

# Sustaining the All-Volunteer Force in the Era of the Operational Army National Guard

A Monograph

by

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## Abstract

Sustaining the All-Volunteer Force in the Era of the Operational Army National Guard, by Noah M. Genger, 57 pages.

September 11, 2001 marks a significant evolution in the utilization of the Army National Guard (ARNG). Since that time, the ARNG has transitioned from a strategic reserve into an operational force. The ability of the ARNG to function as an operational force relies fundamentally on the ability to maintain the All-Volunteer Force (AVF). However, current trends within the population of the United States such as obesity, drug use, and decreased willingness to serve are decreasing the pool of eligible recruits and threatening the viability of the AVF.

This monograph investigates shifts in societal demographics since 2001 and explores the resultant effects in an effort to frame the current recruiting environment. The monograph then examines current ARNG personnel data to understand the challenges facing the recruiting and retention force. Utilizing the analysis of the past seventeen years, the monograph proposes an operational approach to address both the symptoms of the decreasing recruit pool and the underlying root causes.

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## Acronyms

ADD	Attention Deficit Disorder
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
APFT	Army Physical Fitness Test
ARNG	Army National Guard
ASVAB	Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery
AVF	All-Volunteer Force
BMI	Body Mass Index
CDC	Center for Disease Control and Prevention
DoD	Department of Defense
DPRO	Director's Personnel Readiness Overview
JAMRS	Joint Advertising Marketing Research and Studies
Optempo	Operational Tempo
QMA	Qualified Military Available
US	United States

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## Introduction

Throughout the history of the United States, the citizen-soldiers of the Army National Guard (ARNG) have served with distinction and pride when called upon for federal defense and homeland support. Whether in response to a natural disaster or an existential threat, the ARNG has responded with the forces needed. With ranks filled by soldiers that simultaneously maintain civilian jobs and military service duties, the ARNG has answered the call with well-trained soldiers that possess unique and useful civilian skills and experience. As an All-Volunteer Force (AVF), the ability of the Army National Guard to respond to the call rests on the foundation of recruiting and retaining citizen-soldiers to fill the ranks.

The ability of the recruiting and retention force to accomplish its mission is central to maintaining the AVF. In the current context of ARNG 4.0, the National Guard faces an increasingly challenging recruiting and retention environment. The National Guard must compete with the rest of the services for the small portion of the US population that is eligible and willing to serve. More precisely, the National Guard must recruit individuals that are both eligible and willing to serve in the military while maintaining a full-time civilian occupation.

September 11th, 2001 marked the beginning of a significant change to the recruiting environment of the ARNG. The increased utilization of ARNG units to prosecute the war on terror strained the capacity of recruiting and retention to meet operational demands. Higher operational tempo (optempo) and increasing end strength authorizations increased the demand for new recruits. As the need for more recruits increased, the demographic base that supported the ARNG also changed. Factors such as obesity, drug use, propensity to serve, disconnection, and decreasing unemployment all contributed to the difficulties of recruiting and retention in the ARNG.

The current ARNG 4.0 concept establishes multiple initiatives for the ARNG to increase the overall readiness of the force. The ability to recruit and retain quality soldiers is fundamental

to meeting these readiness goals. Through this paper’s examination of the extent to which increased optempo and societal demographic change has affected the demographics within the country and the ARNG, this paper will attempt to visualize the make-up of the current force, the current challenges of recruiting and retention in the ARNG, and future considerations as the force increases overall readiness. Framing the current recruiting environment, this paper will propose an operational approach to address both the symptoms of the decreasing recruit pool and the underlying root causes.

## Background

At the core of these changes is the explicit recognition of the evolution of the reserve components from a purely strategic force, with lengthy mobilization times designed to meet Cold War threats from large nation-states, to an operational force. This operational reserve must be readily available for emergencies at home and abroad, and more fully integrated with the active component.

— The Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, *Transforming the National Guard and Reserves into 21st Century Operational Force: Report to Congress and the Secretary of Defense*

This paper will focus on demographic changes external and internal to the ARNG that have affected the ability to recruit and retain citizen soldiers since September 11, 2001. To understand the current era of the ARNG it is necessary to understand the historical transition of the ARNG from a strategic reserve to an operational force. This transition marks the shift in the utilization of the ARNG from a force relied upon only for domestic response and crises exceeding the Regular Army’s capacity, to a force that is critical to the daily worldwide operations of the US Army. To describe the phases of transition, the ARNG has constructed a phased model that identifies the evolutions that led to the current concept known as ARNG 4.0.<sup>1</sup> The model

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<sup>1</sup> “History of ARNG 4.0,” US Army National Guard, accessed December 19, 2017. <http://www.nationalguard.mil/Resources/ARNG-Readiness/History-of-ARNG-40/>.

encompasses five phases: 1.0, 2.0, 2.5, 3.0, and 4.0, beginning with ARNG 1.0 and the inception of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) and ending with the current evolution of ARNG 4.0.

To investigate the feasibility of an AVF, President Nixon established a commission headed by former Secretary of Defense Thomas Gates. In 1970, the commission issued a report that found “evidence that an All-Volunteer force would result in better retention; greater manpower efficiency, because the number of new recruits who required training would be lower; a higher readiness level; greater freedom for American citizens, who no longer would face a draft; and recruits of a higher quality.”<sup>2</sup> Acting on the recommendations of the Gates Commission, President Nixon ended the draft officially in 1973 and instituted the AVF.<sup>3</sup>

The introduction of the Total Force Policy dominated the period of 1973-83 which was subsequently labeled ARNG 1.0. The Total Force Policy or Abrams Doctrine accompanied the end of conscription and integrated the Reserve Component as the primary augmentation force for the active forces. Three main premises underlay this shift. The first assumption was that an AVF would produce a higher quality military.<sup>4</sup> Second, that a greater integration of the active, reserve, and National Guard forces would benefit the security of the United States.<sup>5</sup> Third, that the

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<sup>2</sup> The Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, *Transforming the National Guard and Reserves into 21st Century Operational Force: Report to Congress and the Secretary of Defense* (Washington, DC January 2008), E7.

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Rostker, *I Want You! The Evolution of the All-Volunteer Force* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2006), 4, accessed January 1, 2018, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG265.html>.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-96.

<sup>5</sup> Patrick M. Cronin, *The Total Force Policy in Historical Perspective*, No. CRM-87-78. Center for Naval Analyses (Alexandria, VA: Naval Planning Manpower and Logistics Division, 1987), 6, accessed January 1, 2017, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a187619.pdf>.

mandatory use of the citizen soldiers of the reserve component would ensure the public's involvement in future conflicts.<sup>6</sup>

While Total Force Policy set the foundation for a more integrated force, the citizen soldiers of National Guard were in practice a strategic reserve. The operational tempo for the average Guard unit remained the standard forty-eight drill periods and two weeks of annual training per year. For the recruiter the line "one weekend a month, two weeks in the summer" aptly described service in the National Guard under ARNG 1.0.

ARNG 2.0 (1984-1991) describes the National Guard under the program of "tiered readiness." Tiered readiness stratified the force into units manned, equipped, and trained at different levels based on the priority assigned to the unit. Operational usage of the force remained low and the Guard remained in its status as a strategic reserve. Resourced as a strategic reserve, the Guard relied on older equipment transferred from the Active Component and units received additional funding for new equipment and training if called upon to deploy.<sup>7</sup> Again, the standard "one weekend a month, two weeks in the summer" applied to majority of the Guard under ARNG 2.0. However, the subsequent call up of units for Desert Storm/Desert Shield tested the efficacy of the tiered readiness model.

Following Desert Storm, the ARNG started transformation away from its role as a strategic reserve. This period, referred to as ARNG 2.5 (1992-2001), encompassed both the military drawdowns of the nineties as well as the Guard deployments in support of missions in the

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<sup>6</sup> There is debate over the assertion that the connection to the American people was a deliberate goal of the Abrams doctrine. The debate centers on the lack of primary sources to qualify the assertion. However, other authors claim the connection to the American people was an intended consequence of the Abrams Doctrine. For a discussion of the topic see National Commission on the Future of the Army, Understanding the Origins of the "Abrams Doctrine", Gian Gentile and Sean Mann, PE-175-RC, September, 2015, accessed January 1, 2018, <http://www.ncfa.ncr.gov/sites/default/files/PE-175-RC%20Abrams%20Doctrine%20Sept%2016%20final%20v1%20.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> "History of ARNG 4.0," accessed December 19, 2017.

Balkans and Egypt.<sup>8</sup> The National Guard instituted programs such as Project Standard Bearer to raise the readiness of selected Guard units and overcome difficulties experienced with the mobilizations during Desert Storm.<sup>9</sup> Under such programs, the ARNG offered bonuses to soldiers to join and remain in high priority units. Between tiered readiness, selective incentives, and strength drawdowns, members again began to complain that the force was divided between the “haves” and the “have nots.”<sup>10</sup> The disparity in training and equipment between the different tiered units created a difficult environment for recruiting and retention.

During ARNG 2.5, the Guard also expanded its operational activity through the State Partnership Program and peacekeeping missions abroad in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo.<sup>11</sup> It continued its domestic response missions in the homeland responding to Hurricane Andrew, the Los Angeles riots, the Oklahoma City Bombing, and the Great Flood of 1993.<sup>12</sup> For the citizen soldier, the opportunities to serve anywhere in the world now existed within the missions of the National Guard. For many soldiers “one weekend a month, and two weekends a year” no longer strictly applied to their service in the ARNG.

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<sup>8</sup> “History of ARNG 4.0,” accessed December 19, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Project Standard Bearer was an ARNG program established to ensure that high priority Guard units were capable of early deployment. Under this program, units identified as high priority received 100 percent of their equipment and were required to maintain manning at 95 percent. Michael Doubler, *Civilians in Peace, Soldiers in War—I Am the Guard: A History of the Army National Guard, 1636–2000* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2001), 292-293.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Doubler, *Civilians in Peace, Soldiers in War—I Am the Guard: A History of the Army National Guard*, 293.

<sup>11</sup> The State Partnership Program links a state’s National Guard force with the armed forces of a relatively equivalent foreign partner country for the purpose of cross training and relationship building. The program is administered through the National Guard Bureau and receives guidance from the State Department and the Department of Defense. State Partnership Program, accessed January 20, 2017, <http://www.nationalguard.mil/Leadership/Joint-Staff/J-5/International-Affairs-Division/State-Partnership-Program/>

<sup>12</sup> Michael Doubler, *Civilians in Peace, Soldiers in War—I Am the Guard: A History of the Army National Guard*, 307-309.

September 11, 2001 marked the beginning of the period labeled ARNG 3.0 (2001-2017) and the massive increase in the optempo of the Army National Guard. Since the initial homeland defense deployments following September 11<sup>th</sup>, the National Guard has deployed over 780,000 soldiers and airmen in support of the Global War of Terror.<sup>13</sup> Nearly half of all ARNG members have combat experience and their service includes tours in over 70 countries throughout the world.<sup>14</sup> During this period, the Guard fully transitioned from a strategic reserve to a component of the operational force.

The Commission of the National Guard and Reserves recognized the necessity of increased optempo for the Guard in 2008 when they noted, “there is no reasonable alternative to the nation’s continued increased reliance on reserve components as part of its operational force for missions at home and abroad.”<sup>15</sup> Crucially important was the recognition by the commission that the operational environment now required the inclusion of the ARNG in order to meet increased demands. By the end of 2016, the term “one weekend a month, two weeks in the summer” represented the absolute minimum requirement of the average citizen soldier. The reality had become far more time intensive.

The current era, ARNG 4.0 (2017-present), represents the final phase in the transition from strategic reserve to operational force. Moving forward, the National Guard envisions a force that is readily deployable and resourced according to a sustainable readiness model. To manage the higher level of readiness, the plan calls for focused resourcing for high priority units as well as increased training and readiness for the force as a whole.<sup>16</sup> With a focus on mission specific

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<sup>13</sup> Frank J. Grass, “2016 National Guard Bureau Posture Statement,” 4, accessed December 19, 2017, <http://www.nationalguard.mil/portals/31/Documents/PostureStatements/2017-National-Guard-Bureau-Posture-Statement.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Frank J. Grass, “2016 National Guard Bureau Posture Statement,” 4, accessed December 19, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> The Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, 5.

<sup>16</sup> “History of ARNG 4.0,” accessed December 19, 2017.

deployments, the ARNG aims to provide enhanced capabilities rapidly to meet the needs of the Army.<sup>17</sup> As stated by the Director of the ARNG, LTG Kadavy, “4.0 is being ready without a notification of an upcoming mission. Where the Army relies on us in certain cases for capability, we have to be ready. We’ve built an Army that needs all three components to go to war.”

## Significance

The Army will continue to have the most difficult recruiting challenge within the Department of Defense based on the volume of enlistments needed and public perceptions concerning risk to the force. The nation’s Army is recruited from the society it serves. The Army will need to adopt policies to support effective recruiting of the best and brightest of those ready to serve while upholding the standards that make the U.S. All-Volunteer Force the envy of the world.

— The National Commission on the Future of the Army

The ability of the recruiting and retention force to fill the ranks with qualified soldiers has underwritten every phase of the ARNG’s development since 1973. So important is the ability to sustain the All-Volunteer Force that in its report to Congress in January of 2016, the first recommendation made by the National Commission on the Future of the Army was to maintain and sustain the All-Volunteer Force. Ideologically, the commission established the AVF as the very foundation of the military and highlighted the importance of maintaining the AVF as the nation’s method of raising forces. In the words of the commission,

So fundamental is an All-Volunteer Force to the governing principles of our nation, and so essential is an All-Volunteer Force in achieving the highest possible level of capabilities and readiness, the Commission considers sustaining the All-Volunteer Force vital to the future of the nation. All budget and force management decisions must be made with this goal in mind.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> “The Next Evolution of the Army National Guard,” *Citizen-Soldier*, Last modified October 26, 2017, accessed December 19, 2017. <https://citizen-soldiermagazine.com/next-evolution-army-national-guard/>.

<sup>18</sup> National Commission on the Future of the Army, Report to the President and the Congress of the United States, January 28, 2016, 40, accessed January 1, 2017, [http://www.ncfa.ncr.gov/sites/default/files/NCFA\\_Full%20Final%20Report\\_0.pdf](http://www.ncfa.ncr.gov/sites/default/files/NCFA_Full%20Final%20Report_0.pdf).



To understand the challenges facing the ARNG it is imperative to acknowledge the significant difference between the recruitment of an active duty soldier and the recruitment of a National Guard soldier. Unlike active military service, which provides full-time employment, potential recruits in the ARNG are choosing to join the military while maintaining civilian employment. The constant tension between the need for civilian employment and the military service permeates all aspects of the ARNG soldier's life. It directly affects who joins, why they join, and why they choose to stay in the military. By analyzing the effects of the last seventeen years through the lenses of societal demographics shifts and increased optempo, this paper will attempt to provide an accurate description of the current playing field that will inform the view of the future force and any actions that will be necessary to adjust and adapt.

## Societal Demographics

There is already a significant literature about what the National Guard requires in terms of funding, training, equipment, and full-time support to transition to an operational force. Yet this conversation overlooks how the Guard will sustain the manning levels needed for enduring increased readiness. Moreover, while the study of demographics in relation to recruiting and retention in the active force is well established, there is little with a focus on the National Guard. This section will examine shifts in societal demographics that are presenting challenges to the recruiting and retention force of the National Guard.

The data presented in this section reflects the most recent empirical studies and literature regarding the societal shifts that are reducing the pool of recruits available for military service. Current analysis of societal trends in the areas of obesity, drug use, willingness to serve, and connection to the military will provide insight into the direct effects these shifts are having on the ability to maintain the AVF. Additionally, an examination of the trends of increasing urbanization and decreasing unemployment will elucidate some of the ARNG specific challenges that exist within the recruiting environment.

## The Diminishing Target Market

In the language of recruiting, the target market centers on the demographic defined as Qualified Military Available (QMA). The Army defines QMA as “A count of youths aged 17 through 24 years who are not enrolled in and attending college, and are mentally, medically, and otherwise eligible for service, without a Service waiver, and who are free of family commitments that would make them unavailable for duty.”<sup>19</sup> The QMA is the population remaining when factoring out those ineligible due to failure to meet the seven overarching enlistment criteria outlined by the Department of Defense. Those criteria include education, aptitude, medical, physical fitness, dependency status, character/conduct, and drugs/alcohol.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, the QMA has steadily declined in recent years.

In 2009, the QMA emerged as a pressing topic of discussion for the military, the media and policy think tanks. In March of 2009, Dr. Curtis Gilroy, the Director of Accession Policy, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness), testified before the House Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee stating that only 25 percent of youth age 17-24 were qualified for military service.<sup>21</sup> Of this number, 10 percent were in college and not available leaving only 15 percent or roughly 5 million (out of 31 million aged 17-24) eligible for service. In response to this startling testimony, a coalition of more than eighty retired senior military leaders formed the group “Mission: Readiness” and in November 2009 they released a study

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<sup>19</sup> US Department of the Army, Army Regulation (AR) 601-208, The Army Brand and Marketing Program (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2013), 11.

<sup>20</sup> US Department of Defense, DoD Instruction 1304.26, Qualification Standards for Enlistment, Appointment, and Induction (Washington, DC, 2017), 8-12.

<sup>21</sup> *Recruiting, Retention, and End-Strength Overview: Hearing before the Military Personnel Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services House of Representatives*, H.A.S.C No. 111-12, 111th Cong., 1st sess., March 3, 2009, 61-62, accessed February 22, 2018, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-111hhrg50088/pdf/CHRG-111hhrg50088.pdf>.

titled “Ready, Willing, and Unable to Serve” that highlighted the diminishing QMA and brought increased awareness to the underlying causes of the problem.<sup>22</sup>

Starting in 2010, the annual *Population Representation in the Military Services* report began including the decreasing QMA as a “significant concern for DOD.”<sup>23</sup> According to the reports, from 2010 to 2015 the recruiting environment transitioned from excellent to good and only 29 percent of the youth population qualified for military service.<sup>24</sup> Figure 1 portrays the most recent estimate of the QMA released in 2013. The chart depicts the 29 percent of the population eligible for service, the 12 percent unavailable due to college, and the 17 percent categorized as the QMA. The QMA further reduces to 13 percent when factoring out those typically not allowed entrance due to aptitude scores below the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Amy Christeson, Dawson Taggart, and Soren Messner-Zidell, *Ready, Willing, and Unable to Serve: 75 percent of America’s young adults cannot join the military. Early education is needed to ensure national security* (Washington DC, Mission: Readiness, 2009), accessed February 22, 2018, <http://cdn.missionreadiness.org/NATEE1109.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness, *Population Representation in the Military Services: Fiscal Year [2010-2015] Summary Report* (Arlington, VA: CNA Resource Analysis, 2011-2016), accessed February 22, 2018, <http://www.cna.org/research/pop-rep>.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

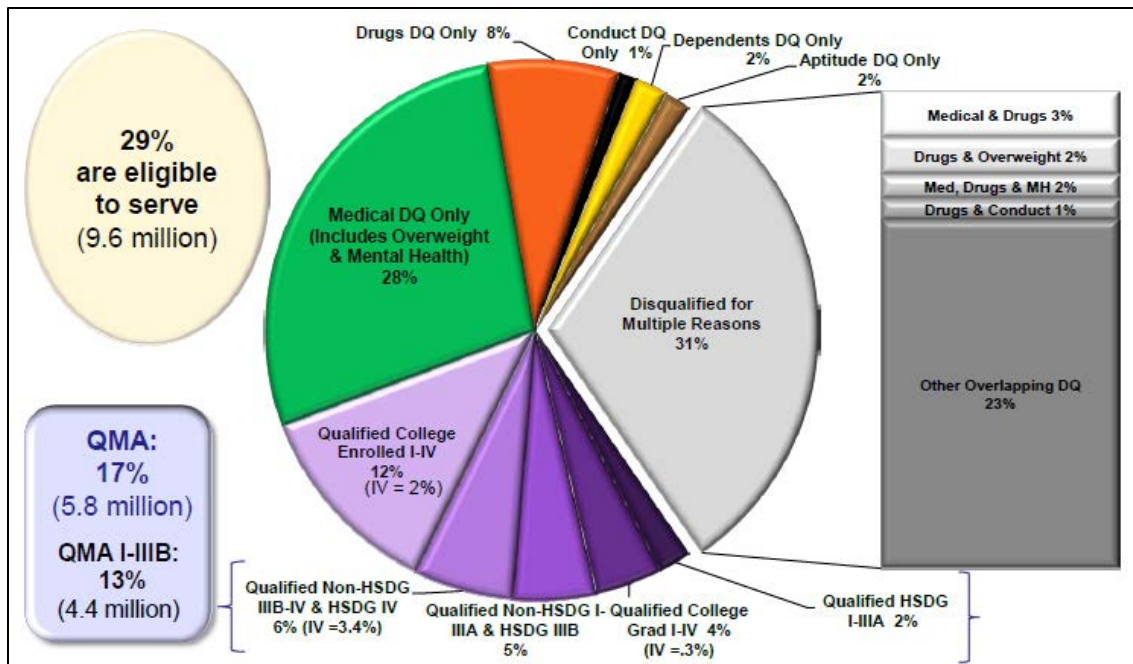


Figure 1. QMA Estimates 2013. Department of Defense, Joint Advertising Marketing Research & Studies, “The Target Population for Military Recruitment: Youth Eligible to Enlist Without a Waiver”, (prepared for Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, September 9, 2016), 5, accessed November 12, 2017, <http://dacowits.defense.gov/Portals/48/Documents/General%20Documents/RFI%20Docs/Sept2016/JAMRS%20RFI%2014.pdf?ver=2016-09-09-164855-510>.

The gravity of the problem captured the attention of the national media. In 2014, the *Wall Street Journal* published an influential article that publicized the fact that 71 percent of America’s youth were ineligible for service in the military.<sup>26</sup> Presently, a quick internet search on the topic will return a trove of media articles expressing the ineligibility of the majority of America’s youth. Most recently the Heritage Foundation published a report titled “The Looming National Security Crisis: Young Americans Unable to Serve in the Military” that reiterated the impending national personnel shortage unless the decreasing trend in the QMA is reversed.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Miriam Jordan, “Recruits’ Ineligibility Tests the Military”, *Wall Street Journal*, June 27, 2014, accessed February 1, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/recruits-ineligibility-tests-the-military-1403909945>.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Spoehr and Bridget Handy, “The Looming National Security Crisis: Young Americans Unable to Serve in the Military”, *Backgrounder*, no. 3282 (February 2018), accessed February 24, 2018, <https://www.heritage.org/defense/report/the-looming-national-security-crisis-young-americans-unable-serve-the-military>

The declining QMA represents the most significant threat to the sustainment of the AVF. The current estimation of the QMA at 17 percent translates to less than 6 million youths available out of a population of roughly 34 million. If you consider the combined recruiting mission of the US military is roughly 290,000, then recruiters need one out of every 21 qualified youths to join the military.<sup>28</sup> Factoring out those unavailable due to college and those not accepted due to low aptitude test scores, the QMA drops to 4.4 million or roughly 1.3 percent of the US population. This number requires one out of every 15 qualified and available youths to join the military in order for all the services to make their recruiting missions.

The bottom line is that the military is increasingly facing a supply problem. The following sections will explore some of the underlying issues that are decreasing the QMA. Additionally, the following sections will identify issues not specifically calculated in the QMA but relative to the decreasing supply of recruits available to the ARNG.

## Obesity

The increase in the national rate of obesity is one of the primary factors reducing the QMA. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) utilizes the Body Mass Index (BMI) as the measurement of obesity and maintains two classifications for weight status: obesity

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<sup>28</sup> The estimated 290,000 recruits is aggregated from figures published by the active services and recent accession goals of the reserve component as reported by the Department of Defense. Meghann Myers “SMA: Army Looking to Recruit 80,000 New Soldiers in 2018,” *Army Times*, accessed February 27, 2018, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2017/11/27/sma-army-looking-to-recruit-80000-new-soldiers-in-2018/>. Lolita C. Baldor, “Marines Seek Young, Tough Recruits in Super Bowl Ad,” *Military.Com*, last modified February 3, 2018, accessed February 27, 2018, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2018/02/03/marines-seek-young-tough-recruits-super-bowl-ad.html>. Stephen Losey, “Air Force Budget Calls for 325,100 Airmen in FY18,” *Air Force Times*, last modified August 7, 2017, accessed February 27, 2018, <https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2017/05/23/air-force-budget-calls-for-325100-airmen-in-fy18/>. Mark D. Faram, “More Sailors Needed Now: The Navy Prepares to Meet Trump’s Goal of 355 Ships,” *Navy Times*, last modified August 22, 2017, accessed February 27, 2018, <https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2017/06/26/more-sailors-needed-now-the-navy-prepares-to-meet-trump-s-goal-of-355-ships/>. Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness. *Population Representation in the Military Services: Fiscal Year 2015 Summary Report* (Arlington, VA: CNA Resource Analysis, 2016), accessed February 22, 2018, <http://www.cna.org/research/pop-rep>.

and overweight.<sup>29</sup> The CDC defines obesity as having a BMI above 30.0 while it classifies overweight as having a BMI greater than or equal to 25 and less than 30 percent.<sup>30</sup> Since 2001, the adult (20+ yrs.) obesity rate in the US has risen from 30.5 percent to 37.7 percent (Figure 2). Simultaneously, the youth (2-19 yr.) obesity rate has risen from 15.4 percent to 17.2 percent.

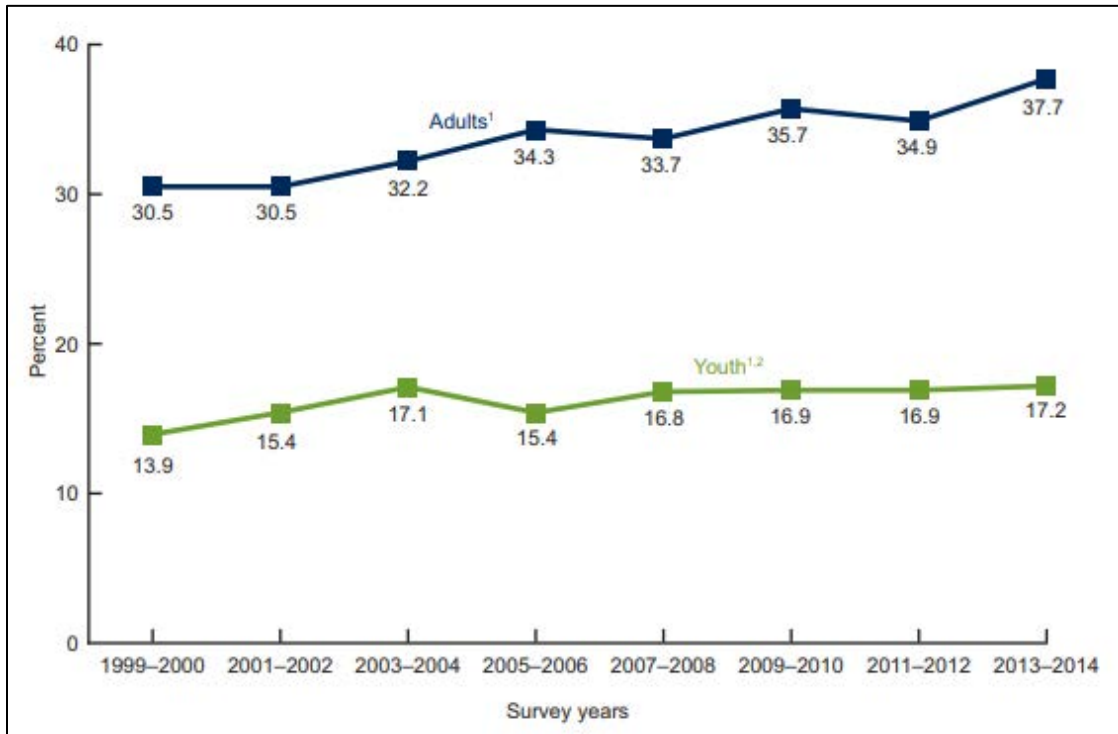


Figure 2. Trends in obesity prevalence among adults aged 20 and over (age-adjusted) and youth aged 2–19 years: United States, 1999–2000 through 2013–2014. Cynthia L. Ogden et al., *Prevalence of Obesity among Adults and Youth: United States, 2011–2014* (US Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, 2015), Figure 5, accessed February 28, 2018, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db219.pdf>.

Rising obesity rates affect the ARNG in two ways. First, an applicant must meet height and weight criteria to be eligible for enlistment. Second, soldiers within the ARNG must remain

<sup>29</sup> BMI is defined as the ratio of a person’s weight to their height squared. “Methodology,” *The State of Obesity*, accessed March 1, 2018, <https://stateofobesity.org/methodology/>.

<sup>30</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, “Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity: Data, Trends and Maps,” accessed Feb 28, 2018, <https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/data-trends-maps/index.html>.

within height and weight standards to remain eligible for service and re-enlistment. A concern that is unique to the reserve component is that commanders are not in direct contact with their soldiers for the majority of their time in service. Therefore, commanders rely on individual initiative, and not mandatory supervised physical fitness periods, to ensure their soldiers meet the height and weight criteria. As it stands today, the rising rate of obesity threatens the ability of the Guard to both recruit and retain qualified soldiers.

Current enlistment criteria for the ARNG establishes body fat percentage limits for the male QMA populations of 24 percent for 17-20 year olds and 26 percent for 21-27 year olds.<sup>31</sup> For females, the body fat percentage limits are 30 percent for 17-20 year olds and 32 percent for 21-27 year olds.<sup>32</sup> These body fat percentages equate to a BMI of roughly 27.0 for males and 26.0 for females.<sup>33</sup> With these criteria, an applicant could technically be overweight according to the CDC and still be eligible to enlist. However, in practice the enlistment criteria exclude the vast majority of the overweight and obese population.

Retention criteria are slightly more restrictive than enlistment criteria. To remain eligible for service in the National Guard a male soldier must maintain a body fat percentage below 20 percent for 17-20 year olds and 22 percent for 21-27 year olds.<sup>34</sup> Female soldiers must remain lower than 30 percent for 17-20 year olds and 32 percent for 21-27 year olds.<sup>35</sup> These limits equate to a BMI of roughly 26.0 for men and 25.0 for women.<sup>36</sup> Again, the standards allow a

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<sup>31</sup> National Guard Bureau, Army National Guard Accession Options Criteria - FY-17-18, First Edition, (Arlington, VA: 2017), Table E.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Calculated from height and weight charts found in Table E. Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> US Department of the Army, Army Regulation (AR) 600-9, The Army Body Composition Program (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2013), 21.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Calculated from height and weight charts found in Tables B-1, B-2. Ibid.

soldier to be technically overweight according to the CDC, but overall those classified as overweight or obese are ineligible for retention in the ARNG.

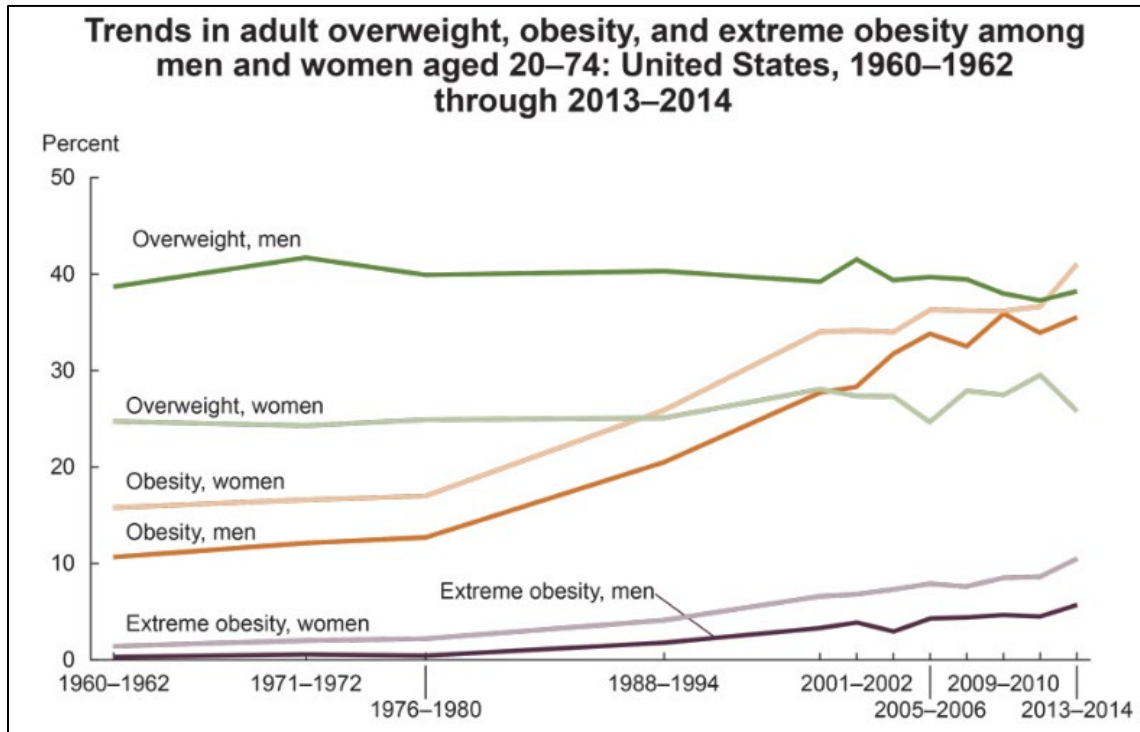


Figure 3. Trends in adult overweight, obesity, and extreme obesity. “Overweight & Obesity Statistics | NIDDK,” National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, accessed March 2, 2018, <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/health-statistics/overweight-obesity>.

Figure 3 shows the growing trend of obesity in light of a larger historical context. Since the inception of the All-Volunteer Force in 1973, obesity rates for males and females have more than doubled. The fact is that roughly two out of every three American adults are now considered overweight or obese. This has a dramatic impact on the QMA. The current estimate is that 27% of enlistment applicants are unable to meet height/weight accession criteria.<sup>37</sup> Out of 34 million-person target market, 9.2 million are not eligible due to obesity.

<sup>37</sup> Christeson, Taggart, Messner-Zidell, *Ready, Willing, and Unable to Serve*, 1.



The rising rate of obesity may have a significant effect on retention in the ARNG. A recent study by the US Army Public Health Center reported that 25% of Guard soldiers are obese and 45.2 percent are overweight according to the CDC definition.<sup>38</sup> This indicates that a significant number of soldiers are at risk of not being able to continue to serve. The inability to retain soldiers due to obesity places even greater demands on the decreasing QMA.

## Drug Use

The increase in drug use among the young adult population is another factor diminishing the QMA. Drug use in this sense refers to current and past drug use that disqualifies an applicant from being able to join the military. This includes illegal drugs, other illicit substances, certain pharmaceutical medications and alcohol.<sup>39</sup> The current increase in illegal drug use as well as the increasing prevalence of the use and misuse of prescription drugs is diminishing the pool of applicants for the military.

Use of illicit drugs is increasing in the United States primarily due to rising marijuana use. In 2016, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration reported that over 1 in 10 Americans (10.6 percent) age 12 and older had used an illicit drug in the last month.<sup>40</sup> This compares to 8.3 percent in 2002 and 9.4 percent in 2013.<sup>41</sup> The percentage of young adults

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<sup>38</sup> US Department of the Army, US Army Public Health Center, *Health of the U.S. Army National Guard (ARNG) Force Report* (Washington, DC: 2017), 12.

<sup>39</sup> For detailed information on disqualifying conditions and medications see US Department of the Army, Army Regulation (AR) 40-501, Standards of Medical Fitness (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017). For information on illegal and illicit drugs see US Department of Defense, *Technical Procedures for the Military Personnel Drug Abuse Testing Program (MPDATP)*, DOD Instructions 1010.16 Change 1 (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2017), Table 1 and Table 2.

<sup>40</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2016 National Survey on Drug Use and Health*, HHS Publication No. SMA 17-5044, NSDUH Series H-52, accessed March 2, 2018, <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/>. Illicit drug use refers to the use of illegal drugs or the misuse or non-medical use of prescription drugs.

<sup>41</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Nationwide Trends," accessed March 3, 2018, <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/nationwide-trends>.

(18-25 years old) that had used marijuana in the last month rose from 17.3 percent to 20.8 percent over the same period.<sup>42</sup>

The misuse of prescription drugs also rose over the same period and continues to be the second largest contributor to illicit drug use with an estimated 4.6 percent of young adults using a psychotherapeutic drug in the last month.<sup>43</sup> Overall, the report stated that 23.2 percent of the young adult demographic had used an illicit drug in the past month. This means that nearly 1 out of every 4 young adults is ineligible for military service due to illicit drug use in the last month.

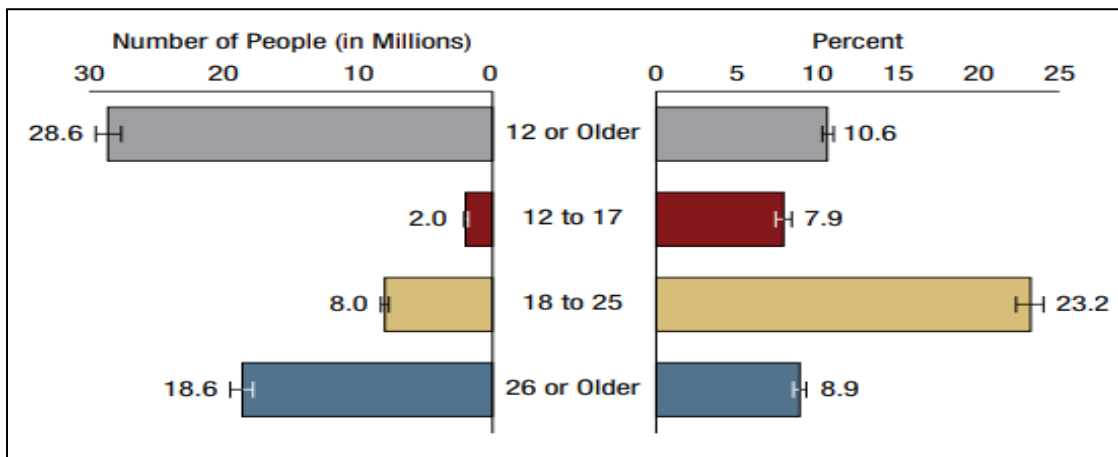


Figure 4. Past Month Illicit Drug Use among People Aged 12 or Older, by Age Group: 2016. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2016 National Survey on Drug Use and Health*, accessed March 2, 2018, <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/>.

Additionally, the growth in prescription rates of drugs used to treat Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Perceptual/Learning Disorder is further reducing the QMA. Per AR 40-501, an applicant diagnosed with ADD/ADHD is not eligible for service unless they meet cognitive requirements and have been medication free

<sup>42</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States*, 15.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

for twelve months.<sup>44</sup> According to a 2014 study by the CDC, the percentage of children age 4-17 diagnosed with ADHD increased from 7.8 percent in 2003 to 11.0 percent in 2011.<sup>45</sup> This number equates to one in five high school males and one in eleven high school females.<sup>46</sup> Of this group, 69 percent received prescription medication for ADHD.<sup>47</sup>

Figure 5 depicts the ADHD medication rates by individual state to demonstrate the potential effect of the issue on each respective National Guard. Interestingly, the diagnosis and medical treatment of ADHD varies greatly from state to state. The direct linkage between the rise in the prescription of ADHD medicine and the disqualification of prospective applicants is difficult to make due to lack of specificity in the available data. However, the data infers that an increasing portion of the youth population will not be available due to medical treatment for ADHD.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> US Army, AR 40-501 (2017), 15.

<sup>45</sup> CDC, “Trends in Health Care Provider-Diagnosis and Treatment for ADHD,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, last modified September 7, 2017, accessed March 3, 2018, <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/features/key-findings-adhd72013.html>.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Susanna N. Visser et al., “Trends in the Parent-Report of Health Care Provider Diagnosed and Medicated ADHD: United States, 2003—2011,” *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 53, no. 1 (January 2014): 34–46.e2, accessed March 3, 2018, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4473855/>.

<sup>48</sup> It is worth noting that there are many other learning, psychiatric and behavioral disorders that require prescription medicine and disqualify applicants for service. However, these conditions are disqualifying based off the diagnosis of the conditions. The diagnosis of ADHD/ADD is not strictly a disqualifier if the applicant achieves specified cognitive results and has not taken medication to treat the condition within 12 months.

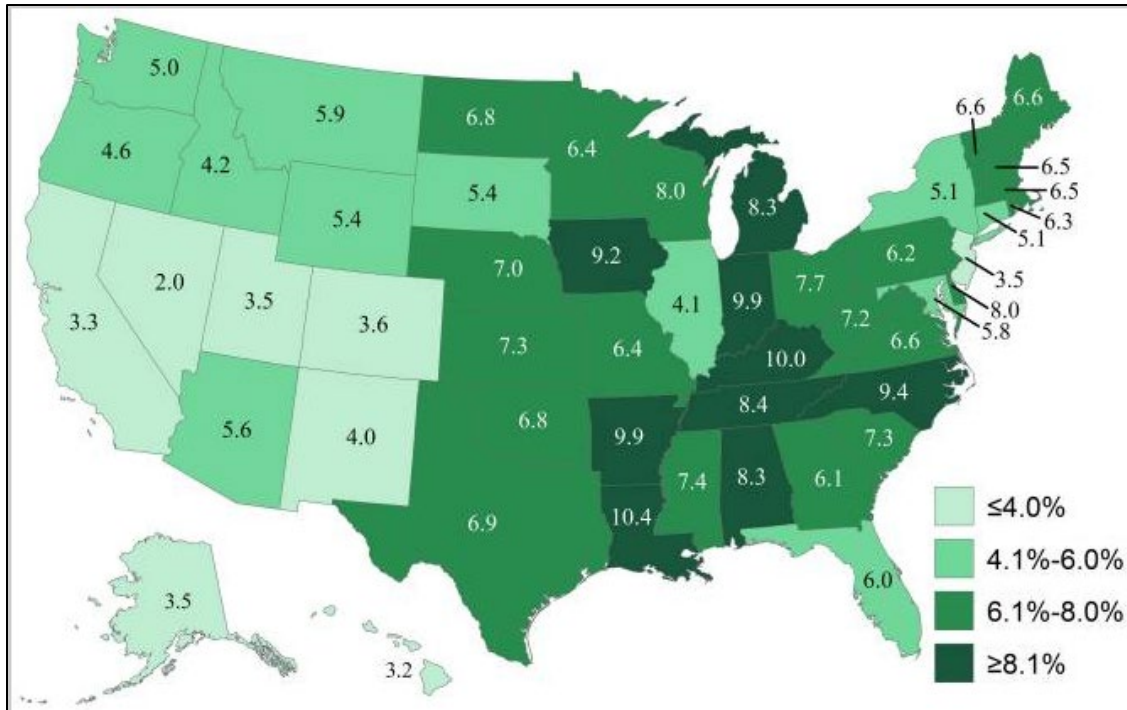


Figure 5. Weighted prevalence estimates of parent-reported current attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) medication treatment among children aged 4–17 years by state – United States, 2011. Susanna N. Visser et al., “Trends in the Parent-Report of Health Care Provider Diagnosed and Medicated ADHD: United States, 2003—2011,” *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 53, no. 1 (January 2014): 34–46.e2, accessed March 3, 2018, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4473855/>.

Currently, illicit drug use accounts for 8 percent of the ineligible QMA. When associated with other disqualifiers, illicit drug use combines to eliminate 30 percent of the QMA.<sup>49</sup> The rise in marijuana usage is the primary driver of the increase in drug use and presents the most immediate and pressing concern. With increasing social acceptance and legalization of marijuana in a handful of states, it is unlikely that this trend will reverse under the current legal framework. In conjunction, the rise in prescription rates for ADHD/ADD presents anecdotal evidence that increasing use of prescription drugs to treat ADHD/ADD further reduces the QMA. Overall, the

<sup>49</sup> Department of Defense, Joint Advertising Marketing Research & Studies, “The Target Population for Military Recruitment: Youth Eligible to Enlist Without a Waiver” (prepared for Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, September 9, 2016), 5, accessed November 12, 2017, <http://dacowits.defense.gov/Portals/48/Documents/General%20Documents/RFI%20Docs/Sept2016/JAMRS%20RFI%2014.pdf?ver=2016-09-09-164855-510>.

threat posed to the QMA by drug use is increasing and current trends indicate that the number of potential applicants disqualified by drug use will continue to grow in the future.

## Propensity

The three previous sections dealt with the QMA and some of the specific factors that are preventing youth in America from being eligible to enlist in the armed services. The discussion presumed that an applicant would join the military given the choice provided they did not have a disqualifying condition. The reality is that very few eligible youth choose to enter the military and that number is shrinking. The following sections will investigate the external motivators influencing youth to either choose or not choose service in the military. The first of these factors is a recruiting variable known as *propensity*.

In recruiting, propensity defines the interest of a person in considering the military as an occupation. The Department of Defense measures this statistic through annual surveys conducted by the Joint Advertising Marketing Research and Studies (JAMRS) program that capture youth opinions and the likelihood that they will serve in the military.<sup>50</sup> The surveys classify respondents that indicate that they “probably” or “definitely” will serve in the military in the next few years as having the propensity to serve in the military. Since 2001, propensity for overall service in the military for youth ages 16-24 has hovered near 13 percent with a dip to 9 percent in 2007.<sup>51</sup>

The figures below contrast the overall propensity to serve in the military (Figure 6) with the propensity to serve in the National Guard (Figure 7). Figure 6 demonstrates the higher regional propensity of the Southern states and the Southwestern states. To maximize recruiting efficiency, active component recruiting commands account for these geographic propensities

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<sup>50</sup> The JAMRS program administers the DOD Youth Poll and maintains an extensive database on propensity, recruiter statistics, and market analysis.

<sup>51</sup> Department of Defense, Joint Advertising Marketing Research & Studies, *Youth Poll Summer 2017 Propensity Update: Youth Poll Study Findings*, 3, February 2018.

when deciding where to focus recruiting resources. As a result, 44 percent of all military enlistments coming from the South, 24 percent from the West, 18 percent from the Midwest, and 13 percent come from the Northeast.<sup>52</sup>

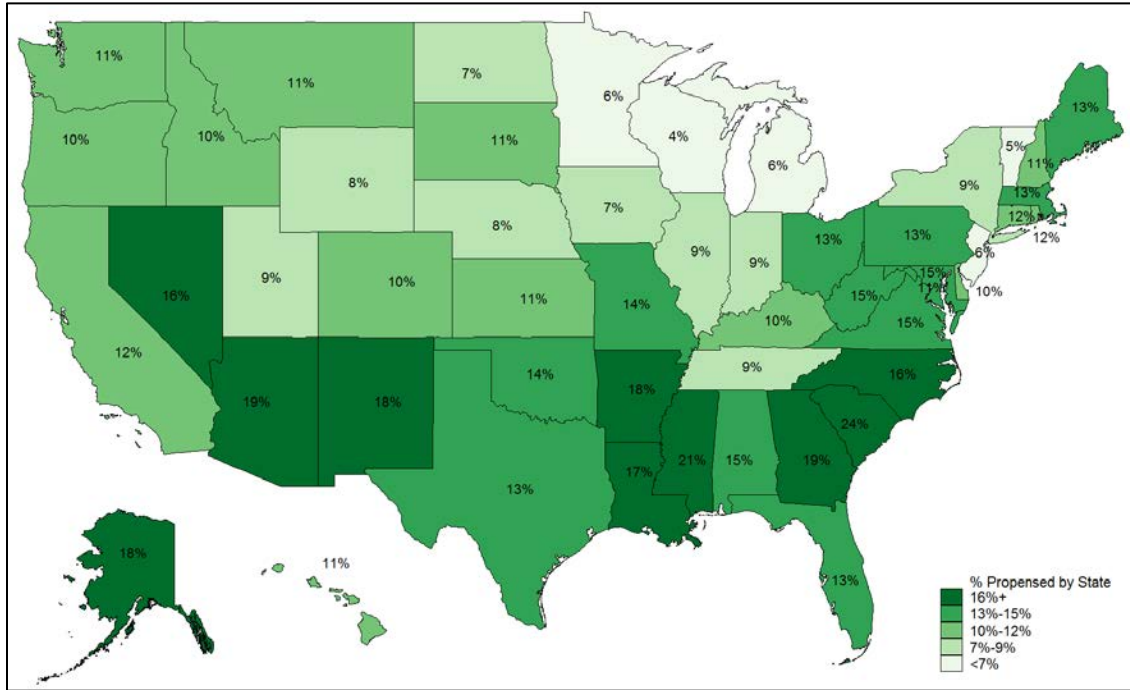


Figure 6. Propensity to serve in the military in the next few years. Joint Advertising Marketing Research & Studies, *Military Propensity and JS Accessions By State*, 1, December 2017.

Figure 7 depicts the propensity to serve in the National Guard by state. The varying propensities portrayed are significant to the National Guard because recruiting is limited to the geographic borders of each state. Unlike the active component, a state with low National Guard propensity cannot hope to recruit from neighboring states with higher National Guard propensities in order to overcome recruiting shortages. Therefore, a localized linkage exists between propensity and the QMA that specifically affects each state.

<sup>52</sup> Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness. *Population Representation in the Military Services: Fiscal Year 2015 Summary Report* (Arlington, VA: CNA Resource Analysis, 2016), 23, accessed February 22, 2018, <http://www.cna.org/research/pop-rep>.

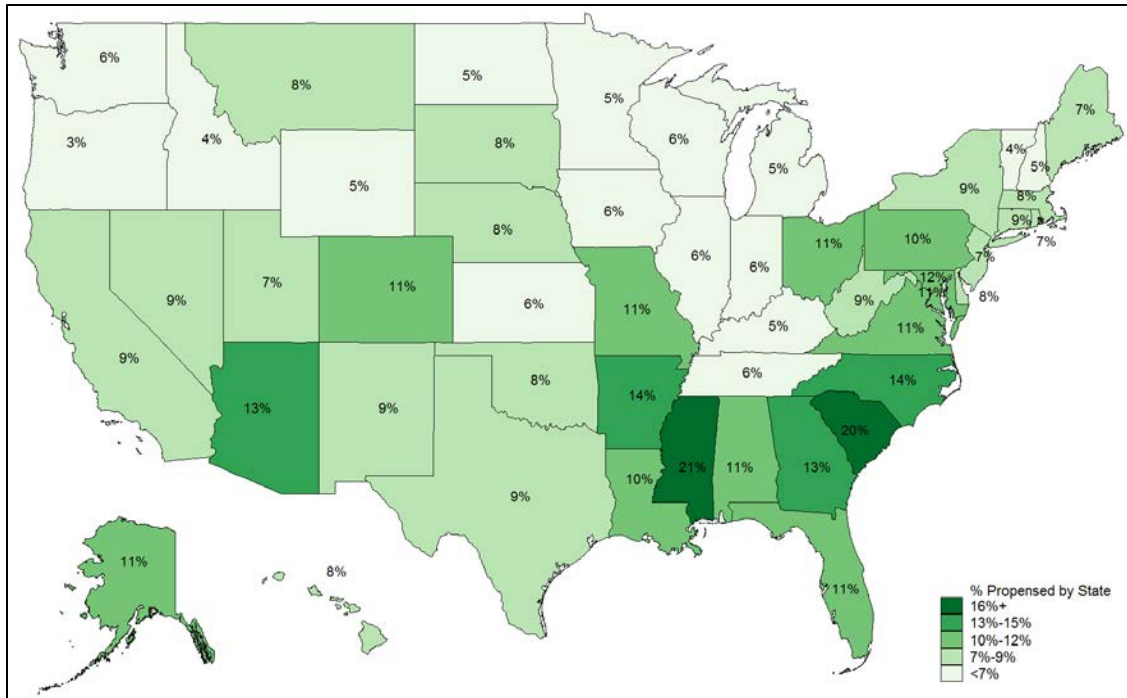


Figure 7. Propensity to serve in the Reserve/National Guard in the next few years. Department of Defense, Joint Advertising Marketing Research & Studies, *Military Propensity and JS Accessions By State*, 2, December 2017.

It is clear from the graphics above that propensity to serve in the National Guard is lower than the general propensity to serve in the military and that propensity to serve varies from state to state. Current JAMRS surveys estimate the average national propensity to serve in the active army is 8 percent while national propensity to serve in the National Guard is 5 percent.<sup>53</sup> This suggests that out of the 34 million youths age 17-24, approximately 1.7 million indicate propensity to serve in the National Guard independent of their actual eligibility to serve. Hypothetically, if you apply the national propensity to serve in the ARNG to the 29 percent eligible to serve, the result is 493,000 youths potentially eligible with the propensity to serve in the National Guard. Factoring out those in college and the low aptitude scorers leaves 221,000 youth that are both qualified and inclined to serve in the National Guard.

<sup>53</sup> Department of Defense, *Youth Poll Summer 2017 Propensity Update*, 20.

Propensity is not the sole indicator of whether a youth will choose to join the military. However, it is a strongly correlated variable that is useful in predicting the likelihood to serve. Although propensity has remained relatively stable over the last 17 years, the rate is lower than in previous decades. The propensity for military service was roughly 18 percent in the eighties, 15 percent in the nineties through 2005, and 13 percent since percent 2008.<sup>54</sup> The fact that propensity is now at 8 percent for the active army and 5 percent for the ARNG presents a concerning dilemma when combined with the shrinking QMA.

## Disconnection

One of the primary factors contributing to propensity is the connection a potential recruit has to current military members or veterans. When deciding to join the military, relationships with military friends or family provide an avenue for the applicant to learn about military life. The presence of a military influence in the life of an applicant strongly correlates to their decision to serve in the military.<sup>55</sup> Of the population of new recruits, 81 percent state they have a close family relative that served in the military.<sup>56</sup> In total, the military obtains approximately one quarter of all enlistments from households with at least one veteran parent.<sup>57</sup>

Although the majority of recruits claim a familial connection to the military, the military connection to the average young adult is shrinking. In 1988, 40 percent of all 18 year olds had at least one veteran parent, by 2000 the number fell to 18 percent, and the current estimate is 15

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<sup>54</sup> Department of Defense, *Youth Poll Summer 2017 Propensity Update*, 36.

<sup>55</sup> Department of Defense, Joint Advertising Marketing Research & Studies, *New Recruit Survey Wave 1 Findings (October 2012–March 2013)*, 14, accessed March 10, 2018, [https://time dotcom.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/new\\_recruit\\_wave1\\_briefing\\_final\\_7-23-2013.pptx](https://time.dotcom.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/new_recruit_wave1_briefing_final_7-23-2013.pptx)

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.



percent.<sup>58</sup> Additionally, the percentage of young Americans that have an immediate family member who has served in the military is far smaller than previous generations. Seventy-four percent of adults over the age of 40 claim to have an immediate family member that served, while only 39 percent of adults under the age of 40 claim the same. Figure 8 demonstrates the decreasing family connection to the military amongst the younger generations.

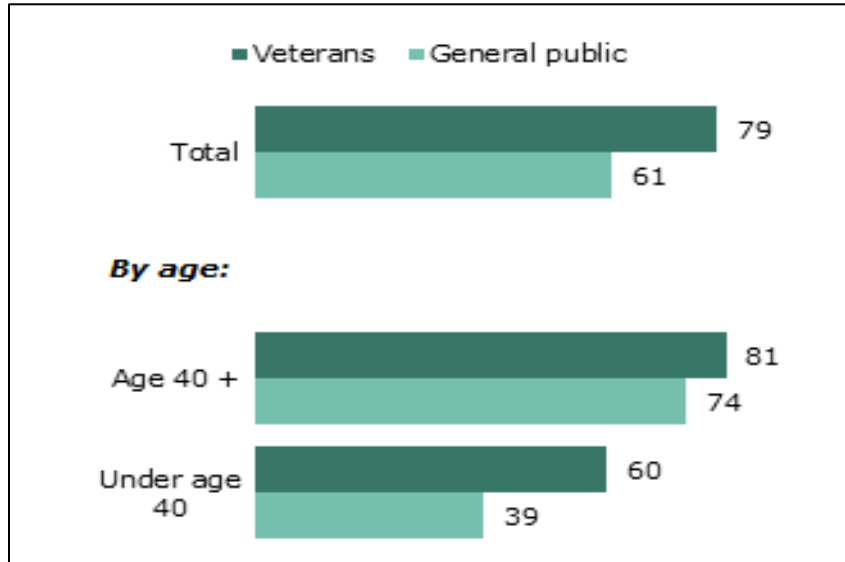


Figure 8. Percentage of Americans that state they have an immediate family member who served in the military. “The Military-Civilian Gap: Fewer Family Connections,” *Pew Research Center’s Social & Demographic Trends Project*, November 23, 2011, accessed March 10, 2018, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/11/23/the-military-civilian-gap-fewer-family-connections/>.

The trend in Figure 8 correlates to the overall decline in the veteran population. Figure 9 demonstrates the rapid decline in the percentage of adults with military service since the inception of the AVF in 1973. The combined effects of a smaller AVF and a burgeoning US population have led to a much smaller veteran cohort relative to the overall adult population. In the US, active and reserve component personnel represent less than one percent of the US population. In aggregate, veterans collectively represent 7.2 percent of the adult population and this number will

<sup>58</sup> National Research Council, Committee on the Youth Population and Military Recruitment, *Attitudes, Aptitudes, and Aspirations of American Youth: Implications for Military Recruitment*, ed. Paul Sackett and Anne Mavor (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2003), 67.

decrease to 4.5 percent by 2040.<sup>59</sup> As a proportion of society, the dwindling ratio of veterans will exert a reduced relational influence on the youth population of the future.

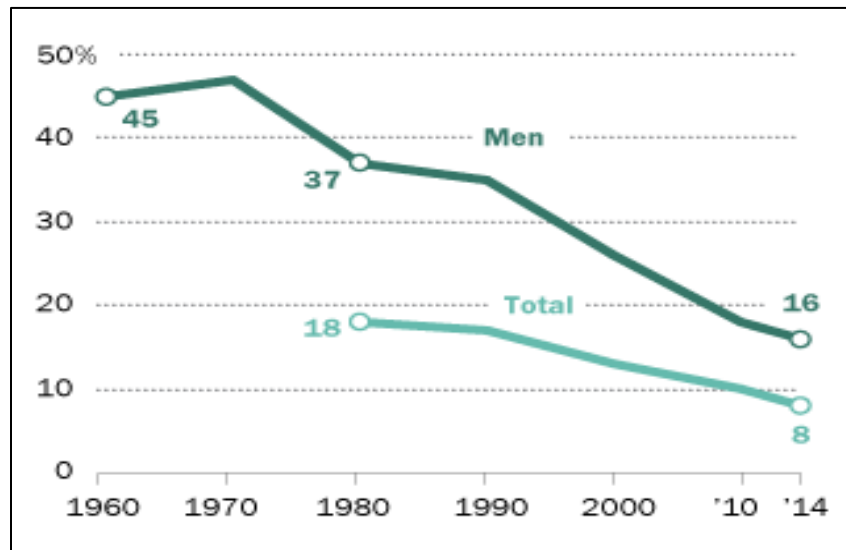


Figure 9. Percent of adults with military service. Gretchen Livingston, “Profile of U.S. Veterans Is Changing Dramatically as Their Ranks Decline,” *Pew Research Center*, November 11, 2016, accessed March 10, 2018, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/11/profile-of-u-s-veterans-is-changing-dramatically-as-their-ranks-decline/>.

Another factor decreasing connection to the military is the lessening willingness of military families to recommend military service to their children or to youths in the community. Current data indicates that households with at least one veteran parent are 23 percent more likely to recommend military service than households without a veteran parent.<sup>60</sup> However, in a recent survey by the Blue Star Families group, 60 percent of military families indicated that they would

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<sup>59</sup> Based off a current veteran population of 18.6 million, a projected veteran population of 13.6 million by 2037, and an estimated US adult population of 302 million in 2040. US Census Bureau, *Projections of the Size and Composition of the U.S. Population: 2014 to 2060*, by Sandra L. Colby and Jennifer M. Ortman, Current Population Reports, P25-1143 (Washington, DC, 2014). Department of Veteran Affairs, *Veteran Population Information Graphic 2016*, accessed March 10, 2018, [https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/Demographics/New\\_Vetpop\\_Model/Vetpop\\_Infographic\\_Final31.pdf](https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/Demographics/New_Vetpop_Model/Vetpop_Infographic_Final31.pdf).

<sup>60</sup> Department of Defense, Joint Advertising Marketing Research & Studies, *Influencer Update: Ad Recall and Impact, Event Attendance and Sponsorship, Wave 58: July–September 2017*, 3, October 2017.

not recommend military service to their children.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, 45 percent of military families indicated they would not recommend military service to a young adult.<sup>62</sup> Although military families are more likely to recommend service than the average civilian families, the total number of military families recommending service is diminishing.

The decreasing connection to the military creates an environment in which a lower percentage of the youth population has a basic understanding of what military life entails. In surveys designed to measure the average understanding of the military, roughly half of young adults (ages 17 to 35) were able name the four active DoD services, half admitted little to no knowledge of active duty service, and only 10 percent believed they understood day-to-day life in the military.<sup>63</sup> Additionally, when surveyed, youth indicated a much greater familiarity with the risk associated with the military than the benefits.<sup>64</sup> Given that the average person weights risk roughly twice as much as gain in the decision-making process, the disconnection between youths and the potential benefits of military presents a roadblock to recruiting.<sup>65</sup>

The shrinking connection between military influencers and prospective recruits presents a challenging problem for the future. As the proportion of veterans and service members decreases relative to the US population, the likelihood of a young adult having contact with a military influence is diminishing. In addition, the over reliance on military families is no longer a sustainable recruiting pool for the future AVF as the proportion of families with a veteran parent

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<sup>61</sup> 2017 *Blue Star Families Military Lifestyle Family Report: Comprehensive Report*, 49, accessed January 25, 2018, <https://bluestarfam.org/survey/>.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Department of Defense, Joint Advertising Marketing Research & Studies, *2016 State of the Market: Implications from Youth and Recruiter Data*, 1, September 2017.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2011), 284.

continues to decrease.<sup>66</sup> As connection to the general population decreases, the general awareness of the positive benefits of military service will also diminish. Overcoming the basic lack of knowledge and misconceptions concerning the military lifestyle will be the primary concern of recruiters and military marketing as the rate of connection decreases.

## Employment Considerations

Another factor contributing to propensity is employment status. In recruiting, there exists a well-established linkage between unemployment rates and recruitment rates. As the rate of unemployment decreases, the recruiting environment becomes much more challenging and resource intensive as recruiters compete against increased opportunities for employment and education in the civilian sector. Most notably, the percentage of high quality enlistments decreases as the services compete with the civilian economy for high quality youth.<sup>67</sup> Figure 10 depicts the unemployment from the year 2001 to the present.

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<sup>66</sup> For more insight on the phenomena of military service being passed down as a family profession see Amy Schafer, *Generations of War: The Rise of the Warrior Caste & the All-Volunteer Force* (Washington, DC: Center for New American Studies, 2017), accessed March 8, 2018, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/generations-of-war>.

<sup>67</sup> Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness. *Population Representation in the Military Services: Fiscal Year 2015 Summary Report* (Arlington, VA: CNA Resource Analysis, 2016), 18-19, accessed February 22, 2018, <http://www.cna.org/research/pop-rep>.

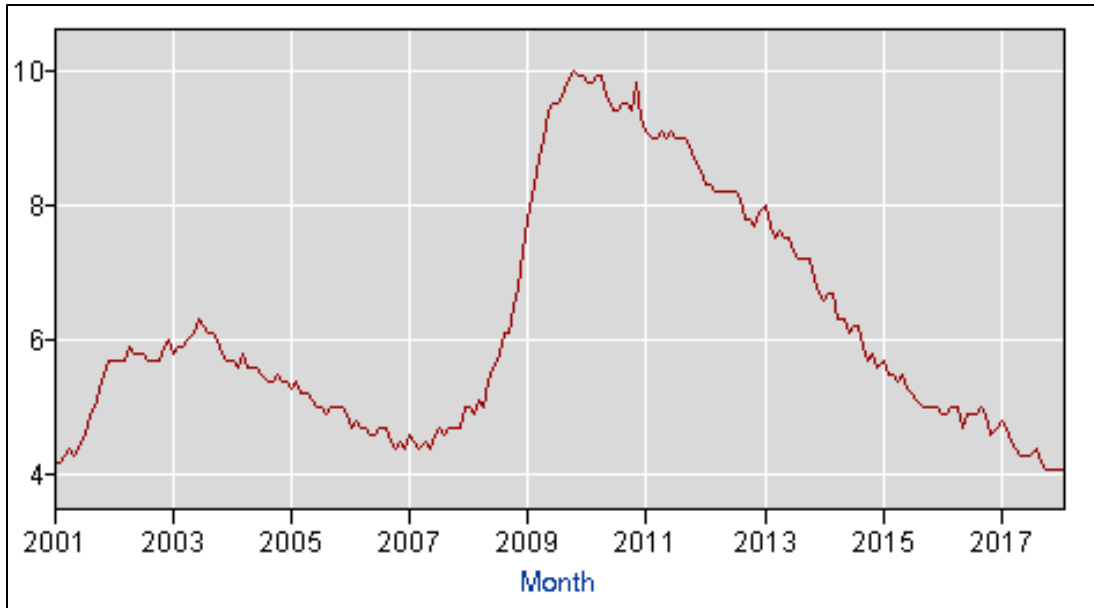


Figure 10. Seasonally adjusted unemployment rate. “Bureau of Labor Statistics Data,” accessed April 3, 2018, <https://data.bls.gov/pdq/SurveyOutputServlet>.

The current national unemployment rate of 4.1 percent represents the lowest rate since the beginning of the Global War on Terror and a 60 percent reduction from the 10.0 percent unemployment rate reached in 2009. Within the ARNG, the unemployment level of each state is equally important as each state represents a separate recruiting pool. Figure 11 depicts the low unemployment rates across each state. With the exceptions of Alaska, New Mexico, West Virginia, and Washington DC, no state in the nation is experiencing unemployment above 5.0 percent.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Washington DC is treated as a state in this context since it has its own National Guard force.

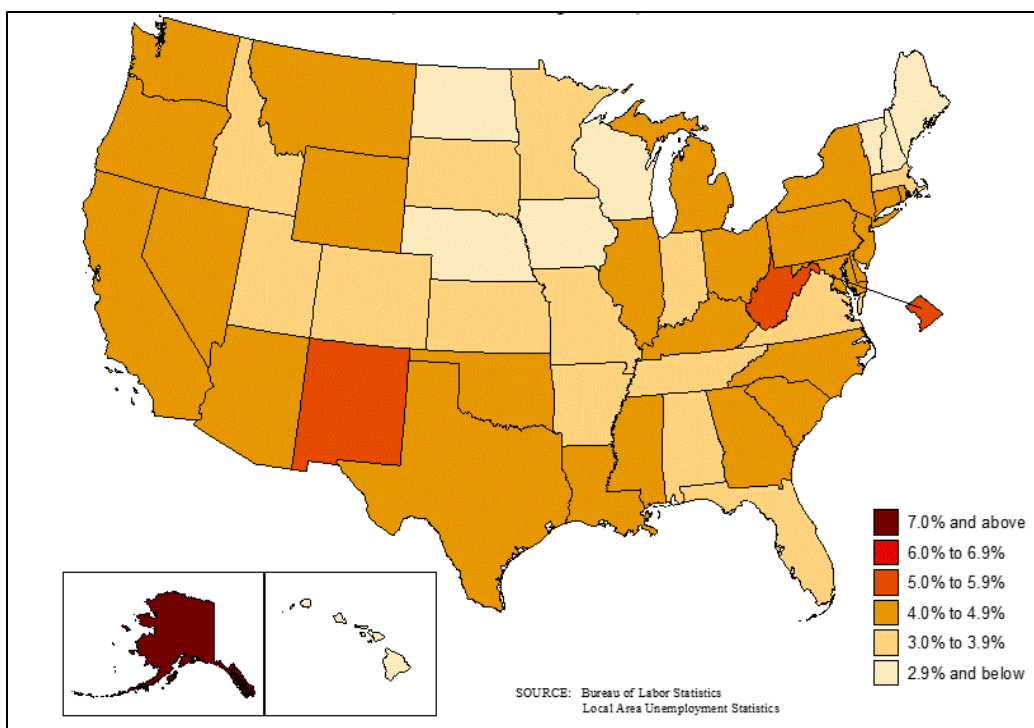


Figure 11. Unemployment rates by state, seasonally adjusted, February 2018. “Tables and Maps Created by BLS,” accessed March 25, 2018, <https://www.bls.gov/lau/tables.htm>.

In a recent study examining the Army’s ability to regenerate forces, researchers classified unemployment rates as favorable, average, and unfavorable in regards to the recruiting environment.<sup>69</sup> The favorable rate was 8.0 percent, the average rate was 6.5 percent, and the unfavorable rate was 5.0 percent.<sup>70</sup> Using these rates the researchers predicted the ability of the Army to generate the forces needed for the future. In every scenario, the unfavorable rate of 5.0 percent resulted in a shortage of soldiers when trying to increase the size of the Army while maintaining quality accession targets. Considering the current unemployment rate is almost a full percentage point below the unfavorable rate, there is cause for concern in the current recruiting environment.

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<sup>69</sup> Shanthi Nataraj et al., *Evaluating the Army’s Ability to Regenerate* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017), accessed March 24, 2018, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1637.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1637.html).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

In addition to unemployment, the growth in the involuntary part-time employment sector also has implications for the ability to recruit in the National Guard. The Bureau of Labor Statistics defines involuntary part-time employment as individuals that would prefer full-time jobs but can only find part-time employment.<sup>71</sup> From 2007 to 2015, involuntary part-time work grew 18 times faster than all other types of employment and the majority (57.8 percent) of the workers were in the 25 to 54 year old age range.<sup>72</sup> The increase in involuntary part-time work is largely attributable to structural changes within businesses seeking to employ more part-time workers than full-time, which implies a possible permanent increase in involuntary part-time workers.<sup>73</sup> With more businesses seeking part-time employees, the likelihood that a prospective ARNG recruit will be an involuntary part-time employee in his civilian occupation are on the rise.

There is always a tension between a soldier's military obligation and civilian occupation in the ARNG. While certain part-time work opportunities allow for increased work schedule flexibility (e.g. Uber), the average part-time worker has less flexible hours, is more likely to work irregular schedules, and experiences greater work-family stress.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, the involuntary part-time worker may be reticent to refuse extra hours since by definition they are seeking full-time employment. In this regard, the rise in the involuntary part-time work force presents an obstacle to recruiting and retention in the ARNG as new recruits struggle to balance their civilian careers with their military service due to the unpredictable nature of part-time work.

Considering that military service in the ARNG is additional to the a soldier's civilian job, the increasing competition from the civilian job market, both from full-time and part-time job

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<sup>71</sup> "Labor Force Characteristics (CPS)," accessed March 24, 2018, <https://www.bls.gov/cps/lfcharacteristics.htm#fullpart>.

<sup>72</sup> Lonnie Golden, "Still Falling Short on Hours and Pay: Part-Time Work Becoming New Normal," *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2016), accessed March 24, 2018, <https://www.ssrn.com/abstract=2881673>.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

opportunities, is a concerning trend for the foreseeable future. The current historically low unemployment rate and the growth in the involuntary part-time job market negatively affect the propensity of young adults to join the ARNG and increase the cost of recruiting and retention both in terms of bonus offerings and the need for more recruiters.

## Urbanization

The population of the US has become increasingly urban since the formation of the AVF. The concentration of young adults in urban areas changes the recruiting landscape across the country and presents unique challenges to the ARNG. Additionally, the National Guard constructed over half its infrastructure between World War II and the Vietnam War when the population was more rural. Thus, the significant change in population demographics challenges the current infrastructure footprint.<sup>75</sup>

Figure 12 quantifies the increasing concentration of the population in urban areas.<sup>76</sup> Since the formation of the AVF in 1973, the proportion of the US that lives in rural areas has decreased from 26.8 percent to 14.4 percent. That is a nearly 50 percent reduction over the course of 45 years that has left many rural areas unable to support the recruiting missions of the local ARNG units.<sup>77</sup> The corresponding growth in urban areas, mainly in large metro suburbs, has left a large number of National Guard facilities in rural areas disconnected from the population base. In order to attend training at these facilities a growing number of urban-based soldiers must now travel

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<sup>75</sup>National Guard Bureau, Army National Guard Installation Division, *Readiness Center Transformation Master Plan: Final Report to Congress*, December 19, 2014, 35, accessed March 14, 2018, [https://www.ngaus.org/sites/default/files/RCTMP%20Final%20Report\\_12192014.pdf](https://www.ngaus.org/sites/default/files/RCTMP%20Final%20Report_12192014.pdf).

<sup>76</sup> The Census Bureau defines metropolitan as cities larger than 50,000, micropolitan as cities between 10,000 and 49,999, and rural as areas with less than 10,000 people. US Census Bureau, "About," accessed March 14, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/metro-micro/about.html>.

<sup>77</sup> National Guard Bureau, *Readiness Center Transformation Master Plan: Final Report to Congress*, 43.



longer distances to attend training.<sup>78</sup> The cost in time and money to accomplish the long distance drive can be a detractor both to recruiting and to retention.

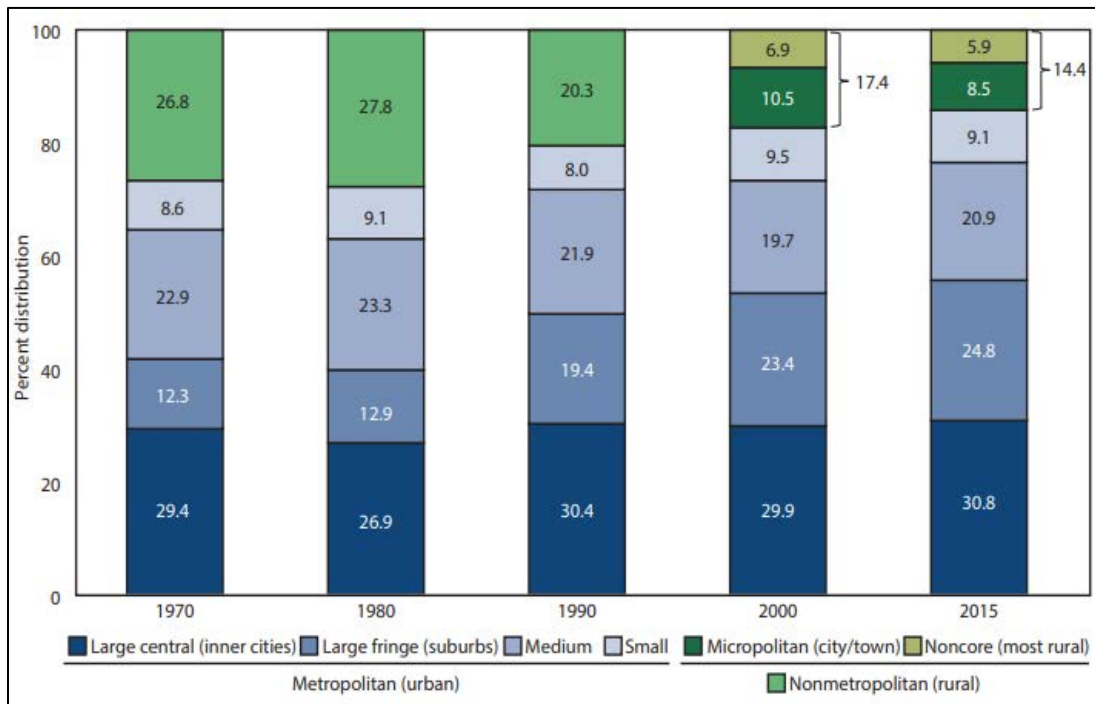


Figure 12. Population, by urbanization level: United States, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2015. National Center for Health Statistics, 2016: *With Chartbook on Long-term Trends in Health* (Hyattsville, MD, 2017), accessed March 13, 2018, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK453383/>.

To understand the effect of urbanization on recruiting in the National Guard, consider the fact that the population of the 143 most populous counties in the US is roughly equal to the population of the remaining 2,999 counties. Out of 3,142 counties, 50.03 percent of the population resides within the 143 counties displayed in Figure 13. If the ARNG were to station forces based solely on the proximity to the recruit pool, 50 percent of the force would be located within one of these counties.

<sup>78</sup> National Guard Bureau, *Readiness Center Transformation Master Plan: Final Report to Congress*, 43.

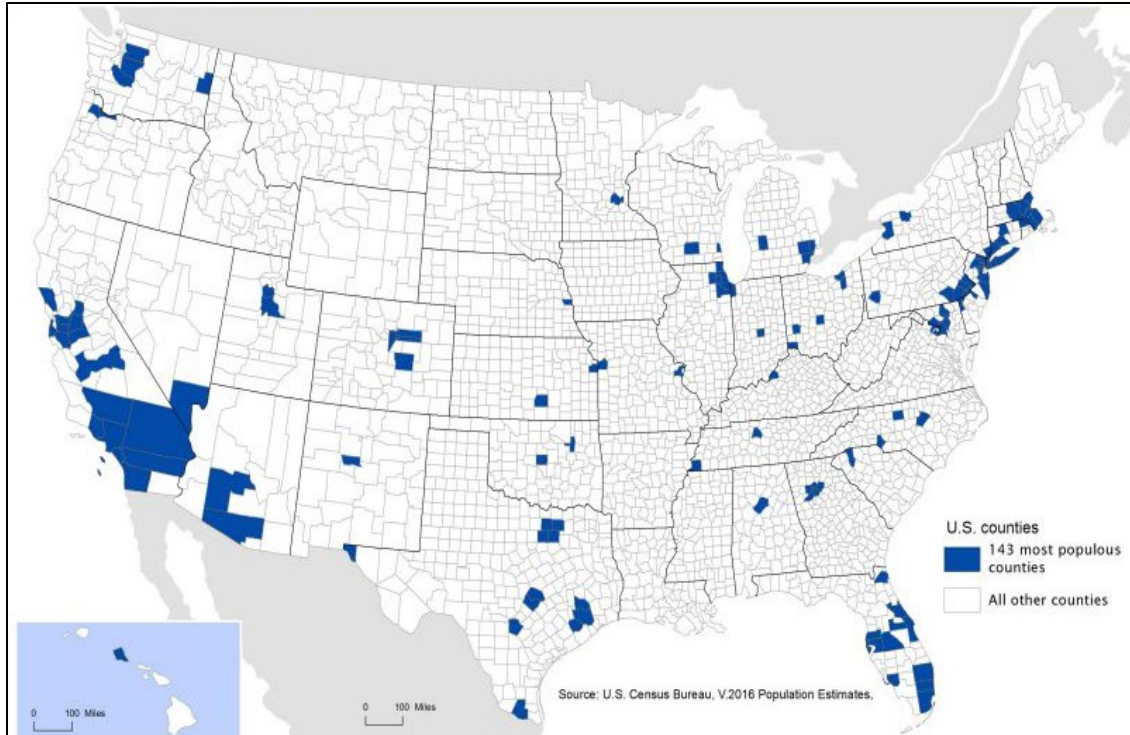


Figure 13. Largest 143 counties in the US by population. US Census Bureau, “Big and Small America,” *The United States Census Bureau*, accessed March 14, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2017/10/big-and-small-counties.html>.

At a state level, 50 percent of the US population lives within the nine states of California, Texas, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Georgia and Florida.<sup>79</sup> As a percentage of the ARNG, those same nine states only account for 32.5 percent of the total force. The 17 most populous states account for 70 percent of the US population and 50 percent of the ARNG. As the population of the US migrates to large urban areas, the ARNG continues to recruit disproportionately from the lesser populated states.

The effect of urbanization is even more significant when viewed through the 18-34 year old demographic.<sup>80</sup> Figure 14 highlights the increasing concentration of the young adult market in

<sup>79</sup> Florence Fu and Chris Weller, “Half of the US Population Lives in These 9 States,” *Business Insider*, accessed March 14, 2018, <http://www.businessinsider.com/half-of-the-us-population-lives-in-just-9-states-2016-6>.

<sup>80</sup> The young adult population is the most likely to migrate to urban areas. US Census Bureau, *Young Adult Migration: 2007–2009 to 2010–2012*, Megan J. Benetsky, Charlynn A. Burd, and Melanie A. Rapino, ACS-31, March 2015, accessed March 16, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2015/acs/acs-31.html>.

relatively small geographic urban footprints. The shaded areas of the map signify the urban areas of the country and the relative percentage of all in-movers to that area classified as young adults. The areas shaded in dark green and light green represent the urban areas in which greater than 70 percent and 50 percent, respectively, of the incoming population in that area are young adults. The map highlights the challenge of less populated states as the young adult population migrates towards the urban areas of the US.

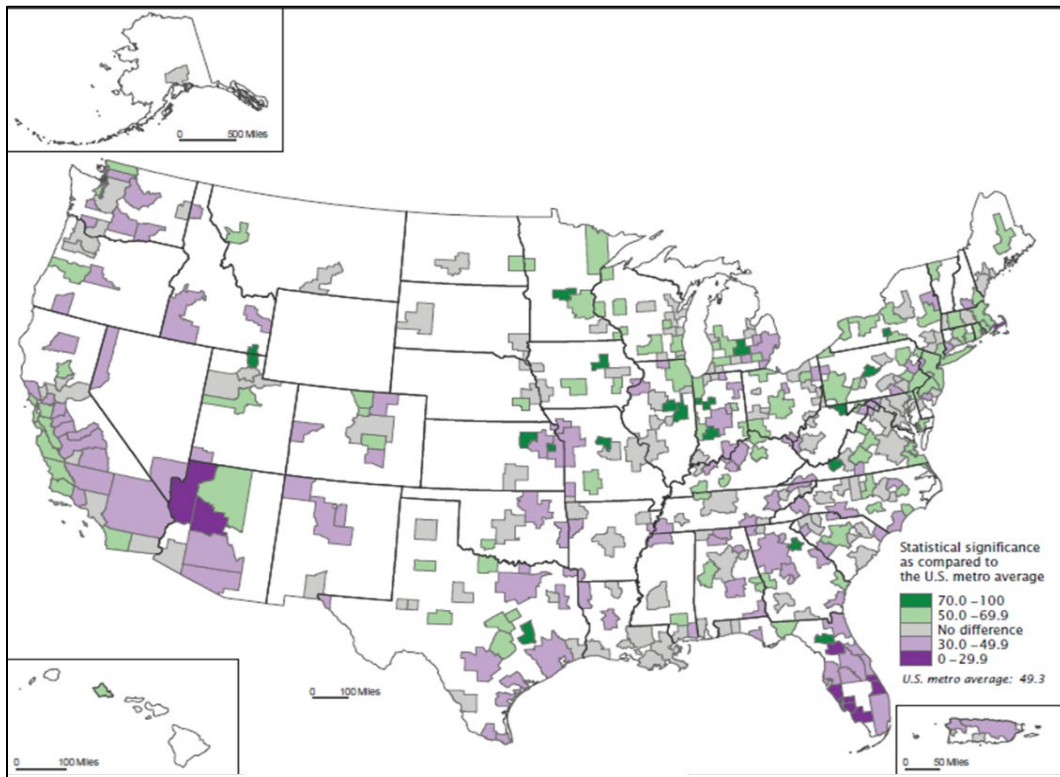


Figure 14. Percent Young Adult Inmovers by Metropolitan Statistical Area: 2010-2012. US Census Bureau, *Young Adult Migration: 2007-2009 to 2010-2012*, Megan J. Benetsky, Charlynn A. Burd, and Melanie A. Rapino, ACS-31, March 2015, accessed March 16, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2015/acs/acs-31.html>.

The urbanization of the US population presents a unique dilemma that is specific to the recruiting and retention of the National Guard. In the National Guard, each state must recruit from within its own borders to fill the vacancies that exists in the state force structure. This limits the recruitment of new soldiers to the local state population regardless of the QMA or propensity of the population. As propensities and QMA populations shift across the country, states encounter

situations where the populations no longer support the existing force structure, or the state has an excess of available recruits that it cannot benefit from because it does not have the force structure capacity to accommodate more recruits.

Additionally, the ARNG maintains a nationwide footprint with infrastructure dispersed throughout the communities of the United States. The ARNG constructed over half of its facilities based off the demographic distribution of the 1950s.<sup>81</sup> Since that period, the demographics have changed immensely as the population has doubled and grown increasingly urban. This shift creates a challenge for the ARNG in balancing the need to station forces near sustainable population bases with the requirement to distribute forces geographically to ensure adequate domestic emergency response capability is available in each state.

### Army National Guard Demographic Shifts since 2001

The previous sections described demographic shifts occurring within society that affect recruiting and retention within the National Guard. This section will utilize current and historical data to analyze how demographics within the National Guard have changed since 2001. The goal of this section is to understand how changing societal demographics combined with the last 17 years of increased optempo have affected the National Guard.

The data utilized in this section is from the ARNG Director's Personnel Readiness Overview (DPRO) database. DPRO is the comprehensive management information system utilized by the ARNG and draws information from 16 different personnel databases. The data updates daily and provides the best snapshot of current and historical trends in the ARNG. Note that as much as possible data trends reflect the period 2001 to 2018, however for some datasets the timeline is truncated due to the availability of data. The data includes graphs generated by

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<sup>81</sup> National Guard Bureau, *Readiness Center Transformation Master Plan: Final Report to Congress*, 35.

DPRO to visualize the current trends within the ARNG. In instances where the trends require multiple data sets, the author has created graphics to display the comparisons.

## Operational Tempo and Recruiting

There are four lenses needed to frame the following discussion on shifting internal demographics and recruiting and retention in the ARNG: optempo, end strength and accession missions, recruiting and retention success, and the total number of recruiters. These lenses provide the context for understanding the shift in the ARNG from a strategic reserve to an operational force and the resulting changes to the composition of the force. The combination of these lenses frames the last 17 years from the perspective of recruiting and assists in understanding the changing recruiting environment.

### Optempo

Figure 15 charts the overall percentage of the ARNG mobilized between November 2000 and February 2018. In 2000, less than one percent of the ARNG was mobilized in any capacity. By March of 2003, over 21 percent of the ARNG was mobilized and the percentage peaked at 28.2 percent in January 2005. The mobilized percentage decreased and stabilized near 12 percent from 2006 to 2008 with another spike in 2008-09 to over 17 percent. Beginning in 2010, the percentage mobilized decreased continuously reaching a low of 2.2 percent. Since 2015, the percent of the ARNG mobilized has steadily increased and presently 4.4 percent of the ARNG is mobilized.

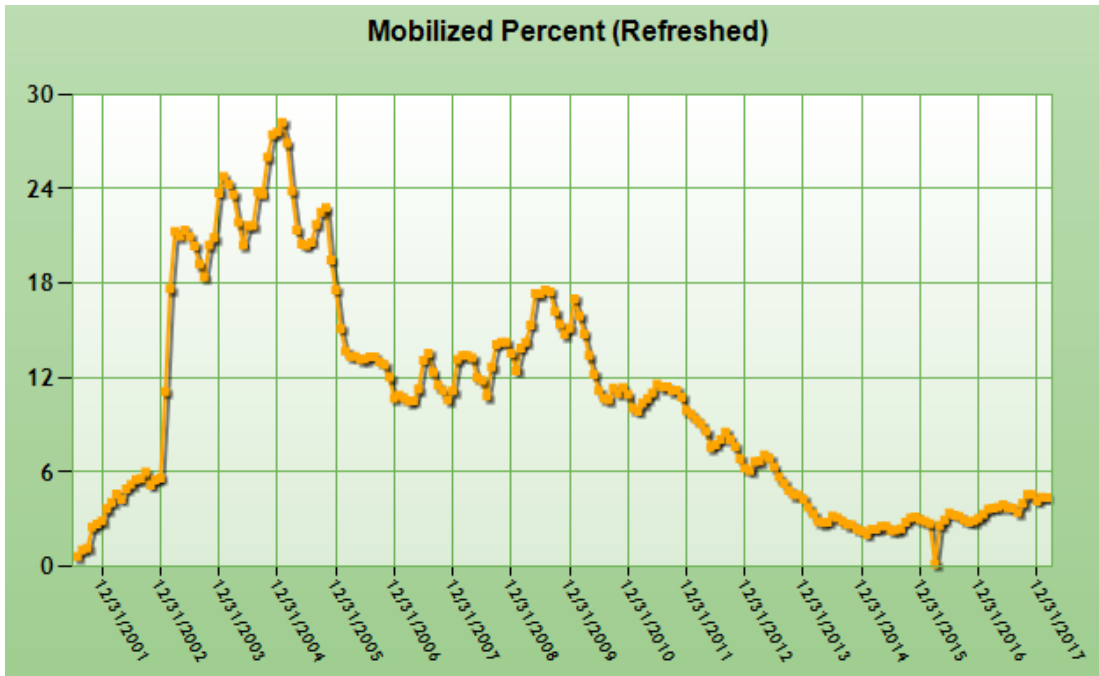


Figure 15. Percent of ARNG Mobilized. US Army National Guard, “Director’s Personnel Overview Report,” accessed March 27, 2018, <https://arng1.ngb.army.mil/Portal/RibbonMenu.aspx?ProviderName=DSROProvider>.

The graph above accounts for the percentage of soldiers formally mobilized and placed in an active duty status. What the graph does not portray is the increased weekend training periods, additional training requirements, and increased support man-hours that occur before and during the mobilization that are performed by soldiers in a National Guard status. However, figure 15 provides a lens to help understand the demographic shifts within the ARNG that occurred over the last 17 years.

### End Strength and Accession Missions

Figure 16 depicts the authorized end strengths and annual enlisted recruiting missions from 2001 to 2018. The authorized end strength of the ARNG increased to a peak of 358,200 from 2009 to 2013 and then decreased to a low of 342,000 in 2016. The current end strength authorization for the ARNG is 343,500. The graph outlines the total number of enlisted accessions (right axis) required annually in the ARNG to attain authorized end strength (left axis). Notice that the total number of enlisted accessions required decreased annually from 2006 to

2017. The decrease in the accessions required to maintain the force was the result of increased retention and will be discussed below.

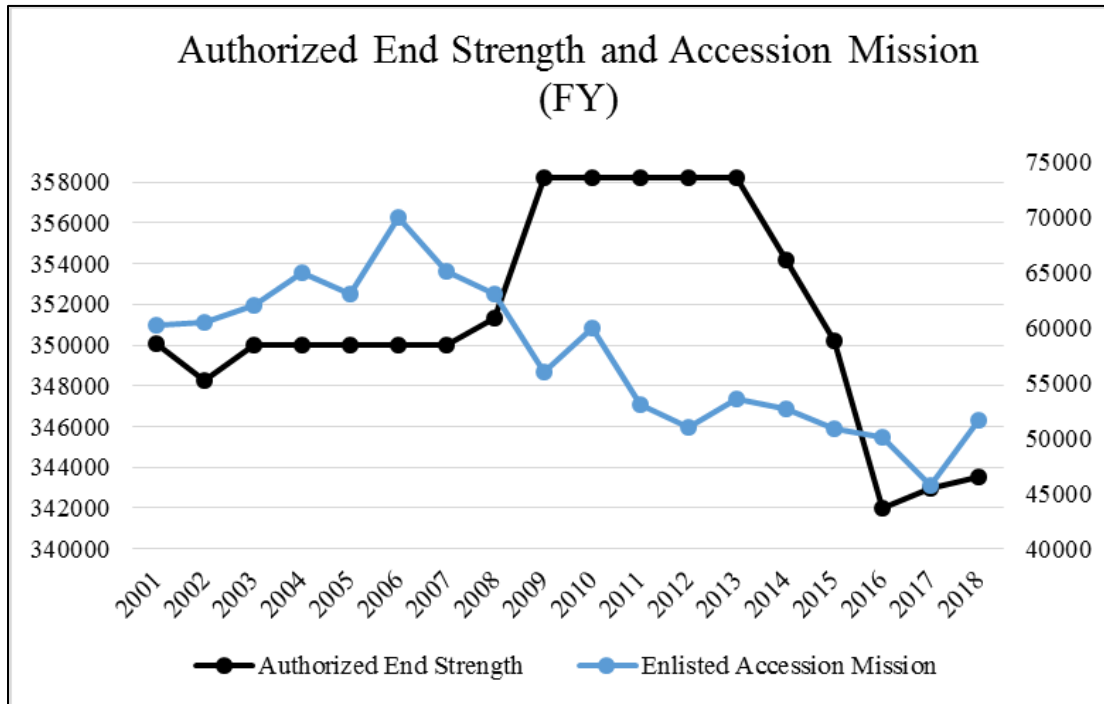


Figure 16. Authorized end strength and enlisted accession mission by fiscal year. Created by author. Data from US Army National Guard, “Director’s Personnel Overview Report,” accessed March 27, 2018, [https://arngg1.ngb.army.mil/Portal/Ribbon Menu.aspx ?ProviderName=DSRO Provider](https://arngg1.ngb.army.mil/Portal/RibbonMenu.aspx?ProviderName=DSROProvider).

### Recruiting and Retention Success

Figure 17 outlines the success of the ARNG in meeting the end strength mission over the last 17 years. With few exceptions, the ARNG as a whole has been able to achieve or exceed the end strength. Other than declines in 2004, 2005, and 2017, the ARNG has achieved 99 to 101 percent of the recruiting mission since 2001. The graph represents the combined result of recruiting, incentives, waivers, and retention efforts that led to successful force sustainment during the transition to an operational force.

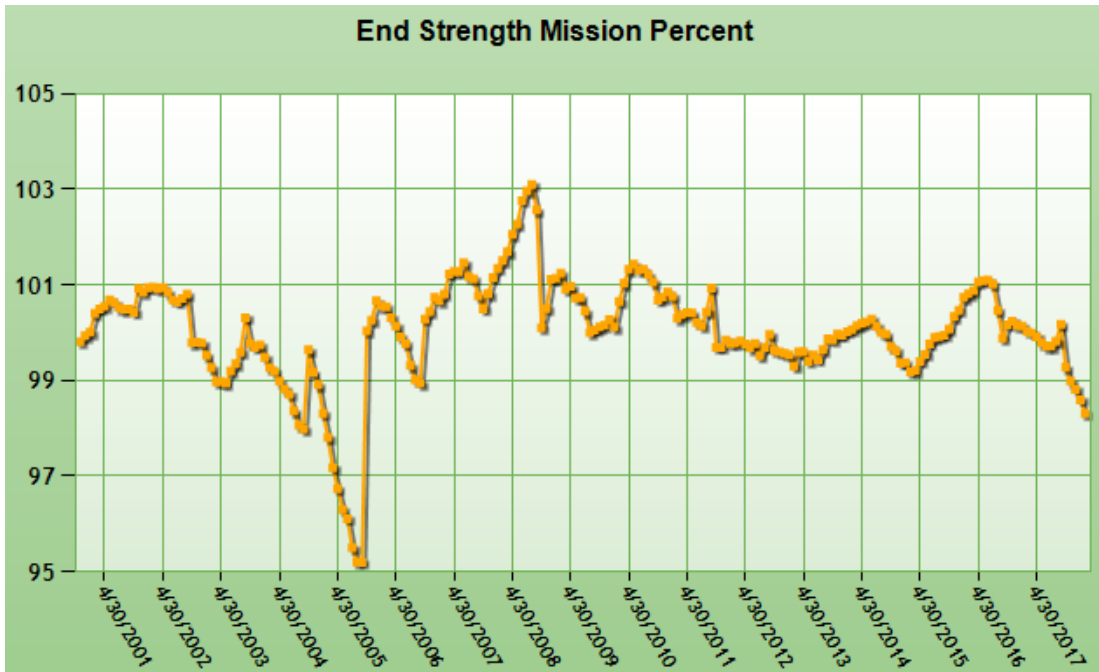


Figure 17. End Strength Mission Percent by Month. US Army National Guard, “Director’s Personnel Overview Report,” accessed March 27, 2018, [https://arngg1.ngb.army.mil/Portal/RibbonMenu.aspx?ProviderName=DSRO Provider](https://arngg1.ngb.army.mil/Portal/RibbonMenu.aspx?ProviderName=DSROProvider).

The graph above portrays the overall percent of end strength achieved each year by the ARNG. However, to understand the accomplishment of the end strength mission it is necessary to examine the recruiting and retention efforts separately. By separating the two components of recruiting and retention, a trend emerges that corresponds to the societal demographics discussed in the previous section.

Figure 18 portrays the percent of the enlisted accession mission achieved each year by the ARNG. In 2001 and 2002, the ARNG achieved over 100 percent of the enlisted recruiting mission. As the mobilization rate increased in support of Iraq and Afghanistan, the recruiting mission accomplishment declined to a low of 75.7 percent in 2004. In response, the ARNG enacted multiple programs to jumpstart recruiting including increased funding for marketing, higher incentive levels, and increased enlistment waivers. The ARNG also increased funding for recruiting, and expanded the numbers of recruiters and recruiter assistants. As a result, the



number of recruits increased rapidly and in 2006 and 2007, the ARNG again achieved greater than 100% of the accession mission.

Beginning in 2009, the ARNG began to remove enlistment and recruiter incentives as optempo declined, funding decreased, and the authorized end strength of the ARNG decreased. At the same time, unemployment began to decrease as the economy started to recover from the recession. The combination of these factors along with the societal shifts discussed above has limited the ability of the ARNG to sustain the recruiting mission since 2009.

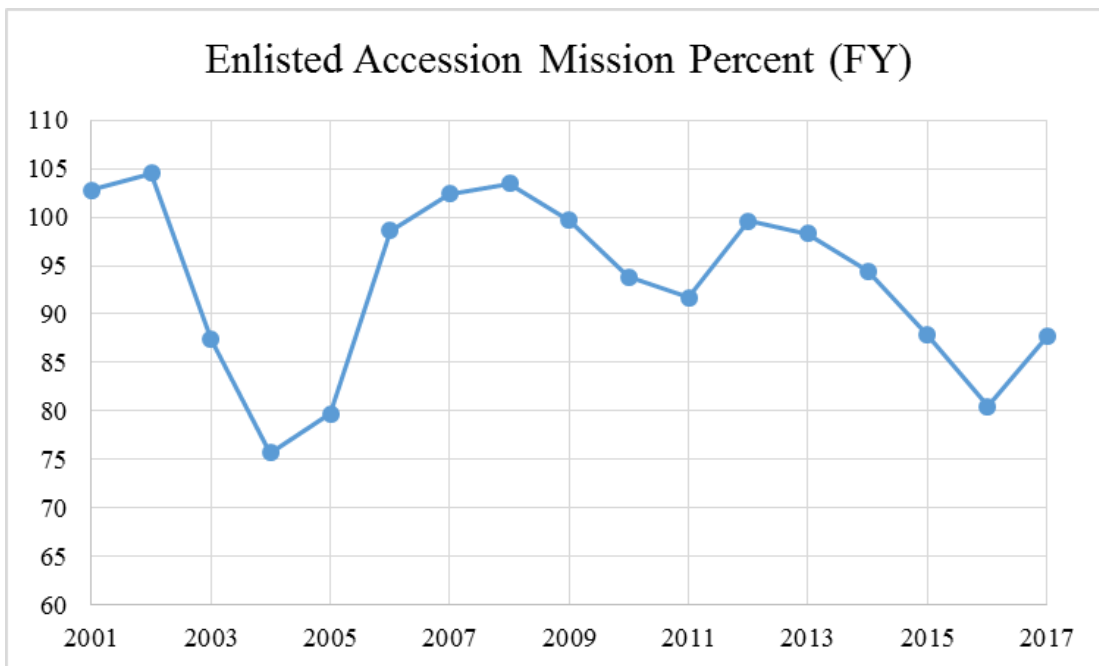


Figure 18. Enlisted Accession Mission Percent (FY). Created by author. Data from US Army National Guard, “Director’s Personnel Overview Report,” accessed March 27, 2018, [https://arn.gg1.ngb.army.mil/Portal/Ribbon Menu.aspx?ProviderName=DSRO Provider](https://arn.gg1.ngb.army.mil/Portal/RibbonMenu.aspx?ProviderName=DSROProvider).

A positive trend in the ARNG since 2001 has been the decline in the attrition rate. In 2001, the attrition rate was near 19 percent requiring the ARNG to replace one fifth of its soldiers every year. By 2017, the attrition rate in the ARNG reached a low of 11.5 percent, almost half the rate in 2001. In the last four months the rate has risen slightly to 13.0 percent.

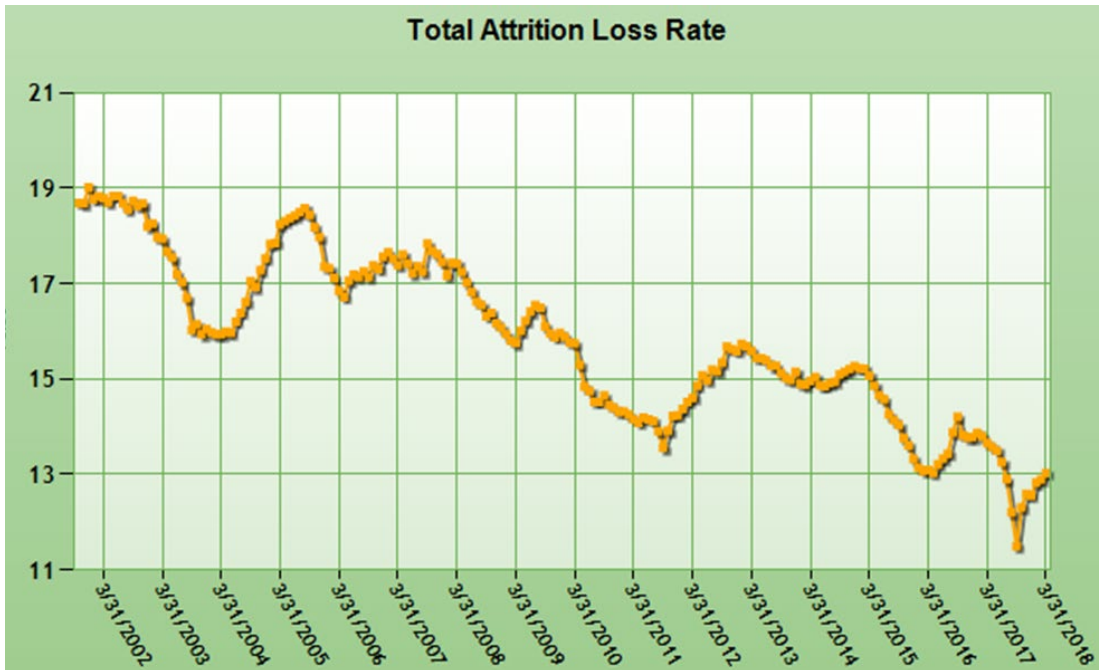


Figure 19. Total attrition loss rate. US Army National Guard, “Director’s Personnel Overview Report,” accessed March 27, 2018, [https://arnng1.ngb.army.mil/Portal/Ribbon Menu.aspx?ProviderName=DSRO Provider](https://arnng1.ngb.army.mil/Portal/RibbonMenu.aspx?ProviderName=DSROProvider).

The decrease in the attrition rate over the last 17 years reflects the comprehensive and effective retention efforts of the ARNG since 2001 and represents a critical success. The decrease in the attrition rate coupled with the decrease in authorized end strength has compensated for the lower recruiting mission success and allowed the ARNG to maintain end strength at or near 100 percent.

### Recruiters

The final lens is the total amount of recruiters by year since 2001. While this does not nearly portray the total amount of recruiting resources that have been increased and expended over the period, it does provide an insight into the increasingly difficult recruiting market that presently exists. Figure 20 indicates that the number of authorized recruiters in the ARNG increased by nearly 70 percent since 2001. The implication is that in order to attain the recruiting mission, 1,300 more recruiters are now required as compared to 2001. The significance of this point amplifies when you consider that the current recruiting mission is roughly 8,000 soldiers

less than the recruiting mission in 2001. At a minimum, figure 20 reveals the increasing costs of maintaining the AVF.

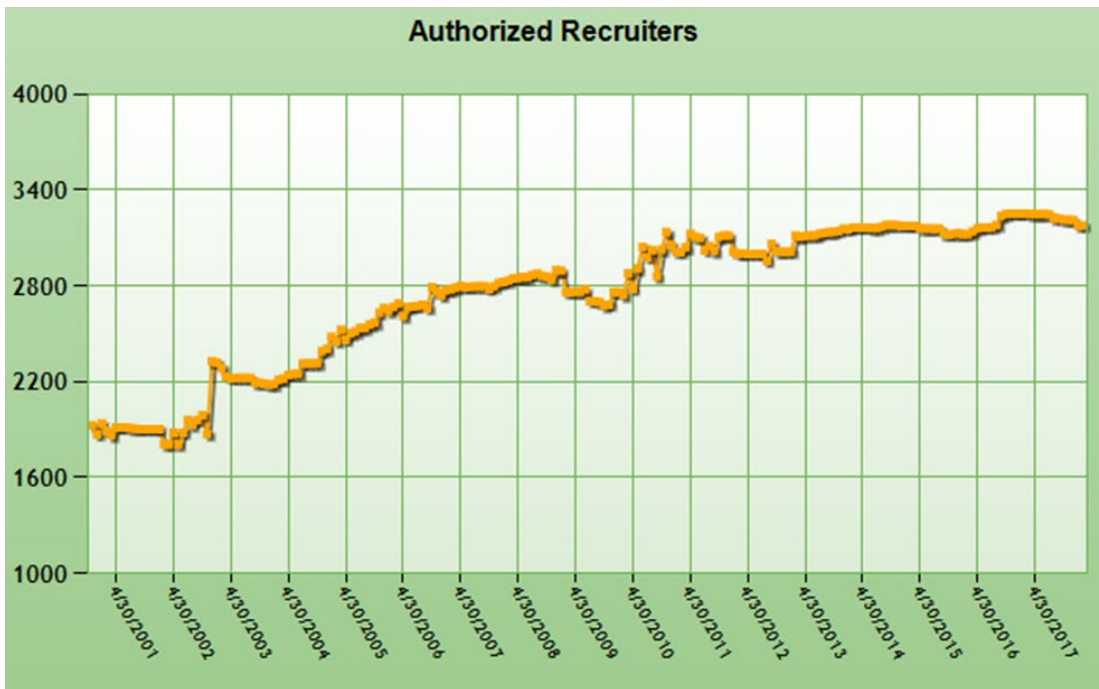


Figure 20. Authorized Recruiters. US Army National Guard, “Director’s Personnel Overview Report,” accessed March 27, 2018, [https://arngg1.ngb.army.mil/Portal/Ribbon Menu.aspx?ProviderName=DSRO Provider](https://arngg1.ngb.army.mil/Portal/RibbonMenu.aspx?ProviderName=DSROProvider).

Having established a base understanding of the recruiting requirements in the ARNG, the following subsections will investigate demographic trends in the ARNG since 2001 and attempt to correlate them to the general societal trends discussed above. In doing so, the goal is to understand the extent to which the current challenges in recruiting are the result of shifting societal demographics versus challenges incurred due to the changing nature of the ARNG. Stated differently, how many of the trends are due to a shrinking supply of recruits versus those that are due to the increased demands placed upon soldiers?

### Applicant Success Rate

A measure related to the changing societal demographics is the applicant success rate at Military Entrance Processing Stations (MEPS). The applicant success rate is the ratio of new applicants that successfully pass initial entry screening to the total number that apply. This

number does not represent the entirety of all interested applicants as the recruiter disqualifies many before they ever make it to MEPS. Additionally, this measure is not a full representation of the effect of the decreasing QMA as it is only a measure of the success of those individuals who choose to apply and undergo the screening process at MEPS. However, it does provide an insight into the difficulty faced by recruiters in finding applicants that will meet initial entry standards. Figure 21 portrays the 12-month running average of the applicant success rate for the ARNG.

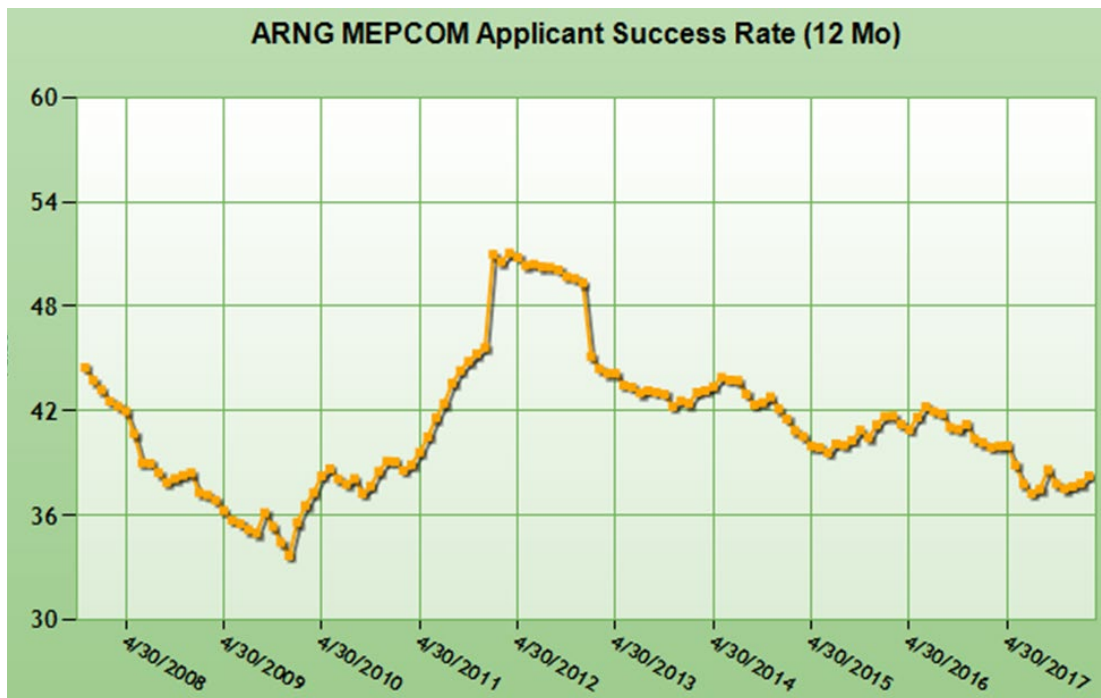


Figure 21. ARNG MEPCOM Applicant Success Rate (12 Mo). US Army National Guard, “Director’s Personnel Overview Report,” accessed March 27, 2018, <https://arngg1.ngb.army.mil/Portal/RibbonMenu.aspx?ProviderName=DSROProvider>.

The available DPRO data for applicant success rate does not begin until 2007, but the data does indicate a trend since that time. Since 2007, the applicant success rate has only exceeded 50 percent once during the period from 2012 to 2013. All other periods have been remained below 50 percent. This means that for every year since 2007 less than one out of every two recruits taken to MEPS by a recruiter successfully joined the military. Presently, the average recruiter enjoys a 38 percent success rate. If you are recruiter that must travel long distance to

transport your recruit to MEPS those are not great odds given the fact that you have already prescreened your applicants and are only transporting those you believe will be successful.

It is important to understand that applicant success rate does not solely depend on the eligibility of the applicant. The rate also factors in many policy levers that can be applied in terms of waivers or changes to standards with regards to medical, moral, and aptitude requirements. However, it is included in this discussion to highlight the difficulty recruiters face in finding applicants that can meet the eligibility standards required to join the ARNG.

## Trainability of New Recruits

The military classifies the trainability of new recruits by evaluating their score on a series of aptitude tests known as the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB). The scores from the Arithmetic Reasoning, Paragraph Comprehension, Mathematics Knowledge, and Word Knowledge portions of the ASVAB combine to form the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT), which serves as the basis for categorizing new applicants. Based on percentiles achieved on the AFQT, the military identifies five categories (CAT) as follows: CAT I (93-99), CAT II (65-92), CAT IIIA (50-64), CAT IIIB (31-39), CAT IVA (16-30), CAT IVB (10-15), and CAT V (0-9). Applicants classified as CAT I-III B are eligible to enlist without a waiver, applicants classified as CAT IVA require special approval, and applicants classified as CAT IVB or CAT V are ineligible for enlistment.<sup>82</sup>

The data in DPRO for this specific trend is only available starting with 2011. Since 2011, the percentage of CAT I-III A enlistments has declined from 71 percent to 61 percent. Correspondingly, the enlistments of CAT IIIB and CAT IV recruits have risen from 28 to 35 percent and 1 to 4 percent respectively. The decline in higher quality recruits indicates the effects of the societal shifts discussed above, namely the decrease in propensity and the decrease in unemployment. Despite the fact that CAT I-III A enlistees are eligible for higher levels of

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<sup>82</sup> CAT IVB recruits are ineligible for service unless entering to serve as interpreters.

incentives than CAT IIIB enlistees, the rate of CAT IIIB recruits continues to rise. Additionally, the rise of CAT IV enlistees indicates the need of the ARNG to allow CAT IV enlistments to accomplish the recruiting mission.

## Physical Fitness and Obesity

The percentage of ARNG soldiers failing to meet the standard on the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) is steadily increasing. When a soldier fails the APFT, they are placed in an unfavorable status and a suspension of favorable actions (flag) is administered until they achieve a favorable status. Figure 22 portrays the near doubling in the percentage of ARNG soldiers flagged for APFT failure from 6.7 percent to the current level of 13.2 percent.

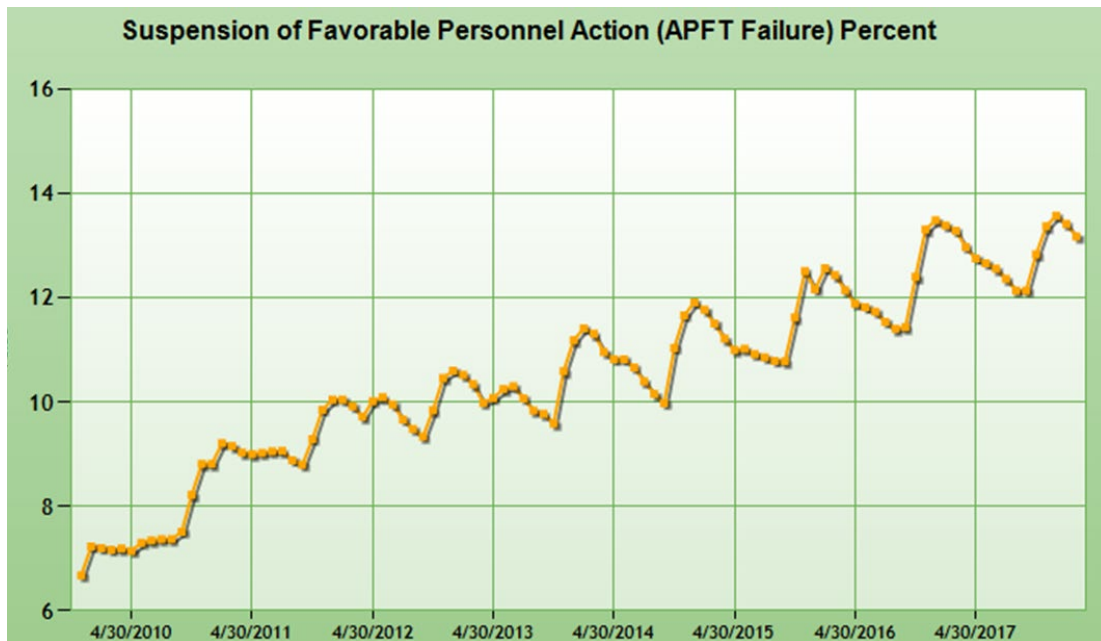


Figure 22. Suspension of Favorable Personnel Action (APFT Failure) Percent US Army National Guard, “Director’s Personnel Overview Report,” accessed March 27, 2018, <https://arngg1.ngb.army.mil/Portal/RibbonMenu.aspx?ProviderName=DSROProvider>.

Similarly, the ARNG flags soldiers when they fail to maintain their body fat percentage within established guidelines. Over the same period, the percentage of soldiers flagged for exceeding the body fat percentage maximums rose from 3 percent to 5 percent. Recall from above that a recent study reported that 26.2 percent of the ARNG soldiers are obese according the BMI

standard used by the CDC.<sup>83</sup> The disparity between the flagged rate and the reported rate of obesity indicates that body fat percentage infractions are currently underreported.

The increase in APFT failures and obesity within the ARNG is troubling given the fact that the standards for the APFT and the maximum rate for body fat percentage have not changed over the same period. The implication is that the trends within society are affecting ARNG soldiers despite the military's emphasis on physical fitness and nutrition. If the current trend of APFT failure and obesity continues, it could have a debilitating impact on recruiting and retention rates within the ARNG.

## Enlistment Waivers

One of the methods available to the military to increase enlistments is to offer waivers for disqualifying enlistment criteria. The waivers can be for medical, moral, physical, or educational attainment criteria and the intent is to enlarge the available pool of applicants. Figure 23 portrays the percentage of soldiers with enlistment waivers since 2001.

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<sup>83</sup> US Department of the Army, US Army Public Health Center, *Health of the U.S. Army National Guard (ARNG) Force Report* (Washington, DC: 2017), 12.

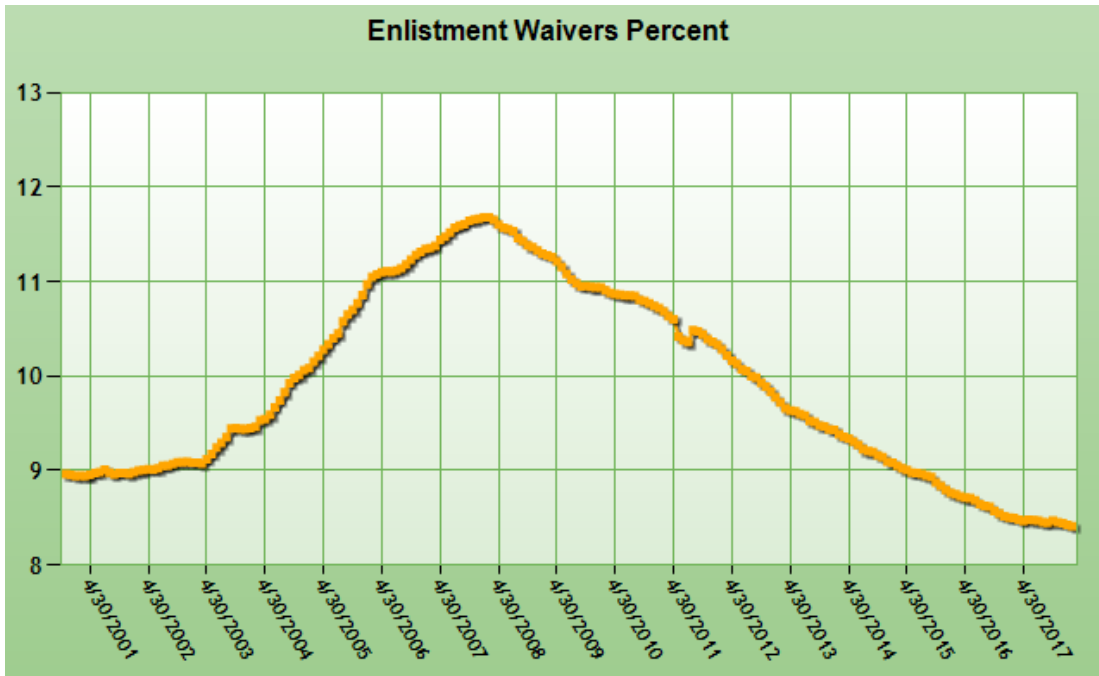


Figure 23. Enlistment Waivers Percent. US Army National Guard, “Director’s Personnel Overview Report,” accessed March 27, 2018, <https://arng1.ngb.army.mil/Portal/RibbonMenu.aspx?ProviderName=DSROProvider>.

The increase and subsequent decrease in waivers correlates with the mobilization rates and end strength requirements discussed above. As optempo increased, the amount of waivers increased in order to generate the amount of recruits needed. As optempo decreased and the force contracted, the amount of waivers issued decreased. The expansion of waivers during the period of highest optempo demonstrates the difficulty of expanding the force without lowering enlistment standards. From roughly 2005 to 2012, over 10 percent of enlisted soldiers in the ARNG received an enlistment waiver.

A trend related to enlistment waivers is the number of discharges due to illegal drug use. As optempo increased, the ARNG granted moral waivers for certain levels of prior drug use. It appears that the higher level of waivers led to a higher level of drug discharges in the years that followed. Figure 24 depicts the amount of discharges due to illegal drug use since 2001. The increase and decrease of discharges appears to follow the same trajectory as enlistment waivers. The separation in years between the rise in waivers and the rise in drug discharges accounts for



the time between enlistment and the drug infraction and subsequent processing time to discharge the soldier from the ARNG.

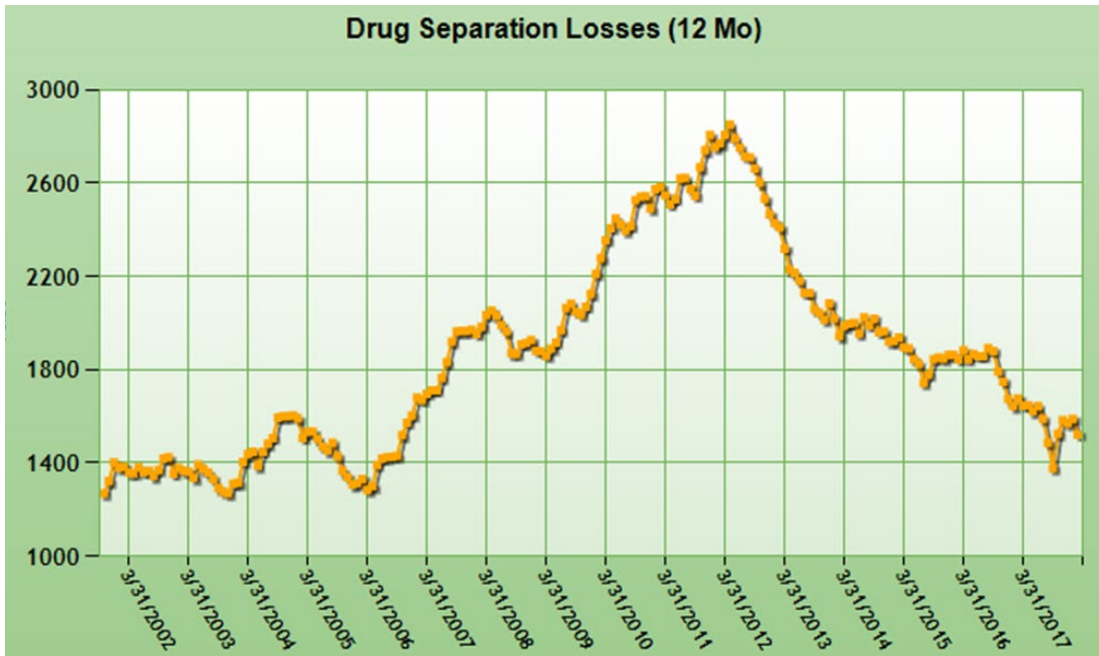


Figure 24. Drug Separation Losses. US Army National Guard, “Director’s Personnel Overview Report,” accessed March 27, 2018, [https://arngg1.ngb.army.mil/Portal/Ribbon Menu.aspx?ProviderName=DSRO Provider](https://arngg1.ngb.army.mil/Portal/RibbonMenu.aspx?ProviderName=DSROProvider).

The decision to allow waivers for enlistment eligibility criteria is certain to continue in the future. Waivers are a viable method of adjusting the recruit pool and offer a quick way to both expand and restrict the force pool in response to end strength needs. However, the use of waivers is not without risk and future decisions to loosen enlistment criteria will have to balance the potential cost to the force.

## Prior Service and Non-Prior Service Recruits

Prior service recruits have always been a fundamental recruiting source for the ARNG. By bridging the gap between active duty service and civilian life, the ARNG offers the ability to continue military service while also pursuing a civilian career. As such, the ARNG has historically received a large number of enlistees from the prior service applicant pool. This benefits the ARNG as prior service recruits have already demonstrated their eligibility and propensity to serve and typically require less processing effort on behalf of the recruiter. These

recruits bring with them experience gained from previous service and represent a pre-qualified applicant pool.

In 2000, prior service recruits represented 50 percent of all ARNG recruits. As of 2018, only 20 percent of all recruits are prior service members. The 30 percent decline in the prior service market represents a significant decline in one of the largest sources of ARNG recruits. The resulting requirement to recruit 80 percent from the non-prior service market increases the competition between all components as ARNG recruiters now compete for an increased share of the non-prior service market.

There are varied theories for the decrease in the viability of the prior service market in the ARNG. Proposed reasons include decreased propensity to join the Guard due to possible mobilizations, medical ineligibility due to prior service injuries or conditions, increased civilian opportunities due to low unemployment and enhanced GI Bill benefits, and increased participation in the United States Army Reserve. However, the reasons for the decrease of prior service members joining the ARNG is not the focus of this paper and the topic itself is deserving of a separate analysis. For the sake of this paper, the pertinent fact is that currently the ARNG receives 20 percent of all recruits from prior service as compared to 50 percent in 2000.

## Years of Service and Average Age

The composition of the ARNG by soldier age and years of service has changed considerably since 2001. The majority of the shift occurred during the period of high mobilization from 2001 to 2009. However, since 2009 the age and years of service demographics have stabilized. Notably, this stabilization is synonymous with the declining rate of mobilizations in the ARNG. This could indicate a new normal or a general stabilization in response to a lower optempo.

Figure 25 depicts the average years of service by ARNG members. The chart is broken into three categories representing the three prevalent stages of a career for an ARNG member.

Since 2001, the percentage of ARNG members that have served for over 13 years has declined by 13.7 percent while the percentage of ARNG members serving less than 6 years has increased by 12.3 percent. The percentage of mid-career soldiers has increased slightly over the same period. The data suggests a higher turnover rate of soldiers in their first term of service and a lower rate of soldiers remaining in the ARNG until retirement.

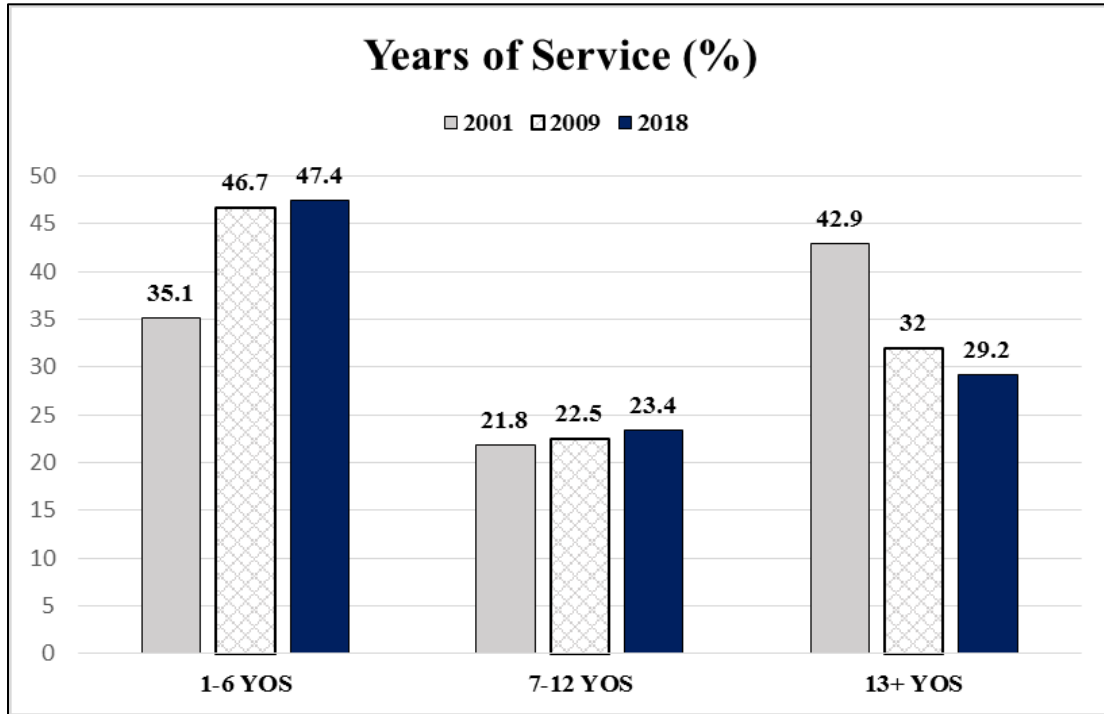


Figure 25. Years of service by cohort. Created by author. Data from US Army National Guard, “Director’s Personnel Overview Report,” accessed March 27, 2018, [https://arnng1.ngb.army.mil/Portal/Ribbon Menu.aspx ?ProviderName=DSRO Provider](https://arnng1.ngb.army.mil/Portal/RibbonMenu.aspx?ProviderName=DSROProvider).

Figure 26 depicts the different age cohorts within the ARNG and the percentage of each cohort as a part of the entire ARNG. Since 2001, the National Guard has become a younger force much more similar in age distribution to the active army. The shift to a younger force also correlates to the decrease in prior service members as well as the decrease in service members serving past 13 years of service. Extrapolating from the data, the trend appears to be toward a larger proportion of younger recruits joining the ARNG to serve for one to two terms.

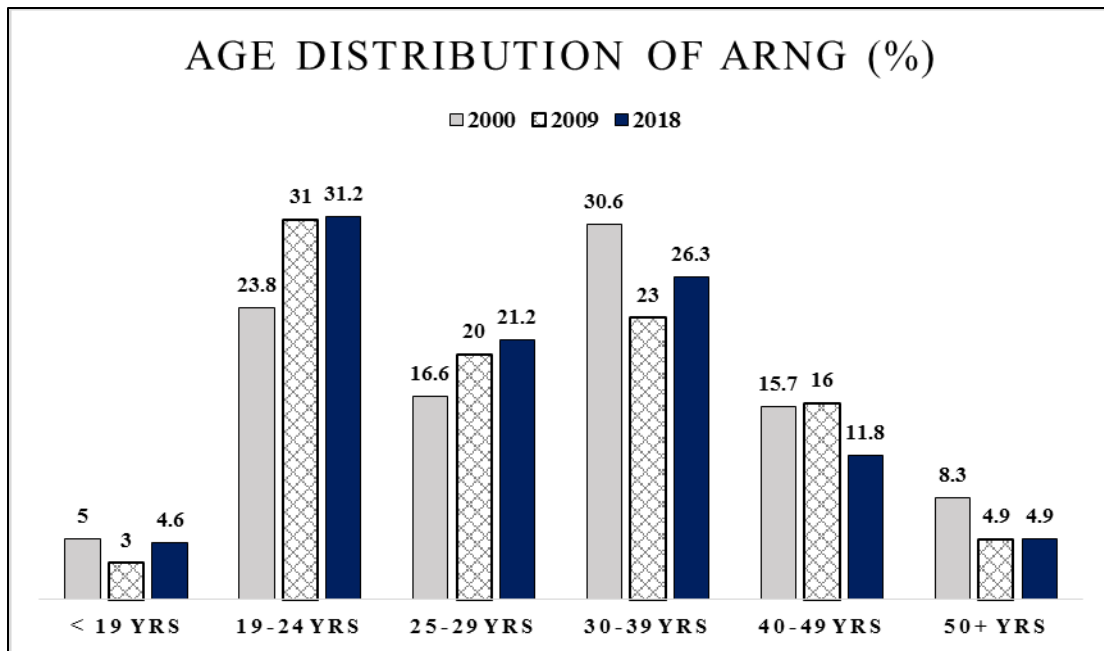


Figure 26. Age distribution of ARNG. Created by author. Data from US Army National Guard, “Director’s Personnel Overview Report,” accessed March 27, 2018, <https://arnggl.ngb.army.mil/Portal/RibbonMenu.aspx?ProviderName=DSROProvider>.

The shifting of the average years of service and the average age of soldiers indicates a cultural change within the ARNG. Whereas the ARNG in 2001 was composed of a majority of Soldiers older than thirty serving multiple enlistments, the ARNG in 2018 is composed of a majority of Soldiers younger than thirty serving one to two enlistments. There is likely a combination of causes that has created this demographic shift in the ARNG, but based on the data, it appears that in the era of higher optempo the current distribution represents the new normal.

### Increased Commute Distance to Unit

The final internal ARNG demographic shift that this paper will examine relates to the previous discussion regarding the migration of the average soldier away from rural areas and the more rural ARNG training facilities. Since 2001, the percentage of ARNG soldiers commuting less than 50 miles to their assigned unit decreased by over 20 percent while the percentage of soldiers travelling 50 to 100 miles and greater than 100 miles increased. The data in figure 27

underscores the fact that the pool of eligible recruits is increasingly geographically separated from the units in which they serve. The increased travel time for training attendance could affect both recruiting and retention in the future if new recruits are unwilling to bear the cost and time required to attend training at their assigned unit.

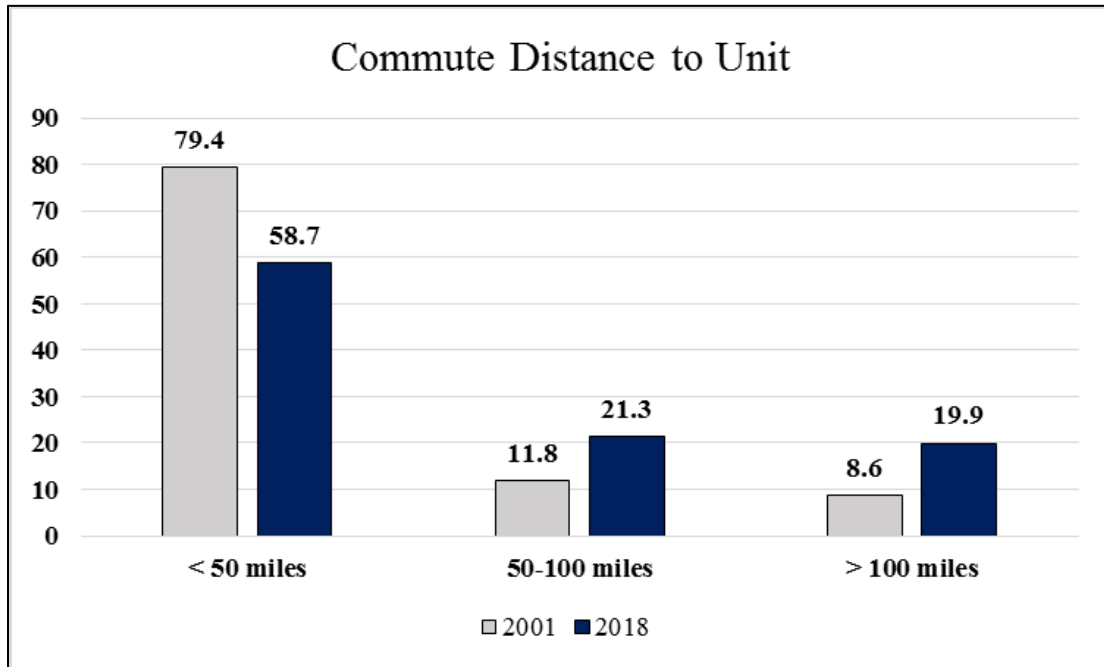


Figure 27. Commute Distance to Unit. Created by author. Data from US Army National Guard, "Director's Personnel Overview Report," accessed March 27, 2018. <https://arnng1.ngb.army.mil/Portal/RibbonMenu.aspx?ProviderName=DSROProvider>.

## Recruiting in the Era of ARNG 4.0

The societal data examined above describes a recruiting pool that is increasingly ineligible to serve in the military, predominately unlikely to choose the military, and largely disconnected from any functional knowledge about the military career and lifestyle. The ARNG specific data outlines the challenge of maintaining the quality of recruits in the face of increasing end strengths, optempo, and a decreasing recruit pool. Overall, the combination of the two datasets provides a clear perspective of the operational environment and the current problem sets that exist as the ARNG looks toward increased operationalization under ARNG 4.0.

The data in the previous two sections provides the empirical evidence of the declining recruit pool within the United States. The problem portrayed is one of supply and demand. The demand for soldiers is increasing while the supply of soldiers is decreasing. The decline in supply is due to a number of factors such as obesity, drug use, propensity, disconnection, unemployment and to some extent urbanization. Some of the factors, such as obesity in society and drug use, are outside the ability of the ARNG to directly influence. Some such as propensity and disconnection can and should be targeted by the ARNG.

In 2014, a former School of Advanced Military Studies graduate and a former member of the commander's initiative group at US Army Recruiting Command collaborated on a report that proposed an operational approach of four lines of effort aimed at redesigning the AVF.<sup>84</sup> The problem according to the authors is the same as described above, the decreasing eligibility and willingness of young adults to serve. The approach, therefore, needs to focus on increasing the supply of recruits. The Runey and Allen approach consists of fostering a culture of civic duty, incentivizing service to attract the qualified but unwilling, qualifying the unqualified through early identification and training, and maximizing the recruiting assets that currently exist.<sup>85</sup> The approach provides a relevant framework for understanding the way forward for recruiting in the era of ARNG 4.0.

The operational approach proposed by Runey and Allen is effective in that it addresses the need for increased civic mindedness and the need to take early measures to influence the future supply of recruits. However, the one area that it neglects to address is the disconnection between the military and the civilian. By including a fifth and overarching line of effort, a targeted campaign to decrease disconnection by increasing influencers, the approach presented by

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<sup>84</sup> Michael Runey and Charles Allen, "An All-Volunteer Force for Long Term Success," *Military Review*, 95, no. 6, (November-December 2015): 92-100, accessed February 20, 2018, <http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p124201coll1/id/1248>.

<sup>85</sup> Runey and Allen, "An All-Volunteer Force for Long Term Success", 98-99.

Runey and Allen can be adapted into a useful approach for increasing the supply of recruits in the ARNG. As such, it is worth examining what the operational approach could look like in the ARNG.

Fostering a culture of civic duty is primarily a policy task that in the ARNG is best led by the governor's office of each individual state. As the commander in chief of the ARNG while in a peacetime status, the governor is in a unique position that provides an excellent platform to foster a climate of civic mindedness. By calling on the leaders, teachers, counselors, and citizens to engage in civic service while highlighting the ARNG as a positive benefit to the state and the individual, governors can shape the future generations of recruits. As more individuals accept the governor's message of service in the ARNG as a way of fulfilling civic duty, the ARNG will gain influencers that can positively impact the recruit pool.

Incentivizing service to attract the qualified but unwilling can happen in a number of different ways. Currently the prevalent methods of incentivizing service include enlistment bonuses, student loan repayment, tuition assistance, and many other options. These methods rely on the incentive being alluring enough to persuade the unwilling individual to join.

Another method worth considering is incentivizing those professions and occupations with the greatest connection to the recruit pool. In this method, the incentive targets specific civilian professions with the goal of increasing key influencers within the community. An example of this would be to build incentive packages that incentivize young teachers to become members of the ARNG. By specifically targeting professions with high connections to the recruit pool such as teachers, the ARNG would not only gain new recruits, but also each teacher would represent a highly visible connection point between the ARNG and potential recruits.

In the ARNG, qualifying the unqualified through early identification and training could consist of ARNG sponsored sports and educational opportunities aimed at enabling young adults to achieve eligibility standards for enlistment. In general, the ARNG is already heavily involved in these types of activities. However, it is clear from the data that the ARNG would be well

served to collaborate with organizations such as Mission: Readiness that are investing in children at a very young age in order to set the conditions for the future recruiting pool. If it sounds inefficient for the military to invest recruiting funds in programs aimed at younger children, consider the fact that the Lockheed Martin Corporation has recently established a new program for middle school children with the intent of generating future employees.<sup>86</sup>

The fourth line of effort consists of the maximizing of current recruiting assets. The current recruiting environment is extremely competitive. Historically low unemployment combined with the decreasing recruit pool and increasing end strength authorizations across the forces creates an environment where multiple entities, civilian and military, are all competing for the same high quality young adults. To compete in this environment, ARNG recruiters will have to be encouraged to establish themselves within their communities and build relationships with key community leaders. In order to enable long-term success, recruiting and retention leaders will have to minimize recruiter turnover to allow recruiters to develop the necessary experience and key influencer networks required for mission accomplishment.

The fifth and overarching line of effort is a targeted campaign to decrease disconnection by increasing influencers. This effort should include all ARNG soldiers and permeates through all aspects of the previous four lines of effort. The intent is that soldiers are encouraged to be active and visible in their communities. Junior leaders should be encouraged to join young professional organizations; senior leaders should work to build relationships with community leaders. The goal is to increase the visibility within the community of the benefits of the ARNG way of life and in doing so increase the propensity of the young adult population.

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<sup>86</sup> Samantha Masunaga, "To Compete with Silicon Valley for Engineers, Aerospace Firms Start Recruitment in Pre-Kindergarten," *Latimes.Com*, accessed April 5, 2018, <http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-defense-recruiting-20161214-story.html>.



## Conclusion

This is not just an Army problem. It's not even a joint problem of all the services. This is a national issue tied to the security of the United States of America.

—LTG (Ret.) John Bednarek, panel discussion co-hosted by The Heritage Foundation and Mission: Readiness

The ARNG is embarking on a new era postured as an operational force capable of responding rapidly to combat and operational deployments. Simultaneously, shifting societal demographics are severely testing the ability to maintain the AVF by reducing the pool of eligible recruits. This paper sought to examine the current recruiting environment in the US in order to develop an understanding of the challenges facing ARNG recruiters and to inform strategies that will ensure the AVF remains viable and capable of supporting ARNG 4.0.

The decreasing pool of recruits represents a complex problem that demands a complex solution. There will not be a single silver bullet that is going to solve the nation's obesity problem or reverse the rising trend of illegal drug use. Additionally, the factors contributing to decreased propensity and eligibility are interconnected. As greater proportions of the population reside in urban areas, the logical response of the ARNG is to relocate training facilities to the areas nearest the recruit pool. However, the relocation of facilities results in increasing disconnection within the rural areas. Likewise, consider that the prescribing of medications to combat ADD/ADHD to enable students to perform better academically is the very act that is precluding them from enlisting in the military. With many interconnected factors combining to decrease the recruit pool of the entire military, a holistic approach must address the symptoms of the shrinking recruit pool as well as the root causes that have created the problem.

The paper then examined trends within the ARNG over the last 17 years to gain an understanding of the effect of increased optempo and societal shifts on the composition of the force. Concerning optempo, the data outlined an initially high attrition rate followed by a steady decrease in losses as the ARNG focused its efforts on the retention of its soldiers. In contrast, the

data displayed the increasing difficulty faced by the recruiting force in light of the shrinking recruit pool and lower incentive budgets. Demographically, the ARNG of today is younger, less likely to serve past 13 years, and less populated by members that have previously served on active duty. In addition, the data revealed an ARNG that is reflective of the same trends that are affecting society. The percentage of soldiers unable to pass the APFT is on the rise, obesity is a growing concern, and the percentage of high quality applicants is on the decline.

To sustain the operational tempo of ARNG 4.0, the paper proposed an operational approach composed of five lines of effort. The five lines of effort focused on increasing civic mindedness, increasing propensity among the unwilling, qualifying the unqualified through early engagement and training , stabilizing and equipping the recruiting force, and developing targeted efforts to increase the amount of positive influencers who can represent the military in the community.

The concept of the All-Volunteer Force is similar to any market. The theory claims that by providing higher pay and other incentives, the armed forces will be able to maintain end strength and attract high quality applicants. In the present situation, the shrinking supply of qualified applicants is driving the price of a qualified applicant higher and higher in terms of recruiting and incentive costs. This is driving discussions about the ability of the AVF to provide forces during sustained and persistent conflict. The military faces a complex problem of how to maintain the inflow of qualified applicants, without exceeding budgets or lowering standards. The factors that are behind the shrinking recruit pool are largely out of the military's realm of control, but military leaders must engage on the topic as it directly relates to the security of the nation in the future.

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