

# Executive Memorandum

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## The Demographics of Military Enlistment After 9/11

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The Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently published a study detailing the demographics of the U.S. military. The study was undertaken in response to a request by Representative Charles Rangel (D-NY), who in December 2002 claimed that “[a] disproportionate number of the poor and members of minority groups make up the enlisted ranks of the military, while most privileged Americans are underrepresented or absent.”

The GAO study surveys a number of Department of Defense (DOD) personnel issues and does not support Representative Rangel’s claims that poor minorities are disproportionately represented. A similar study by The Heritage Foundation, which will be published this month, is more definitive in answering the question of new enlistees and their “privileged” status. The Heritage Foundation study analyzes DOD data on all non-prior-service enlistees for the years 1999 and 2003 by income, education, and race. Studying the home-of-record ZIP codes of enlistees, we also identify the states and regions providing the most enlistees, and changes since September 11, 2001.

**Income.** According to the 2000 Census, national median income for all U.S. households was \$41,994 in 1999 (all figures use 1999 dollars), compared to a mean household income of \$41,141 for homes of recruits of that year. We calculate recruit income by using the median household income of the five-digit

ZIP code of the recruit’s home of record. Because more recruits came from high-income neighborhoods in 2003, the mean income rose to \$42,822. There were proportionately fewer recruits (18.0 percent) from the poorest quintile of ZIP codes in 1999, as well as fewer from the richest quintile (18.6 percent). The income distribution of new recruits after September 11, 2001, is remarkably different. In

2003, only 14.6 percent of military recruits came from the poorest quintile, while the wealthiest quintile provided 22.0 percent.

**Education.** In 1999, 98 percent of all enlisted recruits had at least a high school education, compared to the national average

of 75 percent among citizens who are 18–24 years old. In 2003, no three-digit ZIP code area had a higher graduation rate among its population than among its recruits. After September 11, 2001, the educational quality of recruits rose slightly.

**Race.** In 2003, blacks made up a higher percentage of Army recruits (15 percent) than the adult population (11.3 percent) for a recruit-to-popula-

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- Heritage Foundation analysis of DOD enlistment data for 1999 and 2003 shows that, contrary to some claims, voluntary military recruits are better educated than the general population and were more likely to come from higher-income areas after 9/11.
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This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
[www.heritage.org/research/nationalsecurity/em987.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/research/nationalsecurity/em987.cfm)

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### Summary of Findings: Demographics of U.S. Military Enlistment

	By Total Population	By ZCTA*	Change After 9/11	Comparison Group
<b>Income</b>	Recruits are not disproportionately poor: Mean household income for recruits in 1999 was \$41,141 (in 1999 dollars), compared to the general population median of \$41,994. Recruits in 2003 came from households with an average 1999 income of \$42,822.	Middle-income quintile ZIP code areas provided consistently higher proportions of recruits. Areas in the lowest-income quintile provided disproportionately low numbers of recruits in 1999 and 2003 (18.0 and 14.6 percent, respectively).	Areas in the highest-income quintile provided the greatest positive proportional increase of recruits after 9/11, from 18.6 to 22.0 percent.	Household incomes (in 1999 dollars) for the general population from Census 2000.
<b>Education</b>	98 percent of recruits have a high school education or higher, compared to 75 percent of general population.	High school graduation rates were higher for recruits than for the local population in every three-digit ZCTA in 2003. Of five quintiles based on graduation rates, the only one with disproportionately low enlistment was the highest quintile (15 percent out of a proportional 20).	The average education level of recruits increased after 9/11, with 2.8 percent more enlistees joining that already had some college experience or a college degree.	General population, ages 18-24, from Census 2000.
<b>Race</b>	Whites are proportionally represented in the military (and Army specifically). Blacks and native Americans are over-represented, off-setting underrepresentation by Asians, Hispanics, and individuals who decline to identify a race (based on 2003 data).	Recruiting is not disproportionately reliant on minority neighborhoods. The 100 three-digit ZIP codes with the highest concentrations of blacks represent 14.7 percent of the population, 16.6 percent of 1999 recruits, and 14.1 percent of recruits in 2003.	Not applicable: 1999 military data are not comparable to 2000 Census data.	General population, ages 18 and older, from Census 2000.
<b>Region</b>	Completely urbanized areas have 39.1 percent of the population, but accounted for 30.1 percent of recruits in 1999 and 28.9 percent in 2003. As urban concentration declines, the recruit-to-population ratio rises.	States have widely varying rates of military enlistment. Montana, Wyoming, Florida, Maine, and Texas provide disproportionately high numbers of recruits, whereas Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Utah, and especially the District of Columbia provide disproportionately low numbers.	States with large increases in the recruit-to-population ratio of greater than 10 percentage points were Iowa, Wisconsin, Kansas, Washington, Arizona, Indiana, Oregon, Nebraska, Colorado, Minnesota, and North Carolina.	General population, ages 18-24, from Census 2000.

\* ZIP code tabulation area.

**Source:** Heritage Foundation calculations based on data from U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Undersecretary of Defense, October 1998–September 1999 Non-Prior Service (NPS) Enlisted Accessions and January 2003–September 2003 NPS Enlisted Accessions, and U.S. Bureau of the Census, *United States Census 2000*, Summary File 1, at [www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2001/sumfile1.html](http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2001/sumfile1.html) (July 6, 2005), and Summary File 3, at [www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2002/sumfile3.html](http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2002/sumfile3.html) (July 6, 2005).

tion ratio of 1.44. However, the recruit-to-population ratio of white recruits was 1.01, meaning that blacks did not displace whites. Rather, the racial groups with disproportionately low recruit-to-population ratios in 2003 were Asians, Hispanics, and individuals who declined to identify a race. Regarding the issue of disproportionate recruiting from black neighborhoods, we found that the 100 three-

digit ZIP code areas with the highest concentration of blacks had 14.63 percent of the adult population but provided 16.58 percent of 1999 recruits and only 14.09 percent of 2003 recruits.

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