

# A Crisis of Low Morale: Support for the Military in America's

## Working Class

A Monograph

by

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## Abstract

A Crisis of Low Morale: Support for the Military in America's Working Class, by COL Zachary D. Kerns, 43 pages.

Social and economic decline in America's working-class communities has produced a crisis of low morale. The peace and security of the global commons, provided by the US military, has allowed for international prosperity at the cost of social decline among many American working-class communities. The result is a loss of America's working-class confidence in national institutions. While the military cannot solve the social and economic decline in America's working-class communities, it must make modest investments to ensure the long-term support of the working class. As veteran numbers decline in communities, the military must replace the ambassador function veterans provide and expand the number of interactions of the military with working-class influencers. Military leaders must also become more conscious of the relationship of the military to the American people and consider the impact of their actions on future support. Maintaining a strong relationship with the working class will ensure the future success of the All-Volunteer Force.

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## Abbreviations

AVF	All-Volunteer Force
GWOT	Global War on Terror
JROTC	Junior Reserve Officer Training Corp
KIA	Killed in Action
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
PME	Professional Military Education
ROTC	Reserve Officer Training Corp

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## Introduction

Whatever America hopes to bring to pass in this world must first come to pass in the heart of America.

--President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Inaugural Address, Jan 20, 1953

The US military has played a critical role in keeping the global commons open to all nations, resulting in an era of relative peace and economic development for the world. The American working class is measuring the current benefits of the global economic system against its interests and considering the global economy's contribution to the social and economic decline of their communities. Political leaders in the United States have yet to reach a balance between domestic concerns and fulfilling the global leadership responsibilities expected of the United States. As public confidence in American institutions decline, the US military must take action to reinforce its relationship with working class Americans.

## Background

The military of the United States requires the support of the population it serves as the basis for its legitimacy. The US population expresses that support in three forms: private support, public support, and election support. Private support is essential for the recruitment of volunteers; influential adults must endorse military service as a worthwhile endeavor as they mentor young people. Public support is reflected in displays of support that are not intended for a specific individual but broadly endorse the military. Examples of public support are yellow ribbons and bumper stickers or cheers and applause for military representation at sporting events. Public support can also be observed in an individual thanking an unknown service member for their service. The population's support is also translated through elections. Electoral support is more indirect in that the population is endorsing candidates, who once elected to office will support a strong military (reflected in the budget) and legislation related to military authorities. Currently the US military enjoys a high degree of support from the US population and contrasts with other

institutions of the United States that have experienced a decline in support over the past thirty years.<sup>1</sup>

## Purpose

Insight and understanding of the social and economic conditions in the United States is necessary for the military to communicate with America's working class and to maintain their trust and confidence. With adequate understanding, the military can revise existing policies and implement new policies that will maintain the high standing the US military currently enjoys with the US working class. It is critical to recognize the social and economic trends among America's working class are not a problem the military can solve. However, the military must recognize and appreciate the situation as it considers policy decisions that impact the military's relationship with the American people.

## Hypothesis

The military will continue to be a key institution of the United States into the future and will require the enduring trust and support of the US population. The military currently enjoys high standing with the US population due to the ethics and values that has largely kept the military isolated from domestic politics. The military must recognize and evaluate the impact of social and economic trends that have the potential to negatively affect its relationship with the populace. The analysis of social trends informs changes to policies that are consistent with ethics and values of the military while maintaining trust with the American population.

## Methodology

Effective policies that guide the services first require a clear understanding of what forces are at play. The domestic situation is vastly complex and research into social and economic trends

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<sup>1</sup> Leo Shane III, "Survey: Public Confidence in the Military Is High, Especially among Older Generations," *Military Times*, July 22, 2019, accessed October 13, 2020, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2019/07/22/survey-public-confidence-in-the-military-is-high-especially-among-older-generations/>.

in working-class communities formed the starting point. Research then explored the global trends that impact the domestic situation. This monograph then relies on initial enlistment trends to measure the level of support the military receives from working-class Americans. Enlistment data and academic analysis was only available through 2018. The intent of this monograph is to contribute to the segment of civil-military relations that explores society and the relationship between the populace and the military.

## Significance

While the nation continues to struggle with what role it will play in future global affairs, the military must continue to work diligently towards meeting its obligations on modernization, strategic partnerships, and readiness. However, the military risks alienating itself from the American population if it fails to first understand the domestic situation and not place adequate value on its relationship with the population. Failure to maintain the trust of the American people will have a direct impact on recruiting and retention. Indirectly, failure to foster a strong relationship with the American people will affect funding and authorities as the electorate imposes its will through elections. Additionally, failure to connect with American's will erode the image of the US military abroad and contribute to narratives that seek to damage the standing of the United States. As a lasting institution with widespread respect, the US military will also find itself in a role of informal influence as the population looks toward the military as an example at times of uncertainty and ambiguity. Recent statements by retired senior officers demonstrate the potential for comments to alienate the working class. Therefore, the military must invest internally and evaluate the risks to its relationship with the US population and take actions to preserve it.

## Literature Review

The current global order established following World War II has resulted in *globalism*. Globalism is a global economic system that relies upon free trade with other nations worldwide, it differs from other forms of trade in that nations generally avoid protectionist trade policies. Although globalism offers many benefits, subgroups of every population benefit less equally than others, thereby feeling left out and they often demand nationalist policies to counter the effects of globalism. The US military, as the guarantor of the global order, could lose the support of those in the American middle class who desire more nationalist policies. If so, how can the US military maintain its standing with the American people? For the purposes of this paper, the middle class are those above the poverty line but below the top five percent of earners. The focus of this paper is the working-class portion of the middle class, those in the lower half of income earnings. Also considered are those who, regardless of income, identify as working class.

This section covers literature relevant to the global order, globalism, and its effects on the US population and how it has resulted in a backlash of nationalism. The time-period covered is the emergence of the current global order, beginning with the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944 to the present. The focus of the literature is on the impacts of the global order in relation to the US population and how the order has produced two competing views in the United States. One view favors globalism, the other favors a move towards nationalism. Also covered are the trends in first-time enlistment from 1998 to 2019 as a means of measuring working-class support for the military.

### The World Order

The current world order began in July 1944, near the end of World War II at the Bretton Woods Conference. According to author Peter Zeihan, the United States was poised to establish a global empire following World War II. As the only nation to survive the war with a substantial navy, a functioning economy, and a massive industrial base, the United States was poised to

establish an American imperial system comprised of the former Axis countries and Western Europe.<sup>2</sup> Instead, the United States proposed an international economic system, in which participating nations could trade freely with other nations while the US Navy secured maritime trade, thereby removing the necessity of partner nations to rebuild their navies. The United States additionally opened its economy to the partner nations.<sup>3</sup>

The United States' proposal also included the establishment of international organizations that would manage and arbitrate the free trade system. This arrangement allowed for the European partners to rapidly establish an economic base that financed the rebuilding of institutions and infrastructure destroyed by the war while also freeing them from heavy military costs and created incentives for cooperation in Europe rather than conflict. In exchange, the United States expected the European nations to stand in opposition to the Soviet Union and the sizable land forces the Soviet Union possessed. Following World War II, the Axis nations that came under Allied control joined the Bretton Woods system while the countries controlled by the Soviet Union came under control of the communist order.

## Globalism

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the global economic system grew as former Soviet states emerged from the Iron Curtain and joined in the global free economy. Author and journalist, Thomas L. Friedman marked the collapse of the Soviet Union as the beginning of Globalism.<sup>4</sup> Prior to 1989, the states in the global order each had their own economic systems that interacted with the systems of other nations.<sup>5</sup> The collapse of the Soviet Union coincided with the emergence of the internet.

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Zeihan, *The Accidental Superpower: The next Generation of American Preeminence and the Coming Global Disorder* (New York: Twelve, 2016), 3, 80.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*. Rev. ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), 6.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 7–8.

What resulted is individual state economic systems merged into one global economic system. Rather than an economic system loosely governed at an international level with other sub-systems governed at the state level, the new globalist system is largely ungoverned and acts more like a herd of animals.<sup>6</sup> Like a herd, it is relatively leaderless, and the internet allows the herd to communicate at all levels, resulting in unguided actions, and changes occur as collective perspectives within the herd change. Friedman went on to explain individuals who prosper in this system are those that can develop value and exchange it across the system.

The challenge is that the system is difficult to understand but demands the utmost in efficiency as competition is constant and adjusts at such a speed that a producer is in a constant struggle to reduce costs, increase quality, and find profit in volume. Given the ability of the herd to communicate, a bad message can destroy a business. This global market pressure results in jobs migrating from one nation to another with cheaper labor. At other times, the cheaper labor migrates to the jobs, undercutting the costs of existing workers. This migration of jobs and peoples creates social strains. The social pressures result in nationalist movements that seek to maintain the culture of the society that is increasingly being Americanized due to globalism.<sup>7</sup>

At the time of Friedman's writing in 1999, he viewed the nationalist response to globalism as a problem other nations would struggle with as American brands had the competitive advantage over local entities. He largely dismissed the loss of jobs by Americans as a temporary problem, anticipating adaptation to new jobs in a knowledge-based economy. Friedman was confident social programs would support those that were not able to adapt quickly, until they found new work. Friedman's dismissiveness is based on his belief the United States is

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 31–41.

the nation most poised to gain from the global economy as it exports its soft power around the world.<sup>8</sup>

## Nationalism

The backlash against globalism is not purely an economic response. Friedman identifies the people in emerging economies are concerned that economic prosperity could cost them their cultural and social identity but is largely dismissive of these effects in the United States. Samuel Huntington explored the effects of globalization on Americans and describes it as an identity crisis. Huntington describes American society is split, one side is led by elites who largely view themselves as cosmopolitan or multi-nationalists. The elite's livelihood and sense of being is based on globalism and is not tied to a single nation.<sup>9</sup> The elites are accompanied by many recent immigrants to the United States that have not assimilated and hold a variety of connections and allegiances to their originating nation. The other side is comprised of Americans whose families migrated to the United States generations ago and have assimilated to the level that they no longer identify with the countries of their ancestors but solely as Americans.<sup>10</sup>

Contributing to the anxiety of an American identity crisis is the breakdown of the social and civic connections in American society. Robert Putnam has identified that Americans no longer participate in civic organizations to the degree they did following World War II. Putnam points out that civic participation enables people to feel connected to their community. Putnam also identifies civic participation results in higher election turn out and provides a sense citizens voices are heard, therefore increasing confidence in election results.<sup>11</sup> While Putnam's views

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<sup>8</sup> Joseph S. Nye, *The Future of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011), 81-109.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 14.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 34-35.

focus on the local level, Friedman points out that globalism is reducing interest in local politics and focusing the attention of voters on national elections as the global economy increasingly determines the local economy. Huntington however explains the reduced civic participation is a result of American's alienation from politics and governance because politicians enact laws contrary to national identity.<sup>12</sup> Huntington sites a study that shows a decline in trust of the executive branch and Congress from 1966-1996 and correlates the decline in participation of election activities during the same time frame.<sup>13</sup>

Friedman and Zeihan discuss the role of the US military in maintaining the security of a global free trade system.<sup>14</sup> In Zeihan's perspective, a global order secured by the US military, has led to the most peaceful time in human history as nations focus on economics and the acquisition of resources through trade.<sup>15</sup> James Sheehan, describes how this created an environment of rapid prosperity in Europe after World War II that has resulted in the demilitarization of Europe and replaced it with a civilian society. The relative peace and aversion to armed conflict has largely eliminated conquest. It has also resulted in European states investing in social programs rather than defense, further emphasizing their reliance on the US military if armed conflict became necessary.<sup>16</sup> Huntington describes the US military as defined by an, "overriding loyalty to the American nation-state."<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the US military could find itself positioned between globalist demands of securing the economic system (led by European nations) and a population

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<sup>12</sup> Huntington, *Who Are We?*, 325.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 332–333.

<sup>14</sup> Zeihan, *The Accidental Superpower*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 139, 143.

<sup>16</sup> James J. Sheehan, *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone? The Transformation of Modern Europe*, 1st Mariner Books ed. (Boston: Mariner Books, 2009), 172–180.

<sup>17</sup> Huntington, *Who Are We?*, 273.



that is growing more nationalist but whose support is necessary to fill the ranks of an All-Volunteer Force (AVF).

## Policy

Elected officials are under increasing pressure by the portion of the population that feels left out by globalism to enact policies that will return economic prosperity to the middle class and restore American identity. Timothy Carney continues the theme of Robert Putnam's, *Bowling Alone* to show how civic participation is high in affluent communities comprised of professionals integrated in the global economy, while communities that lost manufacturing jobs overseas without new forms of employment continue to decline.<sup>18</sup> Carney's research illustrates the social conditions in working-class communities resulted in high voter turnout in the Republican primaries of 2016, propelling Donald Trump to the nomination on a platform of national populism.<sup>19</sup> Contrary to Putnam, Carney discovered that these voters, who previously had low civic participation, became highly active for a national candidate. Carney's discovery supports Friedman's assertion that voters view national elections as more influential on the local economy than local elections.<sup>20</sup> Carney also supports Huntington's claim that a large portion of Americans do not participate in elections because candidates do not address national identity concerns.<sup>21</sup>

As the electorate demands more nationalist policies of elected leaders, the tension with globalism will grow. Friedman's interviews with national leaders and economic leaders led him to conclude that there is little policy makers can actually do.<sup>22</sup> In his herd analogy, Friedman demonstrates that a policy change that favors the population of one nation will conversely

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<sup>18</sup> Timothy P. Carney, *Alienated America: Why Some Places Thrive While Others Collapse* (New York: HarperCollins, 2019), 58–62.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 56–58.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 204–207.

<sup>21</sup> Huntington, *Who Are We?*, 325.

<sup>22</sup> Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, 23–24.

alienate it from the global economy. Although the policy produces a positive effect for one constituency, it results in an adverse effect on another, leaving the policy maker unable to fulfill campaign promises. The tension of officials to satisfy the demands of the global economy and domestic nationalistic demands results in what Robert Putnam calls a two-level game.<sup>23</sup> The two-level game requires the official to reach an amicable agreement between both levels. In the opinion of Friedman, the two-level game is unwinnable as the global economy is a leaderless herd and cannot be negotiated with, you either play by its rules or be left behind.

## Military Enlistment

While American's confidence in national institutions has eroded, confidence in the military remains high. The goal of this research is to assess the vulnerability of the military's standing with the US working class as the nation seeks to find a balance between its role in the global economy and its identity as a nation. To evaluate working-class support, a review of enlistment trends was made. In 2007, Ann Marlowe concluded the military is not comprised of young people from poor backgrounds, using the opportunity to reach the middle class.<sup>24</sup> Marlowe's research instead determined the poor are underrepresented in the military and the middle class is overrepresented. In 2009, Beth Bailey provides a comprehensive history of the All-Volunteer Force and enlistment trends, Dr. Bailey's work includes in-depth analysis on female and African American enlistment trends. Unfortunately, Dr. Bailey's analysis is limited in working-class trends but does confirm Marlowe's analysis of middle-class participation and

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<sup>23</sup> Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 433–435.

<sup>24</sup> Ann Marlowe, "The Truth About Who Fights for Us," *Wall Street Journal*, opinion, September 27, 2011, accessed October 13, 2020, <https://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424053111903791504576587244025371456.html>.

identifies white males were disproportionately represented in killed in action (KIA) numbers for Iraq.<sup>25</sup>

Mathew Goldberg identified two key trends; the military is largely representative of the population in regards to racial demographics and that the most likely predictor of military service is an impressionable relationship with an adult (examples are family member, teacher, coach) who served is the most significant predictor of a young person enlisting.<sup>26</sup> Research overall found that analysis of enlistment trends is biased to track racial, ethnic and gender demographics. Analysis by Curt Nichols of a 2006 survey conducted in Texas, indicated political views do contribute to enlistment decisions but is complex in how it effects that decision.<sup>27</sup> Nichols also identified that high support for the military and low support for the Iraq war could lead to cognitive dissonance and a potential crisis.<sup>28</sup> Nichol's insights however could not be expanded upon as the survey was not intended to measure how political views influence enlistment.

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<sup>25</sup> Beth L. Bailey, *America's Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force* (Cambridge, MA: the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 258–259.

<sup>26</sup> Matthew S. Goldberg et al., *Geographic Diversity in Military Recruiting* (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analysis, November 2018), 47, accessed December 3, 2020, <https://www.ida.org/-/media/feature/publications/g/ge/geographic-diversity-in-military-recruiting/d-9079.ashx>.

<sup>27</sup> Curt Nichols, "Public Opinion and the Military: A Multivariate Exploration of Attitudes in Texas," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, ed. Neovi M. Karakatsanis and Jonathan Swarts, (January 2015): 96.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

## Problem Statement

Globalism has contributed to the decline in economic and social conditions of America's working-class and threatens its future support for the US military. The decline in economic security has led to a loss of community and has resulted in a working class that is less trustful and less connected to other people.<sup>29</sup> To put the situation into military terms, morale is low in America's working class, especially among the white working-class. With such an outlook among the working class it is less likely a young person will feel the emotions that encourage self-sacrifice for a common good. While the American population's support to the military takes many forms, the most critical form of support is the willingness of young people to join the All-Volunteer Force. Currently twenty-five percent of the US population does not support globalism while another twenty-five percent are uncertain.<sup>30</sup> The dissatisfaction is not a rebuke of American leadership in the world, but a neglect of middle-class concerns at home that stem from the impacts of globalism and predominantly effect the working class.<sup>31</sup> As the military force that guarantees the global order, and therefore the global economic system, the US military could be the next American institution to experience a loss of trust and confidence from the working class. Until policy makers obtain a balance between international commitments and domestic concerns, the US military must strive to maintain its standing with the portion of the US population that is unsatisfied with the results of globalism in their community.

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<sup>29</sup> Carney, *Alienated America*, 97–99.

<sup>30</sup> Rebecca Savransky, "Poll: Globalization Supporters in US Outnumber Opponents by Nearly 2-to-1 Margin," *The Hill*, September 17, 2017, accessed December 21, 2020, <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/351050-poll-globalization-supporters-in-us-outnumber-opponents-by-nearly-21>.

<sup>31</sup> Tom Wyler and Ashley J. Tellis, "Sustaining America's Role in the World Demands Renewal at Home," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, October 21, 2020, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/10/21/sustaining-america-s-role-in-world-demands-renewal-at-home-pub-83017>.

## Economic and Social Situation

### Globalism

Globalism is the term used to describe a world-wide economic system for nations to voluntarily participate in free trade principles in international markets. Globalization is the integration of markets and technology that enables interaction with individuals and organizations around the world.<sup>32</sup> Globalism includes the expectation that nations will cooperate without enacting protectionist policies that favor domestic business. The goal is that a free and open economy will produce the most efficient outcome for consumers and in return, the businesses of each nation are able to compete on a global scale thereby reaching larger markets and produce profit at scale. Globalism is a result of the transition from the industrial age to the information age. With the introduction of the internet, markets became decentralized and central authorities were increasingly unable to exert control over markets through hierarchical methods.<sup>33</sup> International markets now resemble “herds”, as people communicate on an unprecedented scale and consumer activity is the herd’s reaction to information.<sup>34</sup>

When capitalism prevailed over communism, there was no alternative system to compete with and capitalism became the norm for every nation that desired international trade.<sup>35</sup> Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, half the world conducted commerce based on a system developed by the United States and was then endorsed by forty-four nations at the Bretton Woods conference in 1944. When the nations previously aligned with the Soviet Union could no longer anchor their economic system to the communist bloc, they either adopted the US model or

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<sup>32</sup> Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, 8.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 59–70.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

retained the autonomy of a national system but with a disadvantage when interacting with international economies.<sup>36</sup>

For a company to compete on a global scale, it must have the capacity to operate internationally and, on a scale, relative to its market. Companies must also possess the ability to communicate cross culturally and interact with the system in other parts of the world. If a company was able to meet this barrier to entry, there were few other barriers to overcome.<sup>37</sup> Regional corporations then expanded to new international markets. Companies that were unable to compete at scale and at the pace of their competitors were eventually priced out of the market.<sup>38</sup> Often the larger companies were able to reduce prices as their profit margins narrowed and recouped the profit with the volume they achieved on the global market. Rather than markets comprised of both international and regional companies, a few large international companies dominate markets.

As international companies sought to maximize profits through volume, they also had to find ways of reducing costs to keep up with competition.<sup>39</sup> Through cooperative governments, manufacturing migrated to developing countries where wages for employees were lower. Automation also played a large part in the loss of jobs, yet the perception the jobs transitioned to nations with lower cost for labor overshadows the role of automation.<sup>40</sup> In other instances, immigration increased the size of the available workforce and increased competition for the remaining jobs. The result is less demand for low skilled labor in the United States.

Proponents of globalism argue that America benefits the most from globalization and therefore the negative effects are short lived and social programs can address gaps until new jobs

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 101-102, 157-159.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 77-80.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 206-211.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 88-91.

<sup>40</sup> Carney, *Alienated America*, 37-38.

are created in the global economy.<sup>41</sup> The temporary loss in American jobs is only partially correct. American corporations capable of international commerce do benefit from an expanded market, however not all places in the United States benefit equally.<sup>42</sup> While new jobs and businesses have emerged, the scale has not been sufficient to meet demand, especially in smaller communities that have less diversity of connections to the global economy. The result is the upper middle class, and the poor class are growing while those in between are shrinking.<sup>43</sup> The increase in the upper middle-class population reflects those able to take advantage of globalism while the increase in the poor-class population reflect those who could not.

## Working Class

A complication for Americans to understand the effects of globalism, is a collective understanding of class. For Americans, the term *middle class* is an umbrella term used to represent a large group.<sup>44</sup> American's are likely to consider the factory worker and senior management employee at that same factory to both be middle class without further clarification. This is a credit to American culture that values equality and the opportunity to improve one's economic situation through the creation of a business or advanced education. Attempts to clarify the discussion by income levels are useful for some surveys but do not paint a clear picture.<sup>45</sup> Incomes can also vary significantly from high cost of living locations to low cost of living locations. Some professions require a college degree with a formal income structure while others

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<sup>41</sup> Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, 420–425.

<sup>42</sup> Carney, *Alienated America*, 50.

<sup>43</sup> Pew Research Center, "The American Middle Class Is Losing Ground." *Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project*, December 9, 2015, accessed December 28, 2020, <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/12/09/the-american-middle-class-is-losing-ground/>.

<sup>44</sup> Joan C. Williams, "We Won't Fix American Politics until We Talk about Class," TEDxMileHigh, February 2018, video, 17:10, accessed January 7, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7I6D1i27Nw>.

<sup>45</sup> Gallup Inc, "Looking Into What Americans Mean by 'Working Class,'" *Gallup.Com*, August 3, 2018, accessed December 6, 2020, <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/239195/looking-americans-mean-working-class.aspx>.

have a shorter education requirement and income is based on market demand. An example is a elementary schoolteacher who makes less than a plumber. Generally, Americans consider the teacher as middle class and “white-collar” due to the education requirement to teach in public schools. Yet because plumbing is part of the trades and requires manual labor, Americans consider the plumber as working class and “blue-collar”.

It is necessary to describe exactly who the working class is for the purposes of this paper. The middle class is a large group that includes those above the poverty level, but below the top five percent of earners. Rather than only using a clumsy measure of annual income to subdivide the middle class, more consideration to other factors is helpful. In addition to income levels, Pew Research Center incorporated skill level to help define the subcategories of the middle class.<sup>46</sup> Pew identified the upper-income earners of the middle class possess high-skills, examples are management, engineering, and medical professionals.<sup>47</sup> The lower-income earners of the middle class consist of low-skill levels. The middle-income earners of the middle class often have at least some college (or trade school). It is the lower income of the middle class and portions of the middle-income category that forms the working class, and they are the subject of this paper (See Figure 1). Examples of professions in this group are mechanics, transportation, administration, and service workers.

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<sup>46</sup> Pew, “The American Middle Class Is Losing Ground,” 3.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 1.



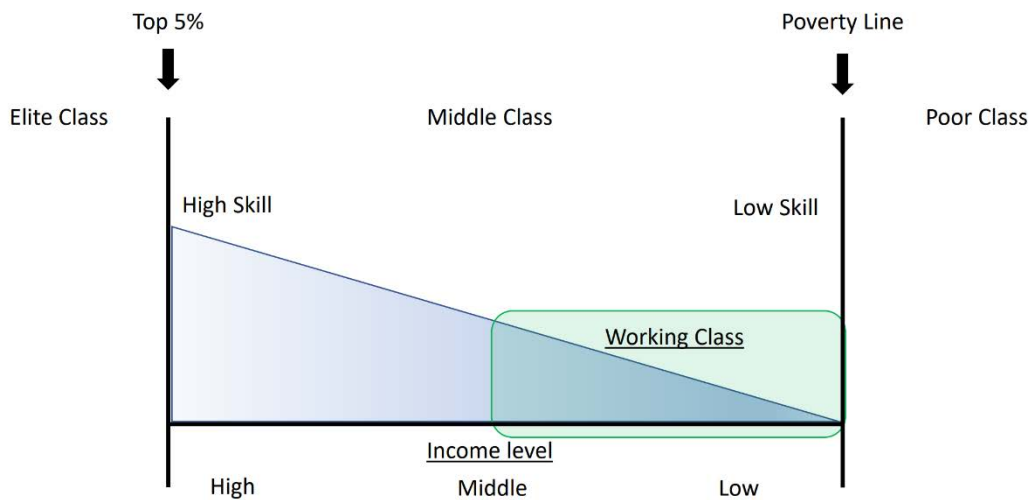


Figure 1. American Class Structure

Source: author.

An American culture that avoids permanent labels of class, results in individuals frequently migrating between the income categories of the middle class without considering the social significance. Identification as working-class is subjective for Americans and related to their perceptions.<sup>48</sup> For example, Americans consider an electrician educated in a two-year trade school to be working class. However, that electrician could start his own business and employ other electricians thereby transitioning into the middle-income category. In America, the electrician would likely still identify as working class, although they are now the employer and possess the skills necessary of a business owner in addition to the skill set of an electrician. The combined skill sets of electrician and business owner could eventually place them in the upper middle-class earnings while still identifying as a working-class electrician. Additionally, an individual that grew up as the child of that electrician may continue to identify with the working class as an adult, although they are upper management at a medium-size company. Because identity contributes to perception, those who identify as working class must also be considered as

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<sup>48</sup> Gallup, "Looking Into What Americans Mean by 'Working Class.'"

working class for the purposes of this monograph.<sup>49</sup> Although American values result in a degree of class blindness, it comes at the cost of precise language. Without precise language it is difficult to discuss the exact grievances and concerns of the working class.

## The Effects of Globalism on the Working Class

Economic conditions receive the most attention in considering the impacts of globalization on the working class. As corporations strive to achieve the most efficiency to remain competitive in global markets, American jobs suffer. First, they suffer as manufacturing moves to developing countries with lower labor costs.<sup>50</sup> Combined with the loss of manufacturing jobs to automation and machines, the result is American manufacturing is less reliant on labor.<sup>51</sup> Second, immigration policies result in the migration of people from developing countries to the United States. Given the relative opportunities compared to their nation of origin, immigrants are willing to work for lower wages than American workers. An increasing labor pool, while the number of jobs continues to decrease creates an environment of stagnation. Adjusted for inflation, American wages were lower in 2008 than in 1969.<sup>52</sup> The comparable decrease in wages is beneficial to corporations who require efficiency to remain profitable and competitive relative to other producers.<sup>53</sup> However, it results in despair to those whose parents and grandparents experienced better economic conditions as working class. Although the global economy has the benefit of lower prices for consumer goods, it is hard to appreciate the cost of a refrigerator compared to 10 years ago, if in that 10 years you lost your job and are unable to afford the refrigerator even at a relatively cheaper price. More than other nations, Americans

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<sup>49</sup> Joan C. Williams, “We Won’t Fix American Politics until We Talk about Class.”

<sup>50</sup> Carney, *Alienated America*, 48–50.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 36–39.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>53</sup> Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, 71–77.

identify themselves by their work and derive satisfaction through their employment.<sup>54</sup> The absence of work therefore is more than an economic crisis; it is a crisis of self-worth and identity.

Every part of a working-class community suffers in a decline.<sup>55</sup> Few communities are entirely working class; this is most noticeable in small towns where the segregation of the classes by neighborhoods is less pronounced than in larger communities. As the community declines, local businesses decline due to a diminished consumer base. As the opportunities diminish, young people move away to seek profitable careers. The migration of young people, who are able to obtain an education and professional careers, is a trend known as, “brain drain.”<sup>56</sup> For the agriculturally based communities, globalism adds to an existing brain drain caused by the technological advances in farming practices, resulting in an accelerated effect. The result is fewer young people to become the next generation of community leaders, thus further contributing to the communities decline. With a shortage of community leaders, the organizations and once thriving institutions also decline, thereby dissolving the connective tissue necessary of a community. More importantly, the connections to people and organizations directly impacted by globalization eat away at once thriving communities.<sup>57</sup> As the despair grows and the brain drain reduces talent, civic participation declines leading to a reduction of voter turn-out as community members begin to lose hope things can change. The result is a downward spiral, from which communities cannot recover. Unfortunately, solving one problem does not solve the entire problem. Timothy Carney offers an appropriate analogy, “but as with dominoes, this disaster is not reversible: a single domino falling may knock down the others, but lifting one back up does

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<sup>54</sup> Huntington, *Who Are We?*, 72–75.

<sup>55</sup> Carney, *Alienated America*, 101–105.

<sup>56</sup> Patrick J. Carr and Maria J. Kefalas, *Hollowing Out the Middle: The Rural Brain Drain and What It Means for America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009), 1–5.

<sup>57</sup> Carney, *Alienated America*, 101–105.

not necessarily lift the others.”<sup>58</sup> Everyone feels the loss as the community declines, regardless of their economic situation. The iconic image of small-town America is giving way to an image more like the inner cities as they struggle with problems of drugs, declining marriage rates, alcoholism, and suicide.<sup>59</sup>

The working-class alienation is compounded by an American identity crisis and reflects a natural reaction to globalism as societies become concerned about the loss of their cultural identity.<sup>60</sup> Samuel Huntington’s book, *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America’s National Identity*, examines America’s identity crisis and identifies the Anglo-Protestant adherents to America’s origins as “Americanized”, and they sense a threat to the American society.<sup>61</sup> The loyalty of the Americanized-white population is solely to the United States. Huntington contrasts Americanized-white identity and loyalties to those of the elite class and recent immigrants. As a result of globalism, the elite class does not view themselves as entirely American but instead multi-national or cosmopolitan.<sup>62</sup> This is a result of the elite class’s financial holdings and business dealings across the global economy, therefore their outlook and loyalties reflect their economic concerns. For recent immigrants, Huntington describes a different experience in comparison to the white-European immigrants 100 years ago. First, the efforts of business and governments to assist assimilation no longer exist as they once did.<sup>63</sup> Second, the interconnectedness as a result of technology makes it easier to remain connected to an immigrant’s origins.<sup>64</sup> Third, globalization has incentivized the governments of the immigrant’s

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 103–104.

<sup>60</sup> Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, 31–42.

<sup>61</sup> Huntington, *Who Are We?*, 180.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 264–269.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 142–145.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 205–207.

nation of origin to maintain a connection to the immigrant whose ability to vote and petition elected officials in a democracy increases their value to the nation of origin, as a means to influence the policies of the United States.<sup>65</sup> Huntington's analysis identifies tension between the Americanized-white population, with exclusive loyalties to the United States, and the split loyalties of elites and immigrants. The result is the Americanized-white population's distrust of elites who are not strongly connected to any country and immigrants who still hold loyalties to their nations of origin. The convergence of the working-class social and economic crisis with the identity crisis of middle-class Americans results in white working-class communities disproportionately impacted by the effects of globalism.

Critics dismiss white working-class concerns of immigration and the migration of manufacturing jobs to developing countries as racism.<sup>66</sup> Racism certainly exists in the United States but to completely dismiss this entire group of people as racist is incorrect. To accept racism as the source of white working-class concerns ignores more than 70 years of significant strides to reduce racism in the United States.<sup>67</sup> Additionally, labeling the white working class as racist only encourages more alienation as it ignores legitimate grievances of economic insecurity and declining communities.

While relocating to better economic conditions is a solution for many individuals, for others it is not. Instead of moving, many men simply choose to drop out of the workforce and join the poor class, adding to the community's decline.<sup>68</sup> For others the solution is not so simple. Community plays a large role in identity and people often sense a need to remain where they grew up, abandoning a struggling community and severing communal bonds is not an easy

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 208–211.

<sup>66</sup> Carney, *Alienated America*, 31-32.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 53–56.

decision.<sup>69</sup> Family situations, such as an aging parent, can also complicate migration. For those who maintain employment, there is no economic necessity to move, and a move could produce the economic uncertainty they have avoided. However, those who are economically secure still mourn the social decline of their community and hope for a return to better days.

## US Military Role in the Global Order

Globalism can only exist with the global order and the US military guarantees that global order. At the Bretton Woods conference, the United States assumed the function that navies had provided to nations prior to World War II, of securing commerce on the high seas. As the only nation to survive the war with a navy capable of worldwide deployment and unencumbered with the task of rebuilding their infrastructure, the United States voluntarily assumed the role of securing trans-national shipping. This alleviated the allies devastated by the war from the costly expense of rebuilding their navies while also rebuilding their national infrastructure and economies.<sup>70</sup> The incentive for the United States to provide security on the high seas allowed the time and space necessary for partner nations to quickly obtain a footing to resist Soviet expansion during the Cold War. Once the Cold War ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US military continued to fill this role. The US Navy continues to maintain the global commons today. With the addition of the US Cyber Command, the role of ensuring the global commons necessary for international trade is extended beyond the high seas.<sup>71</sup> The initial mission statement for the US Space Force lacks a specific linkage to support global commerce; however in its role of supporting the other branches and combatant commands of the US Department of Defense, it will also contribute to the global order.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, rather than simply maintaining an existing role,

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>70</sup> Zeihan, *The Accidental Superpower*, 83.

<sup>71</sup> Cyber Command, "Mission and Vision," accessed December 23, 2020, <https://www.cybercom.mil/About/Mission-and-Vision/>.

<sup>72</sup> Space Force, "Mission," accessed December 23, 2020, <https://www.spaceforce.mil/About-Us/About-Space-Force/Mission/>.

the United States is expanding into the cyber and space domains that are also viewed as global commons.

Following World War II, the European nations underwent a societal transformation. Prior to the war, the military influenced European society to a large degree and society placed a high value on military capability. The emphasis on the military stemmed from a cultural acceptance that conflict was unavoidable and necessary at times to achieve policy. Following the devastation of World War II, European society shifted its perspective and no longer valued military capability to the same degree. Instead, European societies emphasized economic prosperity and social programs that benefited the population.<sup>73</sup> Following a transformation in social views, it is unlikely European nations will readily assume a larger role in securing the global order. The cost of developing the military capability to do so would require the diversion of funds from other efforts the society values more than military capability.<sup>74</sup> The effort to shift perceptions in European society to assume a larger role in the security of the global order is politically unpopular and would require European society to return to a militarized society, a place it does not wish to return. A re-militarized Europe risks the relative peace that has occurred for more than 70 years. European leaders that realize their dilemma must therefore insist the United States maintain its role and use the US military to maintain the order.

The role of the US military in securing the world order has at times forced the United States into conflicts that were unpopular with Americans. The Korean War and Vietnam War are examples where the United States' role as the guarantor of the global order forced action to demonstrate resolve to maintain the order.<sup>75</sup> More recently, Europe could not stop the violence in Bosnia and Kosovo alone, thus forcing the United States to act to maintain the order and the

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<sup>73</sup> Sheehan, *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone?*, 172–180.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 217–221.

<sup>75</sup> Zeihan, *The Accidental Superpower*, 88.

NATO alliance.<sup>76</sup> A similar pattern occurred following the Arab summer resulting in United States actions in Libya and Syria. The US military must remain the protector of the global economic system, Europe cannot do it and the order collapses without the United States.<sup>77</sup>

## The Unwinnable Game

In 1988, Robert Putnam described the friction policy makers experience between addressing the desires of constituents and the demands of the international community as a two-level game.<sup>78</sup> The challenges on American policy makers to participate in globalism while addressing the concerns of the working-class results in a two-level game that is impossible to win. On one level, policy makers face an American electorate that is growing more nationalistic as the impact of globalism adversely affects the working class. On the other level, policy makers face the realities of globalism and the expectations the United States, with its military, will continue to secure the global economy. On one hand, the US taxpayers carry the burden of paying for a very expensive military that guarantees a global economic system that is increasingly less beneficial to the working class and instead benefits those who rely on it but are not equal shares in the costs.<sup>79</sup> On the other hand, that same policy maker can begin to take the United States out of the role of the global order guarantor and risk leaving a vacuum that could result in large scale conflicts similar to those that occurred prior to the current global order (World War I and II).<sup>80</sup>

The other option for US policy makers is to convince European allies to assume a larger role in maintaining a global order they also benefit from. However, as discussed in the previous section, Europeans have changed their perspectives on the military and war. European militaries

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<sup>76</sup> Sheehan, *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone?*, 204–218.

<sup>77</sup> Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, 446.

<sup>78</sup> Putnam, “Diplomacy and Domestic Politics.”

<sup>79</sup> Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, 372.

<sup>80</sup> Zeihan, *The Accidental Superpower*, 149–152.



are no longer capable of projecting power, not for lack of resources but a lack of will to commit those resources to a buildup of military power.<sup>81</sup> This creates a two-level game for European leaders who fear a collapse of the global order if the United States scales back its role but unable to convince their European populations to increased military spending. Therefore, the more the United States pulls away from the role of guarantor, the more European leaders will resent the United States. Paradoxically, although European partners depend upon the US military and its role, their aversion to the application of military power will result in criticism and condemnation of the United States' occasional use of force.

## Future Support for the US Military

As US policy makers work to find a balance to the two-level game, the military's challenge will be to develop military strategy that accommodates both international partners while requiring continued domestic support.<sup>82</sup> Although the international side of the equation will consume the efforts of the military, the domestic challenges deserve the attention of senior leaders as maintaining the trust of the American population is vital. For the US Army, the continued sustainment of the All-Volunteer Force requires the active support of the population.

Prior to 1973, the US military was able to rely on the draft to fill the ranks at times of war or periods of peace that required an influx of personnel.<sup>83</sup> Of all the services, the Army was the most dependent upon the draft.<sup>84</sup> During the draft, the Army's relationship to the population was less critical as the draft would sufficiently fill the Army's ranks if necessary. Civilian leaders largely bore the consequences of an unhappy populace, the highest occurrence coming during the

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<sup>81</sup> Sheehan, *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone?*, 176–180.

<sup>82</sup> Mira Rapp-Hooper, "Saving America's Alliances," *Foreign Affairs*, (March/April, 2020), accessed January 18, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-02-10/saving-americas-alliances>.

<sup>83</sup> Bailey, *America's Army*, 5.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 13, 49.

Vietnam War.<sup>85</sup> With the introduction of the All-Volunteer Force, the relationship of the military to the populace changed. The American people, and society at large, now have more influence in the choice of young people to join the military. Although Army officers generally agree the All-Volunteer Force is preferable to a draft, the sustainability of the All-Volunteer Force requires young people to consistently choose to join the Army. Therefore, the relationship between the Army and the US population is critically important. The US military cannot afford to take for granted the high level of support from the American population that it currently enjoys.<sup>86</sup>

The research conducted for this monograph focused on initial enlistment data for the US Army to explore the subject and to serve as a litmus test. The intent of this monograph is not to determine how to increase recruiting numbers, only to consider the impacts of an alienated working class on the US military. Initial enlistment data and the academic analysis of it is sufficiently available. Data on service members who chose to reenlist and remain in the military after their initial requirement expired (retention), is more difficult to obtain. Numerous factors such as command climate and a host of incentives applied at the unit level influence retention rates. The factors that affect retention are inconsistent across the force thus potentially skewing data. However, it is important to understand the economic and social decline of the working class can also negatively impact retention, but it is simply more difficult to assess. Additionally, continued working class decline will impact general support among the US population for the military. For example, voters dissatisfied with the US military's role in maintaining the global order will support candidates that run on non-interventionist platforms or support military spending cuts.

Unless an officer has served in a recruiting or Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) position, they likely have little exposure to the significance of the military's relationship with the

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>86</sup> Shane, "Survey: Public Confidence in the Military Is High, Especially among Older Generations."

American population. A cursory look at the biographies of general officers, clearly demonstrates, there is little representation or direct experience interacting with the average American in an official capacity at the highest levels of the US Army. The lack of education and experience in the officer corps and an institutional neglect of the subject has the makings of a potential crisis for the US military.

As the United States postures for a conflict with a major power, a loss of support in the working class could force a serious discussion on reinstating the draft, possibly even during peacetime. Several data points converge to demonstrate the significant impact this could have on combat units. Most new recruits come from the middle class.<sup>87</sup> Very few recruits come from the elite and the poor classes. The elites seem uninterested and the poor are more likely than middle class to possess disqualifying factors such as health, education, or an existing criminal record.<sup>88</sup> Upon further analysis of the income levels of the middle class, the upper-middle class is overrepresented in the officer corps. Therefore, the largest block of new enlistees come from those in the lower- and middle-income groups of the middle class, the groups most likely to identify as working class. Alienation of the working class alone has the potential to result in a recruiting crisis. However, it gets worse, studies demonstrate this is also the portion of the American middle class that is getting smaller.<sup>89</sup> Unless the decline of America's middle-class reverses, the All-Volunteer Force will only survive with a significant increase in recruits from the poor, the upper middle class, and the elite.

The areas suffering the most economic and social decline are also white.<sup>90</sup> Analysis of casualties in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) demonstrate white males were overrepresented in the

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<sup>87</sup> Bailey, *America's Army*, 258.

<sup>88</sup> Andrea Asoni et al., "A Mercenary Army of the Poor? Technological Change and the Demographic Composition of the Post-9/11 U.S. Military," *Journal of Strategic Studies* (January 30, 2020): 39.

<sup>89</sup> Pew, "The American Middle Class Is Losing Ground."

<sup>90</sup> Carney, *Alienated America*, 34–36.

casualty numbers.<sup>91</sup> Although all soldiers have the potential of combat and therefore to become a casualty statistic, especially in a counter insurgency environment, white males were overrepresented in casualty statistics indicating white males were overrepresented in the combat arms during OIF. The history of the All-Volunteer Force is one of constant challenges and narrow success. The only test of filling the ranks while in conflict was the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) and it took a significant effort to pass that test.<sup>92</sup> GWOT casualty rates were hardly comparable to World War II, the Korea War, and the Vietnam War. Therefore, a decrease specifically in white working-class American's to join the military will have an outsized impact on units most likely to be engaged in combat. Insufficient volunteers for combat units will again force a discussion on reinstating the draft, or other equally contentious policies that might have the effect of forcing recruits into combat roles they do not wish to serve in. A policy that forces a recruit into a combat occupation would ultimately lead to a discussion on reinstating the draft, as the policy would dampen enlistment rates. Policy discussions over the draft would then come in the middle of a crisis, the worst time to face the issue. As identified in earlier sections, it is the white working-class that is most discontent with the effects of globalism and their support has an outsized impact on military readiness.

Fortunately, enlistment trends from 1998 to 2018 do not currently indicate a decline in white recruits. Also, the trend demonstrates that although there is some fluctuation at times, the military reflects the US population in racial diversity.<sup>93</sup> However, recruiting statistics focus on identifying racial trends and while there is some evidence the military is capturing income data, it

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<sup>91</sup> Bailey, *America's Army*, 259.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 226–234.

<sup>93</sup> Dave Philipps and Tim Arango, “Who Signs Up to Fight? Makeup of U.S. Recruits Shows Glaring Disparity,” *The New York Times*, sec. U.S., January 14, 2020, accessed October 13, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/10/us/military-enlistment.html>.

does not appear to be fully considering class. Most likely, this reflects an American culture that avoids class labels. While this data is optimistic, there could be another explanation.

A statewide survey conducted in 2006 by the University of Texas, identified that Texan's could hold views that did not support Operations in Iraq but could still support young people joining the military.<sup>94</sup> Unfortunately, the survey was not generated in a way as to identify how respondents understood both views, it did however offer the possibility of cognitive dissidence as an explanation.<sup>95</sup> Cognitive dissidence is the holding of conflicting ideas at the same time and creates an imbalance that a person will naturally seek to rectify. A common and easy solution is to change one of the ideas held to achieve a balance.<sup>96</sup> For a working-class individual that views globalism as an unfair economic system, while also holding a positive view of the military that enables that economic system to exist, can achieve a balance by changing their position on one of those views. Because the individual is unable to affect the global economic system, they may determine changing their views on the military is the only way to achieve a cognitive balance. If the same pattern of resolving cognitive dissonance occurred throughout a working-class community, social pressure could dampen support for the military. A pattern of social pressure that resulted in decreased enlistments occurred in World War II and resulted in a shortage of women choosing to serve in the Women's Army Corp.<sup>97</sup>

A common perception is that poor economic prospects produce higher recruiting.<sup>98</sup> While poor economic conditions can certainly help recruiting, there are many factors that influence a young person's choice to join the military and in what capacity they choose to join. Following

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<sup>94</sup> Nichols, "Public Opinion and the Military," 9.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>96</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. "Cognitive Dissonance," accessed January 5, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/science/cognitive-dissonance>.

<sup>97</sup> Bailey, *America's Army*, 144–145.

<sup>98</sup> Asoni, "A Mercenary Army of the Poor? Technological Change and the Demographic Composition of the Post-9/11 U.S. Military," 1–3.

transition to the All-Volunteer Force, African Americans joined the US Army in higher percentages than whites. While the military provided African Americans opportunity to achieve middle class economic status, it also occurred at a time when the military was ahead of the rest of American society in overcoming racism and the reality of equal opportunity proved to be a more significant factor.<sup>99</sup> There is no certainty that as economic conditions in working-class communities decline, recruiting numbers will increase. However, it is clear that social conditions is an area that impacts a young person's decision to join the military.

## Cultural Awareness

Since most American's view themselves as middle class, military officers and sergeants major likely also view themselves as middle class. Regardless of where a military leader started, their perceptions will change over time. The world of a military leader is much different from the working-class world and not recognizing that perceptions change over time can lead to a blind spot that limits the ability to view the world the same as the working class.<sup>100</sup> After twenty plus years of service, senior leaders will possess the perspective of several stressful experiences, but they will be different from the stresses experienced by the working class. The military, for the most part, is not stressed about employment, housing, or healthcare. Routine paychecks, predictable pay raises, and a secure retirement results in financial security. The appearance of military installations has also kept pace. A military base today is equally presentable as they were 20 years ago, as opposed to working-class communities whose decline is observable. Military professionals interact with similarly educated and experienced people resulting in a higher degree of social connections than in working-class communities.<sup>101</sup> Social connections result in a trust shared throughout the community and the absence of the social connections result in an absence

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<sup>99</sup> Bailey, *America's Army*, 212–213.

<sup>100</sup> Joan C. Williams, "We Won't Fix American Politics until We Talk about Class."

<sup>101</sup> Carney, *Alienated America*, 99–100.

of trust and induces a profound effect on a once vibrant community.<sup>102</sup> The advantages of a military community are easy to overlook and might inhibit the ability to empathize and understand working-class concerns. Although the military came to appreciate the value of cultural awareness through years of counter insurgency in foreign countries, it is quite possible a cultural gap is developing with the American working class.

Lack of empathy by senior officers towards working class voters will jeopardize continued support for the military. Recently, several retired officers' broke tradition and voiced criticism of President Donald Trump in the latter years of his administration, perhaps without considering their comments could alienate the working class from the military. The former commander of US Special Operations Command, Admiral (Ret) William McRaven, has written several opinion articles in *The Washington Post*, criticizing the character of President Trump and in one article went so far as to call him "evil."<sup>103</sup> Retired General Stanley McChrystal said President Trump, "doesn't tell the truth."<sup>104</sup> Retired General and former Secretary of Defense James Mattis has also commented on President Trump's character while in the process of offering criticism of policy decisions in regards to Syria.<sup>105</sup> Professional Military Education (PME) at every level reinforces the tradition of officers not publicly criticizing policy makers so as to avoid isolating the military from politics and maintain the subordination of the military to civilian leadership.

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<sup>102</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, n.d., 136–137.

<sup>103</sup> William H. McRaven, "If Good Men like Joe Maguire Can't Speak the Truth, We Should Be Deeply Afraid," *Washington Post*, opinion, February 21, 2020, accessed January 6, 2021, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/william-mcraven-if-good-men-like-joe-maguire-cant-speak-the-truth-we-should-be-deeply-afraid/2020/02/21/2068874c-5503-11ea-b119-4faabac6674f\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/william-mcraven-if-good-men-like-joe-maguire-cant-speak-the-truth-we-should-be-deeply-afraid/2020/02/21/2068874c-5503-11ea-b119-4faabac6674f_story.html).

<sup>104</sup> Caroline Kelly, "Trump Attacks McChrystal after Retired General Called Trump Immoral," *CNN Digital*, January 1, 2019, accessed January 6, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/01/01/politics/trump-tweet-mcchrystal/index.html>.

<sup>105</sup> Jeffrey Goldberg, "James Mattis Denounces President Trump, Describes Him as a Threat to the Constitution," *The Atlantic*, June 3, 2020, accessed January 6, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/06/james-mattis-denounces-trump-protests-militarization/612640/>.

However, keeping the military out of politics also preserves the legitimacy of the military in a democracy thereby maintaining the confidence of the population. Military leaders who criticized President Trump, or any president, made a mistake by not recognizing how he connected with the working class and the potential repercussions their comments could have produced. President Trump courted the working class through their feelings of alienation and the sense elites in Washington DC, forgot about them.<sup>106</sup> In the 2016 presidential election, the working-class communities turned out in record numbers to vote for Donald Trump.<sup>107</sup>

Frustration with Washington DC elites was a common theme during Donald Trump's campaign. While generals and admirals might consider themselves merely servants of the American people, those unfamiliar with military culture can perceive them as part of the Washington DC elite. Therefore, comments insensitive to working-class perceptions jeopardize the rapport earned by the military following the low point of Vietnam. While the military currently enjoys an 83 percent approval rating, the potential for a drastic decline is present, especially in a highly polarized political environment.<sup>108</sup> America's liberalism culture results in a population that swings between pacifism and crusader tendencies. This explains why Americans can seem to be isolationists at times while appearing as reckless interventionist at other times. The professional officer can never fit neatly into the role of pacifist or as a crusader and is therefore always at risk of offending a large portion of the population.<sup>109</sup> Combined with potential blind spots in understanding the working class and the speed at which social media can generate negative attention, senior leaders risk upturning the rapport built over decades in a single 24-hour news cycle.

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<sup>106</sup> Carney, *Alienated America*, 203–235.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 56–58.

<sup>108</sup> Shane, "Survey: Public Confidence in the Military Is High, Especially among Older Generations."

<sup>109</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA, the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), 154–155.





## Recommendations

The data reviewed for this monograph does not indicate there is currently a significant problem in working-class support for the military. However, the social and economic conditions of working-class communities continues and the potential to lose support remains. Additionally, social stress in the United States is on the rise at the time of this research and the most current enlistment data is not readily available for academic research and therefore recent trends cannot be assessed. Of most interest for recruiting purposes is the fact the working class is getting smaller. Therefore, unless the working-class size stabilizes, the military can expect to have increased difficulty in recruiting while maintaining entry requirements. Given the assessed situation, drastic changes and expensive solutions are not necessary. However, a risk remains and therefore reasonable mitigation measures can ensure the military maintains the trust of the working class.

The recommendations of this monograph reflect the following criteria. The effectiveness of the mitigation measure, will it strengthen the military's relationship with the working class. Cost of implementation, the recommendation must not require additional funding for the service or divert funding from other critical efforts. Ease of implementation, approval to implement the recommendation is at the service level and short of a policy level decision, with implementation at the division or equivalent level. An example of a recommendation that is effective but does not meet this criterion is the expansion of the Junior Reserve Officer Training Program (JROTC) in high schools across the nation. JROTC has demonstrated it is effective at connecting with communities and higher enlistment rates occur in those communities thereby meeting the criteria of effectiveness.<sup>110</sup> However, the number of JROTC programs are capped by congress and to expand the number of schools with a program would require legislation.<sup>111</sup> Therefore, expanding

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<sup>110</sup> Goldberg, *Geographic Diversity in Military Recruiting*, 51.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

JROTC fails on the ease of implementation criteria. Additionally, expanding JROTC would require an increase in the US Army Cadet Command's budget. Unless the situation worsens, expending capital with congress or diverting funding from other military priorities to expand JROTC is not necessary. Instead, the recommendations offered in this monograph are "economy of force options".

## 1<sup>st</sup> Recommendation

The military can improve its standing with all Americans by communicating the role it plays in global stability. The relative peace the world has experienced since World War II is not insignificant. Had the American people not acquiesced to their military's contribution in the effort to enforce global order, world history could have been much different. The US military is in a unique position to communicate what the world could have been. The US military is a credible witness to the deterioration of regional conditions where military intervention changed the trajectory of human pain and suffering. A gentle reminder on occasion as senior officers communicate to Americans through various forms of media can highlight the world is a better place because of the US military. This message, however, needs to be subtle. The US Navy recently tried the phrase, "global force for good" as a recruiting slogan. Both American's and veterans did not agree with the globalism theme of the Navy's message.<sup>112</sup> While pointing out the US military's role in enforcing global order is not good for recruiting advertisements, avoiding the point all together enhances any potential cognitive dissonance that is occurring. Therefore, subtle references begin to encourage an honest dialog that will eventually result in a balance. A subtle communication campaign mitigates risk as it can quickly be discontinued and dismissed if it proves contentious. A communication campaign at this scale does not require a budget and the systems to coordinate talking points of senior leaders already exists. It is only a matter of placing

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<sup>112</sup> "Why The Navy Abandoned Its Latest Slogan," hosted by Arun Rath, *All Things Considered*, on NPR, June 13, 2015, accessed January 6, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2015/06/13/414239773/why-the-navy-abandoned-its-latest-slogan>.

the subject into the agenda of existing strategic communication processes. Because strong opposition was experienced with the Navy's campaign, the appropriate level for this discussion and potential implementation is at the service chief level, thus making the criteria for recommendation.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Recommendation

An adjustment in recruiting data captured during initial enlistments will provide insight into the level of support the military receives from working-class communities. Areas with declining life expectancy, increasing rates of overdoses, suicides, and alcohol related deaths are indicators of working-class communities in decline.<sup>113</sup> Overlapping recruiting data with those locations will illuminate trends in support for the US military. The US Army Recruiting Command is data and analytics driven; therefore, it could manage this data for the US Army, other services also possess similar capabilities. The cost to capture the data is minimal as it only requires adjusting existing databases and updating questionnaires. The adjustments could occur in a routine review cycle. The decision to make this adjustment lies with US Army Recruiting Command and the sister organizations in the other services. In addition to informing recruiting efforts, the working-class communities themselves would benefit from the data as sharing with academic and government entities (at all levels) will contribute to greater understanding of trends and potential policy changes.

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<sup>113</sup> Carney, *Alienated America*, 61–62.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Recommendation

Professional Military Education must reflect the significance of the relationship of the military to the population. Few officers interact with the civilian leaders of the military, yet all officers receive education on the subject at every level of Professional Military Education. In contrast, every officer will interact with countless civilians over their lifetime while receiving little education on the relationship between the military and the population. Clearly an imbalance exists that ignores frequency of interactions with civilians in favor of the position the civilian holds. Volumes of books describe the appropriate role of military subservience to civilian leadership in a democracy. While academics have done a great service, more attention to understanding the military's relationship to the populace is necessary. Following the establishment of the All-Volunteer Force in 1973, the US Army's relationship to the population changed and Professional Military Education should reflect it. Diverting even a small amount of curriculum time could be challenging to curriculum writers, however a stronger appreciation of the vital relationship between the military and the population could pay-off in several areas. Academic research into the topic will follow as the demand to better educate the force generates a market for research. Also, service members will become more aware of how their actions effect the image of their service.

The military can mitigate alienation from the white working class by establishing programs that reconnect the military to declining communities by adjusting policies that increase the interaction of service members with the working class. As fewer veterans are available to fill the role of informal ambassadors, the US military must replace the function veterans serve in society and increase the level of interaction with the American population to compensate.<sup>114</sup> The following recommendations do not require additional funding and if enacted properly minimize additional administrative actions.

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<sup>114</sup> Goldberg, *Geographic Diversity in Military Recruiting*, 48.

## 4<sup>th</sup> Recommendation

Establishing a hometown engagement program will deepen the connection of communities to the US military. The US military can incentivize service members already planning to visit an area identified as underrepresented to conduct a community engagement. For example, a service member visiting family on leave can also schedule a community outreach engagement. For example, a service member could visit a Kiwanis or Rotary Club meeting. In return, the service member receives credit for two days of duty at that location (uncharged leave). The military would not expend costs on travel and per diem as the service member was already traveling to the location at their own expense. Review and adjustment of temporary duty policies can be made at the service level to enable the administration of the program.

Local recruiting commands can also assist on a voluntary basis. Local recruiters are aware of what areas could benefit from engagement and could assist service members with contact info for an appropriate community organization if the service member does not have personal connections. Increased referrals because of the program will incentivize local recruiting commands to support it. Because the program is voluntary, recruiting commands that do not receive a benefit from the engagements, or are not in a designated area, can decline to participate.

The service member's chain of command is also part of the process. As the approval authority for leave and passes, the commander knows what service members risk presenting a negative view of the military and can exercise their prerogative to decline the engagement as part of the leave request process. The hometown engagement program appears similar to the hometown recruiter program, but the intent differs in two aspects; first the audience is community influencers and not potential recruits, and second the recruiting office would not be a place of duty. The difficulty in enacting this program is the risk junior commanders would feel that they alone must assume, by allowing soldiers to engage with civilians unsupervised. The reluctance of junior officer support reflects an Army that is risk averse and therefore would require senior

leader emphasis to mitigate the risk perceived by junior officers whose support is critical to the success of the program. The added benefit to the program is the development of key leader engagement skills among junior service members in a low-risk environment, thereby developing a skill set necessary for service members in future complex combat environments. The hometown engagement program also encourages service members to consider what role they can play as a veteran in their community once they leave the service.

## 5<sup>th</sup> Recommendation

Reversing post 9/11 uniform policies can lead to greater visibility of service members in public and increase the number of positive engagements with civilians. Following 9/11 many commanders enacted uniform policies to mitigate the risk of soldiers targeted by terrorist organizations or antiwar protestors. While a less visible presence can reduce the risk of becoming a target, the threat has not materialized in a significant capacity. The existing policies require reassessment in consideration of the positive aspects of soldiers interacting with civilians in normal daily activities. Because the policies remain, absent clearly identified threats, also demonstrates the risk adverse nature of the US military. Therefore, a rebalance between protecting soldiers and reconnecting with average Americans is necessary. Reversing uniform policies will also require significant senior leader emphasis, as the nation nears the twentieth anniversary of 9/11, the practice is now institutionalized, and the experience of a different approach is nearly forgotten. 9/11, also resulted in the restriction of civilian access to installations thus decreasing the ability for civilians to voluntarily engage with service members and placing the burden of engagement on the military.

## Conclusion

Social and economic decline in America's working-class communities is increasing, resulting in a crisis of low morale. The result is a loss of America's working-class confidence in national institutions. While the US military has so far maintained a healthy relationship with the working class, military leaders must invest in the relationship to ensure working-class support remains high. Declining working-class communities could lead to a reduction of support to the US military and negatively impact the willingness of young people to contribute to the nation's defense and risks the future success of the All-Volunteer Force.

The US military, as the guarantor of the global order, has contributed to a relatively peaceful period of human history. The peace and security of the global commons, provided by the US military, has allowed international access to global markets. The necessity of efficiency to compete in global markets has led to an economic decline in America's working-class, which has resulted in the social decline of communities that were once the backbone of the United States. American political and business leaders continue to struggle with balancing the global leadership role of the United States among domestic demands. The global economy has also resulted in shifting population demographics that has produced an American identity crisis that further complicates the situation for the working class. While the military cannot solve the social and economic decline in America's working-class communities, it must take action to mitigate negative impacts on future military capability.

While working-class support for the military currently remains high, the US military must make modest investments to ensure the long-term health of the relationship. As veteran numbers decline in communities, the military must replace the ambassador function veterans provide and expand the number of interactions of the military with working-class influencers. Military leaders must also become more conscious of the relationship of the military to the American people and consider the impact of their actions on future support.



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