%
Hispanic	108,391	99.00%	9.48%
Other	70,060	99.04%	6.13%
Total	1,143,541	99.15%	100.00%
18-44 YEAR OLD CIVILIAN WORKFORCE			
White	56,271,851	93.18%	72.36%
Black	9,883,915	88.50%	12.71%
Hispanic	7,482,645	63.85%	9.62%
Other	4,124,777	92.17%	5.30%
Total	77,763,187	88.62%	100.00%

Source: PopRep 2002 Table B-28

In Table 1 Hispanic enlisted personnel makeup 9.49 percent of the total enlisted force while Hispanics make up 13.35 percent of the total

civilian workforce in the appropriate age group for service in the enlisted ranks. That comparison would suggest significant underrepresentation by Latinos. However, a different measure emerges from Table 2, which compares enlisted personnel with Tier 1 and 2 educational qualifications to the comparable civilian workforce. Column 3 of Table 2 shows that Hispanic enlisted personnel with Tier 1 and 2 qualifications make up 9.48 percent of the enlisted ranks compared to 9.62 percent of the comparable civilian workforce. By that measure, Latinos are present in the enlisted military in roughly the same proportion as they are in the qualified civilian workforce. The same comparison also indicates that whites are underrepresented in the enlisted military. Blacks are significantly overrepresented by either measure.

As a practical matter, this measure of the qualified workforce also excludes most Latinos who lack the immigration status (citizen or legal permanent resident) required by law for enlistment. According to estimates by Jeffrey Passel, a demographer at The Urban Institute, about 60 percent of the undocumented population has not completed high school. Among 18- to 44-year olds, Passel estimates that in 2001 there were about 1.2 million Latinos with at least a high school degree or equivalent. If that number is subtracted from the qualified civilian workforce, Latino representation in the enlisted ranks increases by comparison. After accounting for this estimate of the undocumented population, Latinos make up 8.2 percent of the qualified civilian workforce, and thus their 9.48 percent of the enlisted ranks reflects an overrepresentation.

Table 3

FY 2001 Applicants for Enlistment, Total DoD by Education with Civilian Comparison Group				
RACE/ ETHNICITY	Column 1 Tier 1 & 2 applicants: number	Column 2 Tier 1 & 2 applicants: percent	Column 3 Tier 1 & 2 in civilian labor force 18 - 24 years old: number	Column 4 Tier 1 & 2 in civilian labor force 18 - 24 years old: percent
White	214,902	59.71%	13,902,928	69.41%
Black	79,493	22.09%	2,693,295	13.45%
Hispanic	41,507	11.53%	2,297,335	11.47%
Other	24,023	6.67%	1,137,263	5.68%
Total	359,925	100.00%	20,030,822	100.00%

Source: PopRep 2001 Table A-8

Another way of measuring Hispanics' propensity to volunteer for military service is to look at applicants for enlistment. In Table 3, Hispanics with Tier 1 or Tier 2 qualifications make up 11.53 percent of

the applicants for enlistment in FY2001. Meanwhile, Hispanics account for 11.47 percent of the qualified civilian labor force that is of enlistment age, i.e. 18 to 24 years old, and that has the necessary educational credentials. By this measure, Latinos are represented in just about equal proportion to the qualified workforce. The table shows that by this measure also whites are under represented in the enlisted military and blacks are over represented.

Table 4

FY 2001 Active Component Enlisted Members Total DoD by Occupational Area and Race/Ethnicity										
RACE/ ETHNICITY	Infantry, Gun Crews, & Seamanship	Electronics	Commu- nications	Medical	Other Technic al	Admin- istrators	Electrical	Craftsman	Supply	Non- Occu- pational
a. Number										
White	129,608	77,940	71,130	40,542	24,002	86,683	160,217	27,846	51,159	45,100
Black	31,615	18,181	20,287	21,423	6,486	69,668	38,879	7,882	31,500	13,005
Hispanic	19,425	8,593	8,133	8,180	2,631	19,754	20,835	3,450	9,455	9,031
Other	10,440	5,513	4,684	7,478	1,797	12,854	15,181	2,623	5,971	4,199
Total	191,088	110,227	104,234	77,623	34,916	188,959	235,112	41,801	98,085	71,335
b. Percent										
White	18.15%	10.91%	9.96%	5.68%	3.36%	12.14%	22.43%	3.90%	7.16%	6.31%
Black	12.21%	7.02%	7.84%	8.27%	2.50%	26.91%	15.02%	3.04%	12.17%	5.02%
Hispanic	17.74%	7.85%	7.43%	7.47%	2.40%	18.04%	19.03%	3.15%	8.64%	8.25%
Other	14.76%	7.79%	6.62%	10.57%	2.54%	18.17%	21.46%	3.71%	8.44%	5.94%
Total	16.57%	9.56%	9.04%	6.73%	3.03%	16.38%	20.38%	3.62%	8.50%	6.18%

Source: PopRep 2001Table B-30

Just as there are significant differences in the racial and ethnic composition of the armed services, there are also differences among occupations in the military. Table 4 shows that Latinos are slightly overrepresented among enlisted personnel who most directly handle weapons, making up 17.74 percent of the category “Infantry, Gun Crews & Seamanship” while that category makes up 16.57 percent of the enlisted force. In contrast, Hispanics are somewhat underrepresented in some of the more technical occupations such as electronics and communications.

Table 5

FY 2001 Active Component Enlisted Members by Gender				
Total DoD	Males	Females	Total	% Female
White	630,068	84,159	714,227	11.78%
Black	198,224	60,702	258,926	23.44%
Hispanic	93,420	16,067	109,487	14.67%

Other	59,803	10,937	70,740	15.46%
Total	981,515	171,865	1,153,380	14.90%

Source: PopRep2001 Table B-25

Differences in participation rates by gender are also apparent among racial and ethnic groups. Females make up a much larger share, 23.44 percent, of the black military enlisted population than in any other racial or ethnic group. African-American females make up 35.32 percent of the women in the enlisted force, while black males make up 20.2 percent of the enlisted males. Hispanic females represent 14.67 percent of Latinos in the enlisted ranks. They make up 9.35 percent of female enlisted personnel, and Hispanic males represent a similar share of the male enlisted force, 9.52 percent.

The Officer Corps

Table 6

RACE/ ETHNICITY	FY 2001 Active Component Officer Corps by Service and Race/Ethnicity										Civilian College Grads	21-49 years old
	ARMY		NAVY		MARINE CORPS		AIR FORCE		TOTAL DoD			
White	50,543	78.00%	43,347	83.48%	13,716	84.88%	59,715	87.77%	167,321	83.28%	22,177,620	78.38%
Black	7,697	11.88%	3,517	6.77%	1,044	6.46%	4,457	6.55%	16,715	8.32%	2,426,025	8.57%
Hispanic	2,784	4.30%	2,436	4.69%	851	5.27%	1,639	2.41%	7,710	3.84%	1,439,629	5.09%
Other	3,773	5.82%	2,628	5.06%	549	3.40%	2,227	3.27%	9,177	4.57%	2,251,506	7.96%
Total	64,797	100.00%	51,928	100.00%	16,160	100.00%	68,038	100.00%	200,923	100.00%	28,294,780	100.00%

Source: PopRep Table B-34

A look at the racial/ethnic makeup of the officer corps indicates that Latinos make up a relatively small share of the total. But, as with enlisted personnel, educational qualifications are a key determinant. With few exceptions, a four-year college degree is a prerequisite for commissioning as a military officer. Hispanic representation looks somewhat higher when the percentage of Latino officers is compared to the percentage of Latinos in the civilian labor force of the appropriate age and with a college degree. In both the Navy and the Marine Corps, the percentage of Hispanic officers is roughly on par with the percentage of qualified Latinos in the civilian workforce. It is somewhat lower in the Army and substantially lower in the Air Force. By this measure whites are on par in the Army and overrepresented in the other services, and blacks are over represented in the Army but underrepresented in the other services.

Another way of looking at the Hispanic presence in the officer corps is by examining representation by rank. The officer corps is divided into ten pay grades. The first three represent the youngest, most junior, and most numerous segment of the officer corps. Almost all of the

personnel in these ranks received their commissions in the prior ten years, many in the prior five years. In the Army, Air Force and Marines, pay grades O-1 through O-3 correspond to the ranks of second lieutenant, first lieutenant and captain and in the Navy to ensign, lieutenant junior grade and lieutenant. These are all company grade officers who are most likely to have direct command of enlisted personnel. Hispanics are heavily concentrated in these ranks. Some 69 percent of Hispanic officers are in these pay grades compared to some 57 percent of white officers and 64 percent of black officers. Hispanics make up 5.49 percent of the officers in the junior ranks while whites account for 81 percent and blacks 9 percent.

The next three pay grades are comprised of field rank officers—major, lieutenant colonel, and colonel in the Army, Air Force and Marines; lieutenant commander, commander and captain in the Navy. Most of the personnel in these ranks received their commissions at least ten years ago, and they hold important staff jobs and commands. Officers in these ranks have opportunities for advanced studies and are often on career tracks that take them to a complete 20 years of service and full retirement. The number of officers in these ranks is progressively smaller as the seniority pyramid narrows. A significantly smaller share of

Table 7

FY 2001 Active Component Office Corps by Pay Grade and Race/Ethnicity									
Total DoD	Pay Grades								
RACE/ ETHNICITY	O1-O3			O4-O6			O7-O10		
	number	% of group	% of grades	number	% of group	% of grades	number	% of group	% of grades
White	96,108	57.44%	80.98%	70,310	42.02%	86.52%	822	0.49%	93.09%
Black	10,700	64.01%	9.02%	5,967	35.70%	7.34%	42	0.25%	4.76%
Hispanic	5,351	69.40%	4.51%	2,342	30.38%	2.88%	12	0.16%	1.36%
Other	6,517	71.01%	5.49%	2,649	28.87%	3.26%	7	0.08%	0.79%
Total	118,676	59.07%	100.00%	81,268	40.45%	100.00%	883	0.44%	100.00%

Source: PopRep2002 Table B-49

Hispanic officers hold these ranks, only 30 percent, compared to 42 percent of white officers and nearly 36 percent of blacks. Latinos make up less than 3 percent of the officers in these ranks while whites account for more than 86 percent.

The top four pay grades are comprised of flag rank officers—generals and admirals. This elite category of military leaders is overwhelmingly dominated by whites who hold 93 percent of the flag billets, compared to 1.36 percent for Hispanics.

Historical Trends

A recent briefing by the Defense Manpower Data Center examined changes in Hispanic representation in the military from September 1992 to September 2001, roughly the period of the draw down in U.S. military

forces that followed the end of the Cold War. That period also coincided with a nearly 70 percent surge in the Hispanic population. The briefing slides in a report entitled “Hispanic Statistical Profile” are available at www.pewhispanic.org.

From 1992 to 2001, while the overall end strength of the military dropped by 23 percent from 1,775,000 to 1,369,000, the number of Hispanics in uniform grew by 30 percent from 90,600 to 118,000. During that period the total number of enlisted accessions (successful enlistments) fell by 11 percent while Hispanic accessions increased by 31 percent. Hispanics represented 7.6 percent of enlisted accessions in 1992 and 11.3 percent in 2001. Accessions to the ranks of commissioned and warrant officer ranks increased for Hispanics from 2.8 percent of the total to 4.7 percent. This included a significant increase in the number of Hispanic officers earning commissions at the nation’s military academies, from 1.7 percent to 4.1 percent of the total.

The briefing also examined “survival rates” for Hispanics—the percentage of personnel who remain in the service after their initial four-year enlistment is completed. High retention rates are prized by the military as they maximize the benefits of training and specialization. Retention among Hispanics was already higher than average and increased during the period of the draw down. For enlisted personnel who joined the service in 1992 the survival rate was 38.1 percent for Hispanics compared to 36.9 percent for the military overall. Among those who joined in 1996, the rate was 40.4 percent for Hispanics compared to 37.3 percent for the military overall.

A similar trend toward significantly improving retention among Hispanics is evident in the officer corps. Among officers commissioned in 1992, 82.1 percent of Hispanics were still on active duty four years later compared to 83.9 percent of the officer corps overall. Among those commissioned in 1996, 86.8 percent of Hispanics were still on active duty after four years compared to 82.9 percent for the officer corps overall. For other resources related to Hispanics in the military please visit

www.pewhispanic.org.