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SHORT SUPPLY

Identifying and Addressing the Root Causes of Declining Propensity for Military Service

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About the National Security Human Capital Program

The success of U.S. national security is driven by the unified warfighters and civilian professionals who develop, execute, and assess U.S. national security strategy, contingency plans, operational concepts, rules of engagement, doctrine, and policy. The U.S. warfighting

edge therefore relies on recruiting, retaining, and leveraging top talent from across the nation with the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other attributes necessary to deter and, should deterrence fail, defeat adversaries.

The CNAS National Security Human Capital Program provides timely, data-driven, actionable research and policy recommendations to ensure that the U.S. military, the Department of Defense, the military services, and the broader national security apparatus have access to and effectively leverage the nation's top talent. The program engages policymakers, industry leaders, Congress, scholars, the media, and the public regarding the critical role of human capital for national security.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE U.S. MILITARY FACES a critical challenge: Fewer young Americans are willing to serve, and fewer adults are encouraging them to do so. Because of deliberate policy choices by the leadership of two administrations in fiscal years 2024 and 2025, recruitment improved. Despite this good news, two fundamental threats loom: a projected 13 percent decline in Americans turning 18 between 2025 and 2041, and a long-term drop in propensity to serve—from 16 percent of youth in 2003 to 10 percent in 2022.¹

This study captures findings from quantitative analysis of publicly available government data; the existing body of survey data regarding trust in institutions; novel data from a survey conducted by the Center for a New American Security and YouGov in January 2025; interviews with policymakers, congressional staff, and uniformed leaders; and an expert workshop convened in February 2025.

The decline in propensity reflects deeper societal shifts beyond the Department of Defense's control. Trust in American institutions has eroded over the past two decades. Confidence in the military among Americans fell from 82 percent in 2009 to 60 percent in 2023—mirroring declines across government, religious institutions, and civic organizations.² Young people are simultaneously withdrawing from higher education, workforce education, and military service, signaling a broader disengagement from traditional pathways to adulthood and contributions to society.³

The study's key findings include:

Young Americans are disengaging from traditional pathways to adulthood.

Between 2017 and 2022, college enrollment dropped 9 percent, labor force participation among 20–24-year-olds fell from over 70 percent to the low 60s, and the propensity to serve in the military declined.⁴ The recruiting crisis is not isolated—it reflects generational patterns of reduced institutional engagement.

Exposure to military service drives recommendations to serve.

Survey data show that individuals closest to military service—service members, military families, veterans, and veterans' families—are significantly more likely to recommend military service. However, the civil-military gap has widened as fewer Americans have direct connections to service members, shrinking the population of influential advocates.

Practical concerns outweigh ideological debates.

Adults cite fear of death or injury (72 percent), post-traumatic stress disorder (63 percent), and competing career interests (46 percent) as primary reasons for not recommending military service.⁵ Partisan debates about military personnel policies from both ends of the political spectrum, while generating attention, have limited explanatory power compared with these fundamental safety and opportunity concerns.

Mistrust in civilian leadership matters more than mistrust in uniformed leadership.

Declining confidence in the presidency and Congress—not in military leaders—most closely correlates with adults' willingness to recommend military service. Veterans who question whether their deployments served credible national interests are less likely to encourage the next generation to serve.

The study's recommendations target multiple levels of government and society:

The president should use public platforms to highlight military professionalism and performance, deploy forces responsibly with clear justifications, leverage initiatives such as the Presidential Fitness Test to increase both fitness and exposure to military service as a career option, and protect the military from partisan polarization.

The secretary of defense and the service secretaries should pilot pre-enlistment military exposure programs enabling candidates to experience military life prior to committing to service, establish public-facing recruitment performance dashboards, invest in quality-of-life improvements (particularly housing), maintain rigorous standards to both drive lethality and protect service members from undue injury or death, and embrace talent management systems that match individuals to roles based on knowledge, skills, attributes, performance, and preferences.

Congress should fund recruiting and quality-of-life improvements as strategic priorities rather than treating such expenditures as mere overhead, enforce stringent reporting requirements, and conduct mid-fiscal-year oversight hearings specifically focused on personnel and recruitment separate from required posture hearings.

State and local leaders should prioritize increasing exposure to those who have served across the civilian community by recognizing local service members, ensuring recruiter access to schools, and supporting military spouses and transitioning veterans through professional and occupational licensing reciprocity and employment assistance.

INTRODUCTION

THE UNITED STATES MUST fulfill its military manpower requirements annually to meet current and emerging threats, calibrating the accession of new recruits with the retention of current service members. As approximately 200,000 service members transition out of service each year, the services must actively recruit new enlistments to meet active-duty end strengths.⁶ The U.S. military struggled to meet recruitment goals in fiscal years (FYs) 2022 and 2023. Through deliberate changes in policy and practice spanning two administrations, the military services reversed this decline. However, two trends threaten continued progress:

a sharp drop in the number of Americans turning 18 in the coming years (Figure 1) and a long-term decline in both young people's propensity (or willingness) to serve in the military and adults' willingness to recommend service to the young people in their lives.

Military recruitment requires individuals who possess two simultaneous attributes: eligibility and propensity. Eligibility involves meeting a range of service standards, including U.S. citizenship or permanent resident status, age requirements, a high school diploma or equivalent, a qualifying score on

Figure 1 | Projected Decline in American Population Turning 18, 2026–2042⁷



Due to the decline in American birth rates following the 2008 financial crisis, the number of Americans turning 18 will drop sharply from 2026–2040, posing challenges for future military recruitment.

the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test, and the ability to pass a medical exam and a physical fitness test.⁸ Currently, only 23 percent of American youth meet eligibility requirements, limiting the population that the military can access for service.⁹ Yet the low rate of eligibility for military service is only one challenging factor; not only do potential recruits need to meet the standards for service, but they also need to have an interest in serving, referred to as a propensity.

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In FY 2022 and FY 2023, the Army missed its active-duty recruiting goals by 15,099 (25 percent) and 10,000 (15 percent), respectively—a return of challenges previously faced in FY 2018, when the Army missed its recruiting goals by 6,500 soldiers (15 percent).¹⁰ The Navy missed its targets for the first time in FY 2023, falling short by 7,000 recruits (18 percent), while the Air Force also missed its recruiting goals for the first time in more than 20 years in FY 2023.¹¹ While meeting its recruiting goals, the Marine Corps had to rely more heavily on its Delayed Entry Program than in years past.¹² The Space Force—the smallest service—has largely avoided recruitment challenges due to its reliance on interservice transfers.

By the end of FY 2024 and continuing into FY 2025, military recruitment improved across each of the services.¹³ The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness actively worked and continue to work in concert with the services to identify where medical, academic, moral, and mental health care standards could be modernized while also accounting for additional operational risks associated with any such policy change. The services increased access to medical professionals

to expedite the medical waiver process, which has become more cumbersome with the introduction of the Military Health System GENESIS electronic health care system in 2021.¹⁴ The services have further invested in identifying ways to professionalize and incentivize recruiters to better navigate the current challenges.¹⁵ The Army established the Future Soldier Prep Course in August 2022, aiding interested candidates in improving physical fitness and academic aptitude in order to meet Army standards, yielding 15,000 new soldiers in FY 2024.¹⁶ In June 2025, the Pentagon announced the establishment of a 12-month Recruitment Task Force intended to “translate this year’s [FY 2025] momentum into an enduring advantage.”¹⁷

Despite these improvements, the nation is facing a demographic shift that will shrink the pool of young Americans reaching military service age. Between 2025 and 2041, the number of children turning 18 is projected to decline by 13 percent, primarily due to lower birth rates after the Great Recession that began in 2008.¹⁸ Furthermore, the Pentagon’s acknowledgment of a nearly 40 percent decline in propensity to serve—a trend that continues even amid the recruiting improvements seen through September 2025—signals potential future challenges for military recruitment.¹⁹

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American propensity for military service, as measured by the Department of Defense’s (DoD’s) Joint Advertising Market Research and Studies (JAMRS) annual Youth Poll (surveying youth ages 16 through 21), declined from a recent high of 16 percent in November 2003 to the current low of 10 percent in the spring of 2022.²⁰ JAMRS surveys further found that those with the ability to influence decision-making—fathers, mothers, grandparents, and other engaged adults—were all less likely to recommend military service in 2021 than they were in 2003.²¹

Larger, unanswered questions remain regarding the root causes of the decline in American propensity to serve in the military or to recommend or support others' interest in military service. The decline in propensity for military service may have greater explanatory power for the current recruiting challenges than the proportion of American youth eligible for military service. While it is true that the services are currently wrestling with the low percentage of youth eligibility for military service, youth eligibility rates in 2023 reflected the same eligibility rates as those from FY 2013.²² Yet in previous years, even with a low percentage of youth eligible to serve in the military, the military services were able to meet their recruiting goals because propensity was sufficiently high.

The reduced propensity reflects a shift in attitudes toward the value of military service driven by factors well beyond the purview of the DoD and the services. Societal attitudes toward military service are likely affected by a range of independent and interacting variables, including historically low unemployment rates, changes in labor force participation, societal expectations regarding university attendance, preferences among the recruitable population, the competitive evolution of benefits among civilian employers, shifting trends in parenting behavior and expectations, the impact of the post-9/11 wars and their outcomes, and declining trust and participation in institutions. Most of these factors fall beyond the control of the DoD and the military services. Except for unemployment rates, the relationship between these factors and rates of propensity for military service remain understudied.

While the DoD and the military services have a role to play in driving propensity—for example, ensuring that the American public is educated about and exposed to opportunities for military service—changes in trends regarding propensity toward military service reflect broader changes at a societal level. Shifts in trust in institutions, debates surrounding the execution of and withdrawal from the post-9/11 wars, changing attitudes regarding the necessity of college attendance, shifting dynamics in workforce participation, and changing attitudes about individual versus collective responsibilities

all impact the perception of military service as a viable and desirable career path for American youth. Yet to date, no comprehensive root cause analysis of the decline in propensity for military service has been conducted.

This report synthesizes mixed-methods analysis and findings of a yearlong study on the root causes of the decline in propensity to serve in the military or recommend military service to eligible young Americans. The study analyzed relevant quantitative data, including data from DoD JAMRS surveys, the U.S. Census Bureau, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the Federal Reserve. The research team analyzed military end strengths since the inception of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) in 1973 and military pay over time from DoD budget requests. The team further analyzed survey data provided by military community organizations to identify trends in how likely service members, spouses, and military families were to recommend service to others.²³

The decline in propensity for military service may have greater explanatory power for the current recruiting challenges than the proportion of American youth eligible for military service.

The research team further identified and analyzed existing survey data regarding trust in institutions to identify trends over time.²⁴ However, limited survey data existed linking elements of trust in institutions to the likelihood that adults would recommend military service to the young people in their lives. To link these two bodies of survey research—trust in institutions and likelihood of recommending military service—the research team collaborated with YouGov to field a representative survey of 2,500 American adults. The survey was fielded between January 2 and January 15, 2025. The time frame was notable as it occurred after the 2024 presidential election but before Inauguration Day 2025, representing a period of transition.

The research team conducted interviews with defense leaders (including uniformed officers, senior noncommissioned officers, and civilian political appointees) and congressional committee professional staff members. The research team further interviewed a wide range of experts, including those focused on demography, workforce and employment, higher education, and military marketing and advertising. The research team identified and convened a group of 33 practitioners and experts on military recruitment, sociology, demography, employment, and civic engagement for a one-day expert elicitation workshop on February 19, 2025. The workshop also included active-duty, Reserve, and National Guard service members and both officer and enlisted perspectives. The workshop's purpose was to identify structured areas of consensus across the group of handpicked experts, supplementing and contextualizing findings from individual interviews.

Road Map and Scope of the Report

The report provides a background on military manpower requirements and military recruitment from the inception of the American AVF in 1973 through the end of FY 2025. The report then outlines root causes of the decline in propensity for military service or recommending military service identified over the course of the study through data analysis, survey findings, and expert feedback. The report closes with recommendations for key players across government and American society. The appendix provides the survey instrument.

While the decline in propensity for military service affects all three components of the military—the active duty, the Reserves, and the National Guard—this report focuses on the impact of the decline in propensity on the active-duty force to meet its manpower requirements. Though this report does not address the challenges specific to reserve component propensity, Reserve and Guard perspectives were included in interviews, the survey, and the expert elicitation exercise.

MILITARY RECRUITMENT

Background and Context

THE UNITED STATES HAS relied on volunteer service to meet military personnel requirements for much of the nation's history. The reliance on volunteers reflects the early decision at the nation's founding to limit the use of a standing army as a departure from the British model of a large standing army.²⁵ Through the 18th and 19th centuries, this preference for a smaller, more flexible military force was central to U.S. defense policy and manpower requirements. The 20th century, however, saw more than 16 million Americans drafted into military service during World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.²⁶

The United States returned from a mixed force of volunteers and conscripts to an all-volunteer force on July 1, 1973. The decision followed findings and recommendations of *The Report of the President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force* (frequently referred to as the Gates Commission report) in 1970. Established by President Richard Nixon, the Gates Commission was directed to "develop a comprehensive plan for eliminating conscription and moving toward an all-volunteer armed force."²⁷ While recognizing the potential drawbacks of an AVF (including a higher cost and the potential that an AVF would increase the civil-military divide), the Gates Commission argued that "the nation's interests would be better served by an all-volunteer force, supported by an effective stand-by draft," recommending

the transition to a smaller, more professionalized modern American military.²⁸ The services have met their manpower requirements through recruitment since the AVF's implementation in 1973.

The services determine their manpower requirements based on their force posture, operational concepts, and strategic guidance as part of the planning, programming, budgeting, and execution process. The services submit their manpower requests to OSD, which ensures that the Joint Force has the personnel and capability it needs. The DoD submits its request to the president, who in turn submits the president's budget request to Congress. Congress ultimately sets the authorized statutory end strength by service in the annual National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).²⁹

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Each military service maintains an officer corps, an enlisted corps, and a small warrant officer corps. Officers, who receive a commission from the president, serve as the "lawful extension" of executive authority, accountable for the orders they give and

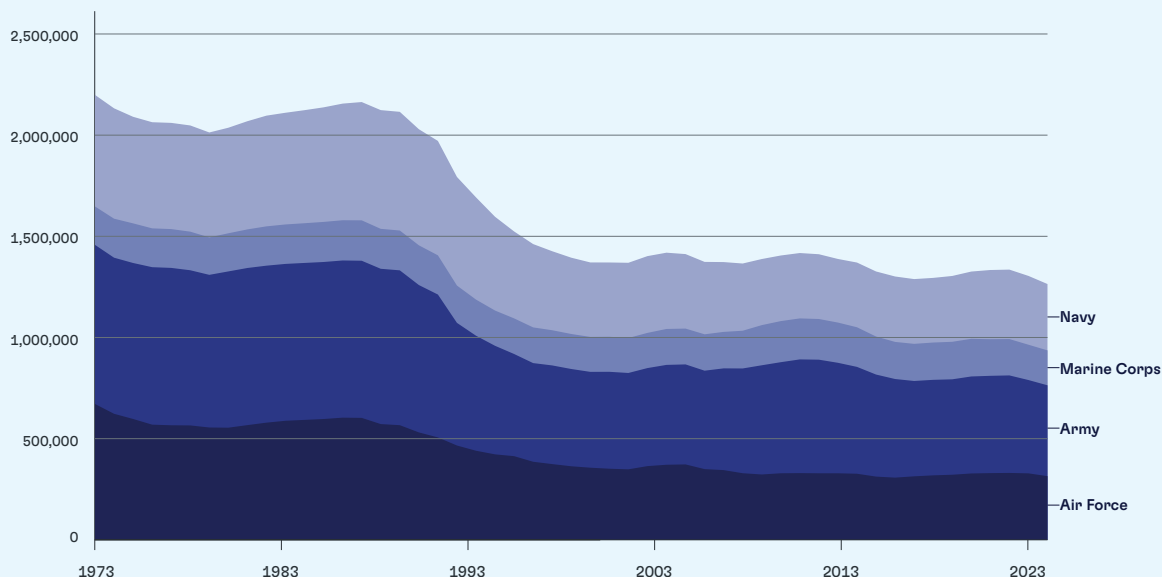
the actions they take on behalf of the nation and the president in the president's role as commander in chief.³⁰ Active-duty officers in the grade of O-4 and above are confirmed in their rank through the advice and consent of the Senate via the confirmation process. While officers are required to have a four-year college degree, enlisted service members are not and are managed through a military enlistment contract for a specified period. Warrant officers are highly technical experts who specialize in a specific field, such as cyber or aviation expertise.³¹ Across the active-duty force, officers comprise 16.9 percent, enlisted service members comprise 81.6 percent, and warrant officers comprise 1.5 percent.³² The services must apply different approaches to recruit sufficient numbers of quality candidates for officers, enlisted service members, and warrant officers. Because enlisted service members comprise the majority of the force, the services must prioritize recruiting efforts toward new enlistments.

Historical Trends, 1973–Present

In the period since the transition to the AVF, active-duty end strengths declined from approximately 2.2 million service members in 1973 to 1.8 million service members in 1992 as part of the post-Cold War drawdown.³⁴ Beginning in 1996, the force underwent further recalibration to 1.3 million–1.4 million service members, a level that has remained consistent through the present (Figure 2). Despite heavy deployment cycles during the post-9/11 wars, active-duty end strengths remained constant, with the active component relying on National Guard and Reserve mobilizations to meet operational requirements.

To maintain required force levels, the services have two available levers: recruiting new personnel and retaining current service members. Each approach involves tradeoffs. New recruits are younger and, on average, more physically fit. Given their lower pay grades, they also cost less than retaining existing

Figure 2 | Active-Duty End Strength, FY 1973–FY 2024³³



Since the advent of the American All-Volunteer Force and the shift away from conscription toward a professional force, the U.S. military was reduced in size from over 2.1 million to under 1.3 million.

service members. Retaining existing personnel provides valuable benefits, including a greater depth of training, performance, experience, and specialized military skill sets, but comes at a higher cost due to more advanced pay grades and years of service. Each year, new recruits account for approximately 12 percent of the total active-duty force.³⁵

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Each military service uses active-duty service members as recruiters, who seek out prospective candidates and assist them in the application and qualification process for military service. However, not all applicants complete the enlistment process.

Figure 3 illustrates the number of individuals who initiated the enlistment process compared with those who ultimately enlisted from FY 1973 (the inception of the AVF) through FY 2024. The gap between applicants and enlistees reflects individuals who either did not meet the required standards or chose to withdraw from the process. Over time, two trends emerge: the number of applicants has declined, and the gap between applicants and enlistees has narrowed. As the pool of interested applicants declines, the services either have reduced flexibility to screen out less competitive candidates or risk failing to meet their recruitment goals. The military faces a shrinking applicant pool, a declining population of Americans reaching military service age, and low eligibility rates among young people. These trends highlight the urgent need to understand why fewer eligible young Americans want to serve in the military and why fewer adults encourage military service. The next section examines existing research, establishing a foundation for understanding the findings from the survey, interviews, and expert elicitation exercise.

Figure 3 | Applicants vs. Newly Enlisted, 1976–2024³⁶



Since 1976, the number of individuals who initiated the enlistment process compared to those who ultimately enlisted have both declined. The narrowing gap between the number of applicants and the number of new recruits places additional pressure on the military services to ensure that those applying are qualified and meet service standards.

HISTORICAL FACTORS AFFECTING MILITARY RECRUITMENT

Trust in Institutions, Social Capital, and the Economy

SINCE THE MILITARY draws recruits from the broader population, societal trends directly impact propensity for military service. Emerging bodies of research on trends within American society not previously used to explain the military recruiting crisis offer useful inputs to a framework for understanding the root causes of the current recruiting environment. Among those bodies of research include literature regarding trust in American institutions, decreases in rates of social capital and participation in volunteerism and public service, and literature on the relationship between unemployment rates and military service.

Declining Trust in Institutions

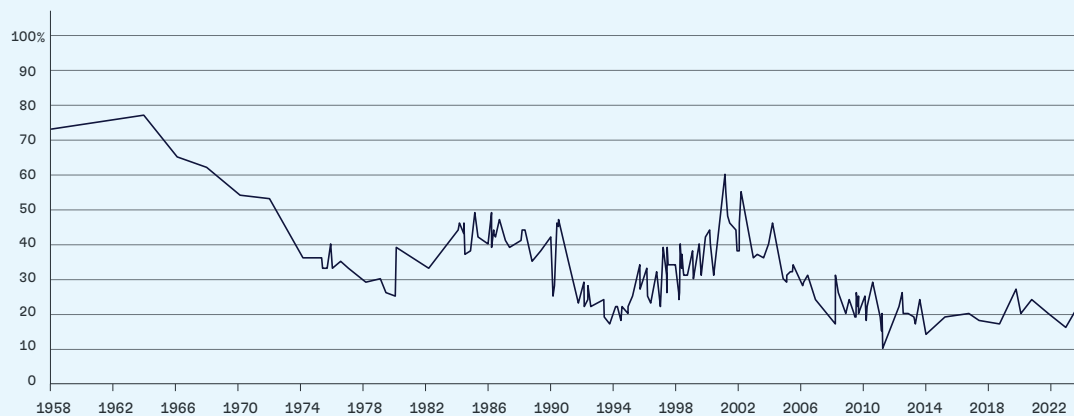
There has long been an interest in tracking Americans' perception of trust in institutions, including the presidency, Congress, the Supreme Court, religious institutions, the military, law enforcement, public schools, and the media. The Gallup Poll and the Pew Research Center have tracked American confidence in institutions and public trust in government annually since 1975 and 1958, respectively.³⁷ In both datasets, evidence suggests that trust in U.S. institutions has declined over time (Figure 4). While trust in the military has historically been higher than trust in other U.S. institutions, perceptions of trust in the military have experienced significant decline in the past 15 years, from a high of 82 percent in 2009 to a more recent low of 60 percent in 2023 (Figure 5).³⁸

In recent years, both sides of the partisan political spectrum have argued that controversial military personnel policies are driving the decline in propensity for military service, including critiques of the presence of right-wing domestic violent extremism, racism, or misogyny in the ranks from the left, or critiques that military personnel policy has become “woke” from the right. These partisan suppositions are hypotheses that deserve rigorous, data-informed analyses of whether and how military personnel policy or the makeup of the services affects a willingness to enlist or recommend enlistment.³⁹

The most serious effort to trace the impact of military personnel policies on military recruitment found that, among a nationally representative sample of 2,100 military veterans in 2024, the perception that the military was “increasingly focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)” made conservative veterans less likely to advise service.⁴⁰ While these findings are meaningful, because the survey sample was representative of the overall veteran population—the majority of whom are over 65 years old (given the impact of the conscription-era military during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War)—two dynamics may be at play. These veterans are, in fact, less inclined to recommend military service—and they may also have a diminished influence over young people's career choices.

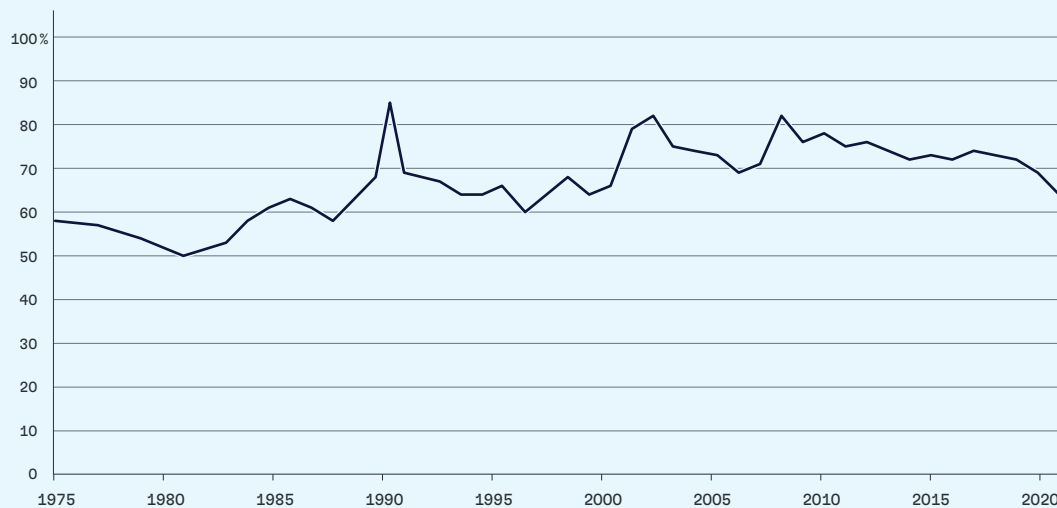
However, decades of DoD survey data consistently indicate that the reasons American youth are not

Figure 4 | Percentage of Americans Who Say They Trust the Government to Do What Is Right Just About Always/Most of the Time, 1958–2024⁴¹



The percentage of Americans who trust the government to do what is right declined from 73 percent to 16 percent between 1958 and 2024.

Figure 5: Percentage of Americans Who Say They Have a Great Deal or Quite a Lot of Confidence in the Military, 1975–2023⁴²



The military has enjoyed a much higher degree of trust from the general public than the government overall between 1975–2023. However, since 2009, the percentage of Americans who place high confidence in the military has declined steadily from a high of 82 percent to a low of 60 percent.

interested in military service—and that their parents are less likely to recommend military service—are rooted in more practical concerns: In the FY 2024 data, parents rate the possibility of death or physical injury (72 percent), the possibility of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (63 percent), discomfort

at the prospect of leaving their family or friends (59 percent), or other career interests (46 percent) as the most likely reasons not to recommend military service.⁴³ Findings from expert interviews, the Center for a New American Security (CNAS)/YouGov survey, and the expert elicitation exercise reinforce these trends.

Decreasing Social Capital, Volunteerism, and Service

Political scientist Robert Putnam defines social capital as “connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity that arise from them.”⁴⁴ Putnam’s model examines the decline in social capital across tangible quantitative measures such as union membership, volunteerism rates, and attendance rates at houses of worship.⁴⁵ Across all indicators, U.S. participation in social networks has declined since 1960—a trend that predates the creation of the modern U.S. AVF in 1973.

Related to decreased social capital, the United States has seen a decline in broader public and national service corresponding with a decrease in propensity toward military service. In response to this challenge, Congress established the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service in the National Defense Authorization Act for 2017.⁴⁶ The commission defined service as “a personal commitment of time, energy, and talent to a mission that contributes to the public good.”⁴⁷ The commission focused on actionable recommendations to enable and incentivize public service through civic education, increased federal funding, public-private partnerships, and improvements to federal hiring practices. However, the commission’s combined mandate on military, national, and public service—rather than military service alone—in some ways limits its direct impact on propensity for military service specifically. The distinction matters, as there are future operational risks that may require military service specifically and for which other forms of service are not interchangeable.

The Impact of Economic Trends on Propensity for Military Service

Research on the relationship between the strength of the labor market and military recruitment indicates that unemployment rates have significant explanatory power on military recruiting rates. As unemployment rates rise, the percentage of “high quality” military recruits also rises.⁴⁸ High quality

youth meet two criteria: 1) a high school diploma and 2) an Armed Forces Qualification Test score of 50 or higher. The DoD and the military services pursue high quality candidates because enlistment terms completion rates and job performance are more highly correlated for candidates who meet these standards than for those who do not.⁴⁹

The alignment of military recruitment rates—particularly among highly qualified individuals—with unemployment rates indicates that military recruitment is sensitive to economic incentives. Research shows a clear relationship between unemployment rates and military recruitment: When the economy weakens, more highly qualified individuals enlist.⁵⁰ However, the economy’s cyclical and unpredictable nature means that understanding this correlation is not the same as having a sustainable recruitment strategy. Uniformed and civilian leaders need deliberate, long-term recruiting plans that can succeed across varying economic conditions.

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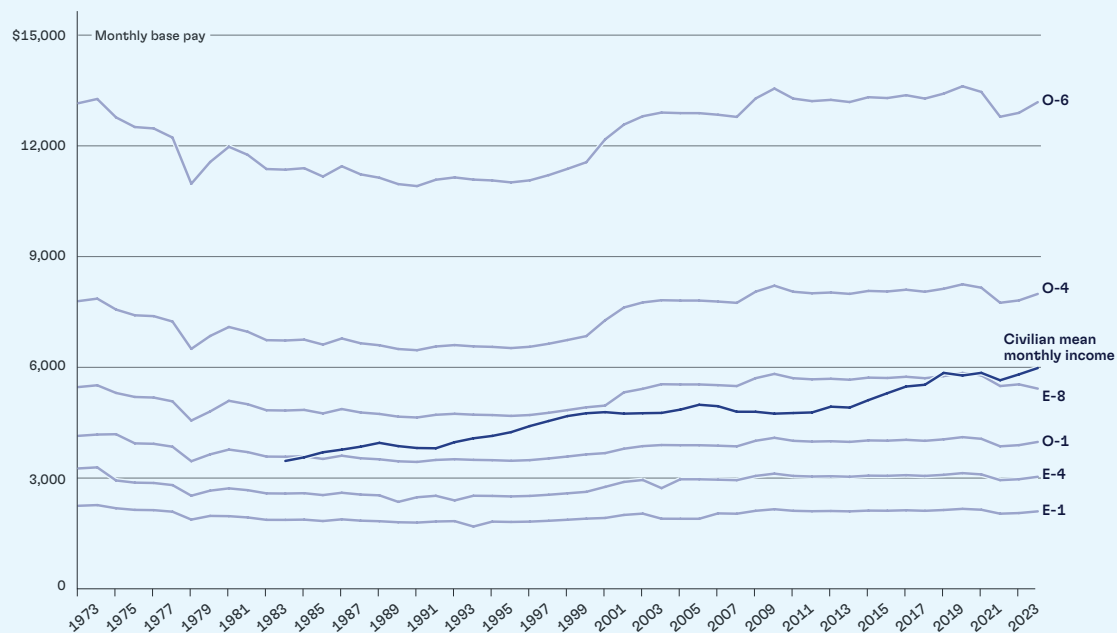
Moreover, causal or correlational relationships between the state of the economy and military recruiting outcomes do not capture the full picture of an individual’s propensity to serve. Higher unemployment does not create propensity for military service where none existed.⁵¹ Rather, a subset of American youth already has some inclination toward military service but makes economically rational comparisons. These individuals pursue military service when it offers better incentives than available civilian jobs. This does not decrease the value of their military service; the AVF relies on at least some proportion of individuals who are financially incentivized to enlist. This subset of the population deserves (and receives) rigorous analytic attention. Bonuses and other incentives are particularly effective for this population, so long as the incentives meet their individual threshold.

Thus, the literature on the impact economic trends have on military service is necessary but not sufficient for explaining the current decline in propensity toward military service.

Since the inception of the AVF, military basic pay for those with fewer than four years of service has consistently fallen below civilian pay. However, additional forms of military pay (such as Basic Allowance for Housing, hazardous duty pay, and special pays for specific skill sets) provide a compelling compensation package for service members, and officers and noncommissioned officers in higher pay grades with more years of experience outpace the civilian mean monthly income (Figure 6).

The background and historical context examined in this section establish that military recruiting is shaped by factors outside of the military's control, including generational shifts in American attitudes toward institutions, declining participation in civic life, and practical concerns of adults regarding the risks associated with military service. The following section provides original research from the CNAS survey instrument, expert interviews, and findings from an expert elicitation exercise designed to address the underlying reasons for the decline in propensity to serve in the military or recommend military service, establishing a foundation for evidence-based recommendations.

Figure 6 | Select Military Base Pay Grades vs. Civilian Income, FY 2025 Constant Dollars⁵²



Since the inception of the American All-Volunteer Force, military base pay for those with fewer than four years of service (both officer and enlisted) has consistently fallen below the average civilian income. Income and potential opportunity costs factor into considerations for military service. Calculations provided for an E-1 with under two years of service, an E-4 with over three years of service, an E-8 with over 10 years of service, an O-1 with under two years of service, an O-4 with over six years of service, and an O-6 with over 20 years of service.

FINDINGS

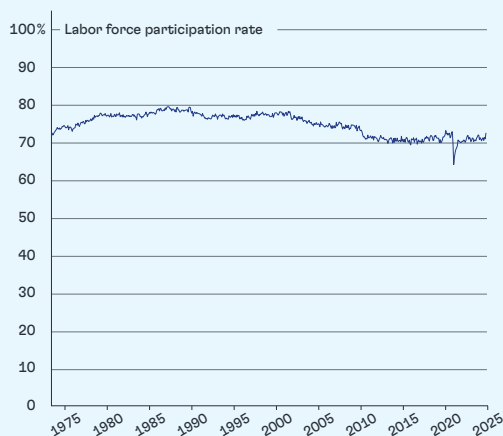
Root Causes of the Decline in Propensity

REASONS FOR THE DECLINE in propensity/willingness to recommend service to youth are multilayered, ranging from mistrust in institutions to decision-making processes among teens to everyday concerns. The following section outlines results from the CNAS/YouGov survey, expert interviews, and government data analysis.

Challenges in Youth Participation Are Not Unique to Military Service

Interviews and data analysis indicate that the reduced participation of Americans in military service is part

Figure 7 | Labor Force Participation Rates for 20–24-Year-Olds, 1973–2025⁵³



Military recruitment is subject to similar trends affecting overall labor market participation among American young adults. Labor force participation rates among this population dropped from 73 percent to 66 percent over the course of 2020.

of a larger pattern of disengagement from traditional institutions. Other areas of American life have also been affected by declining engagement.

The challenging military recruitment period coincided with declines in both higher education enrollment and workforce participation rates. Colleges and universities experienced a significant drop in enrollments—from 19,949,828 enrolled students to 18,155,619 students, an 8.9 percent decline—between the fall semesters of 2017 and 2022.⁵⁴ Labor force participation rates for the nation’s 20–to-24-year-old population cohort also have dropped in recent years. Participation rates that had approached 80 percent in the final decades of the 20th century fell closer to 70 percent in the aughts of the 21st—and dipped even into the low 60s the year that the COVID-19 pandemic began (Figure 7).

Familiarity with the Military Correlates with Higher Willingness to Recommend Military Service

Academic literature supports the supposition that personal connection to military service (whether as a service member, veteran, or family member) influences the likelihood of serving.⁵⁵ As the population of those with military service continues to decline as a result of the move away from conscription to the smaller AVF, only about 7 percent of U.S. citizens are veterans or service members.⁵⁶ The established findings in the literature are reflected in the CNAS/YouGov survey: Among survey respondents, the closer individuals were to military service, the more likely they were to recommend it to others.

Higher Trust in the Government Is Correlated with Increased Recommendations for Military Service

Unsurprisingly, confidence in the federal government’s integrity correlates positively with willingness to recommend military service. Support increases substantially with higher trust (Figure 9). The implication for political leaders is that good governance and maintaining public trust in government institutions are not merely matters of democratic legitimacy; they directly affect military recruitment and military capability.

Service to Country Is the Primary Motivator Across Party Lines

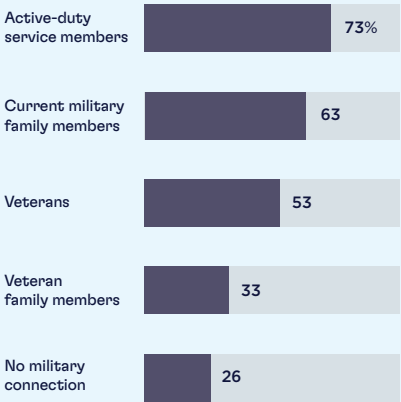
While the reasons adults would recommend military service differ based on reported political affiliation, the trends in reasons why adults would recommend military service cluster similarly across political affiliations (Figure 10). Democrats, Republicans, and independents all rate “service to country” most frequently as the reason why they would recommend military service. Republicans and independents are more likely to recommend military service as a way to develop discipline than their Democratic counterparts.

Politicization of the Military

The survey instrument (Appendix) did not include questions asking whether respondents felt that the military was being politicized or subject to partisan sway—specifically, whether respondents either thought the military was too “woke” or progressive (a critique from the right) or whether it faced internal challenges with extremism, misogyny, or racism (a critique from the left). However, the survey did pose an open-ended question regarding reasons why respondents would not recommend military service, with the option to provide their own feedback. Of the 773 Republicans surveyed, 11 gave a write-in answer related to “DEI” (referring to diversity, equity, and inclusion policies). Among independents, 2 out of 624 respondents provided similar answers, while no Democrats had similar answers. On the other side of the political spectrum, 6 out of 868 Democrats cited concerns with the potential uses of the military during a Republican administration in their open-ended answers; no Democrats provided open-ended answers regarding extremism, misogyny, or racism.

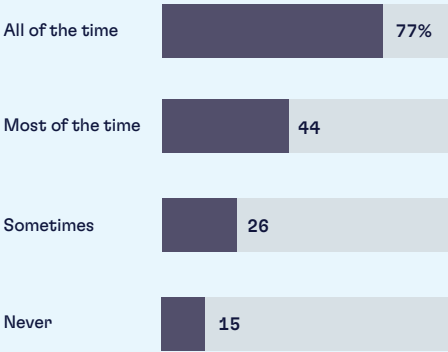
The data suggest that concerns about politicization within the military mirror broader political divides. While these themes are salient in current political discourse, it is worth noting that very few respondents spontaneously cited these issues as reasons not to recommend service, more frequently citing the practical challenges of military service itself.

Figure 8 | Likelihood of Recommending Military Service by Familiarity with Military Service



Data from CNAS/YouGov survey, question five. The closer an individual is to military service, the more likely they are to recommend service to young people in their lives.

Figure 9 | Trust That the Federal Government Does What Is Right and Implications for Recommending Military Service

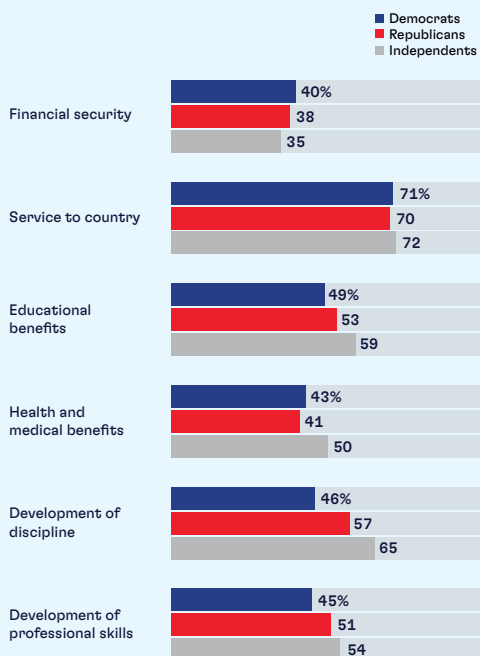


Data from CNAS/YouGov survey, question nine. Confidence in the federal government’s integrity correlates positively with willingness to recommend military service.

Practical Concerns Outweigh Ideological Debates

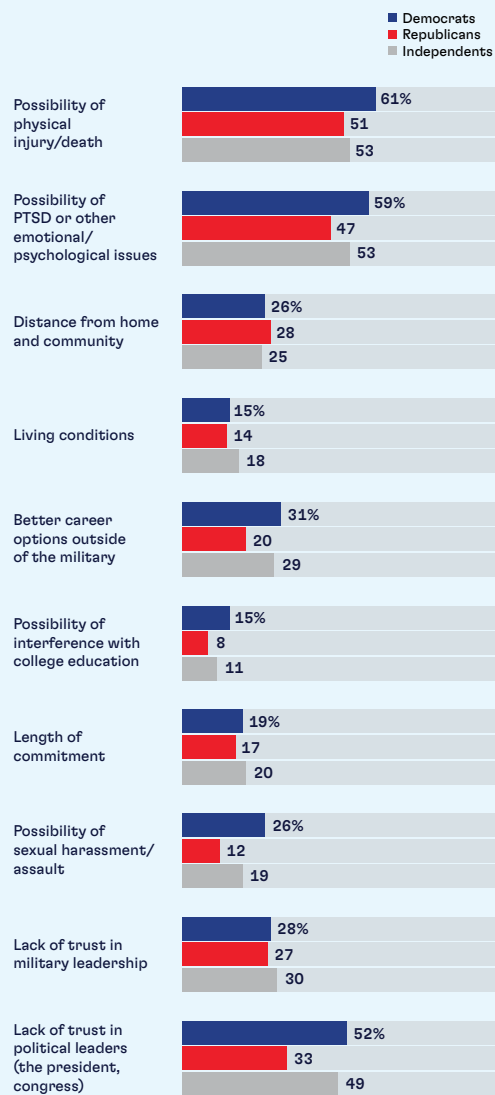
More disparity exists across political ideologies regarding the reasons not to recommend military service (Figure 11). Democrats are more concerned with the possibility of physical injury or death, PTSD, or sexual assault than Republicans are. All groups are nearly equally concerned with a lack of trust in military leadership, but nearly 20 percent more Democrats and 9 percent more independents are likely to cite mistrust in political leaders than are their Republican counterparts. Given the timing of the survey—between the 2024 presidential election and Inauguration Day 2025—it is difficult to parse whether the mistrust is placed in a specific set of political leaders (the president and Congress) or whether there is a higher mistrust in political leaders generally across these two groups.

Figure 10: Reasons for Recommending Military Service by Political Affiliation



Data from CNAS/YouGov survey, question 20. Democrats, Republicans, and independents all rate “service to country” as the predominant reason they would recommend military service.

Figure 11: Reasons for Not Recommending Military Service by Political Affiliation



Data from CNAS/YouGov survey, question 21. The possibility of physical injury or death is the most cited reason for not recommending military service across all political affiliations.

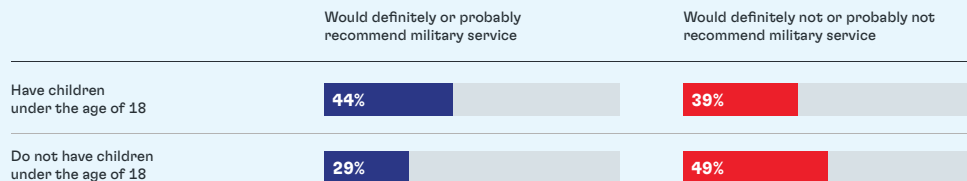
Those with Regular Interactions with American Youth Are More Likely to Recommend Military Service

Perhaps surprisingly, parents of children under the age of 18 (Figure 12) and those who regularly spend time (defined as at least one hour per week) with individuals under the age of 25 (Figure 13) are both more likely to recommend military service than individuals who do not regularly engage with American youth. Feedback from interviews and the expert workshop indicated that one consideration for recommending military service (as well as college or other specific career paths) is that “it depends on the kid.” This might suggest that adults who regularly interact with American youth have a clear individual in mind, accounting for their skills, opportunities, and preferences, which may make it easier to steer a specific individual in the direction of military service.

This finding suggests a strategic imperative for policymakers: Focus recruitment efforts on the populations that matter most for influencing youth decisions. Parents, teachers, coaches, and other adults who regularly interact with young Americans are not only more likely to recommend military service but further possess individual-level knowledge to identify good fits. Investing in these relationships—rather than broad-based campaigns targeting those otherwise disconnected from youth—promises more efficient use of recruitment resources.

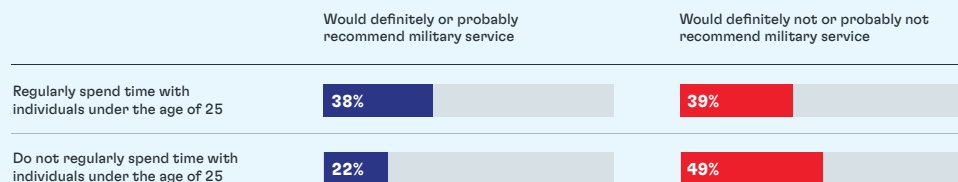
Survey respondents were also asked which service they were most likely to recommend for young men in their community versus young women in their community (Figure 14). One option provided for each (not captured in Figure 14) was “I would not recommend military service to a young man/woman in my community.” There was a notable gendered difference in responses: 21.9 percent of respondents reported that they would not

Figure 12 | Likelihood of Recommending Military Service by Parental Status



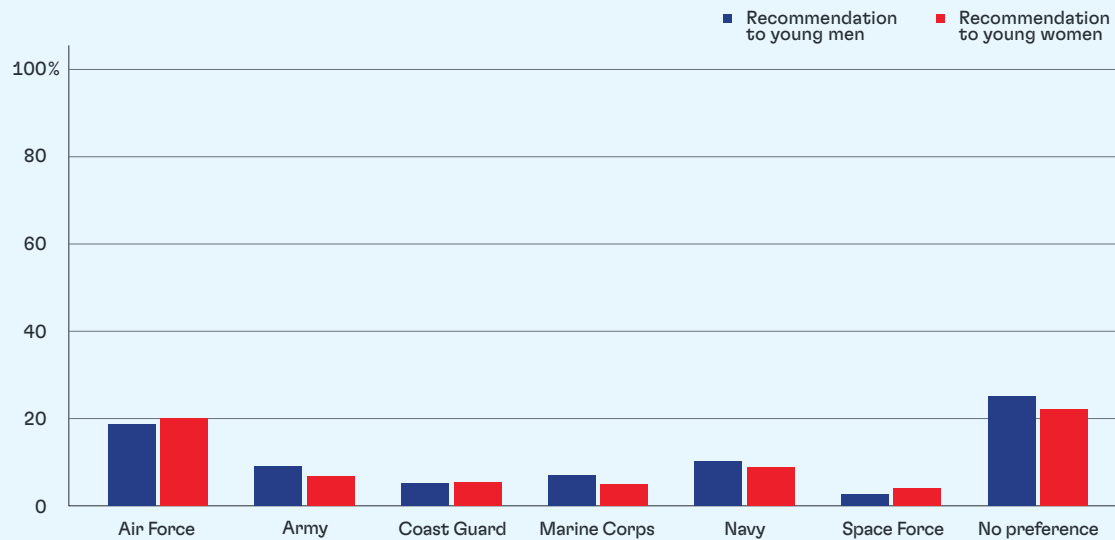
Data from CNAS/YouGov survey, question 33. Parents are more likely than non-parents to recommend military service to young people in their lives.

Figure 13 | Likelihood of Recommending Military Service Among Adults by Level of Interaction with Americans Under the Age of 25



Data from CNAS/YouGov survey, question three. Those who regularly spend time with individuals under the age of 25 are more likely to recommend military service than those who do not.

Figure 14 | Branch of Service Recommendation by Gender of Individual Receiving Advice



Data from CNAS/YouGov survey, questions 23 and 24. While the plurality of respondents would recommend any branch, the Air Force is the top choice among those selecting a specific branch.

recommend military service to a young man in their community, while 27.8 percent reported that they would not recommend military service to a young woman in their community. More respondents specifically recommended service in the U.S. Air Force for both young men and young women (18.7 percent and 20 percent, respectively) than any other branch of service; notably, though, a plurality who recommend service indicated no preference, saying they would recommend service in any branch to both young men and young women.

Belief That Better Options Exist Outside of the Military Decreases Recommendations for Service

More than one-quarter of respondents reported that a reason they would not recommend military service is because better career options exist outside of the military. When examining how those respondents rank-ordered post-high school plans, 57 percent reported that their first recommendation to a graduating senior would be to attend a four-year university with a scholarship, and 22.65 percent

would recommend attending a trade school as their first recommendation. Approximately 6 percent would recommend full-time employment directly out of high school. The gap between those who would recommend a four-year degree on scholarship and those who would recommend full-time employment directly out of high school indicates a perception that the most valuable post-high school option is education rather than employment. It further provides an opportunity for the military to emphasize educational benefits; if free education is a motivator for this population, the GI Bill is a compelling benefit.

However, broader trends in American society indicate that both students and parents are beginning to question the value of a college degree. In 2023, surveys indicated that, for the first time in a decade, more Americans (56 percent) think that “earning a four-year degree is a bad bet,” compared with those who believe in the value of a degree (42 percent).⁵⁷ This shift suggests that there may be an increased appetite to consider military service as a desirable post-high school option.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

THE DECLINE IN AMERICAN propensity to serve in the military—and adults’ willingness to recommend military service—represents a complex challenge rooted in broader societal transformations than any single policy failure. This study reveals that the recent recruiting crisis is a symptom of generational disengagement from traditional institutions and pathways into adulthood.

The evidence suggests several interconnected dynamics. Young Americans are simultaneously withdrawing from multiple forms of institutional participation. The 9 percent drop in college enrollment, the decline in labor force participation among 20–24-year-olds, and the decrease in propensity for military service all occurred during the same time frame of 2020–2023. This pattern suggests that addressing military recruitment requires understanding and addressing—where possible—broader questions about how young Americans view their roles in society. It further requires an honest assessment about the crucial nature of fully staffing the military to national security requirements and finding ways to break through these long-term trends to confront short-term shocks in military recruitment.

Trust in civilian leadership—more than trust in military leadership—drives recommendations for service. This finding places significant responsibility on civilian political leaders: Their decisions about when, where, and why to deploy military forces have direct consequences on the nation’s ability to sustain an AVF.

Moreover, practical concerns overshadow ideological debates. While some survey respondents pointed

to partisan issues when given the opportunity to identify their own reasons for not recommending service, only 1 percent of Republicans mentioned DEI-related concerns, while less than 1 percent of Democrats cited concerns about potential military misuse under a Republican administration, and no Democrats raised concerns over extremism, misogyny, or racism in the military as a reason not to recommend military service. Instead, consistent with decades of JAMRS data, adults consistently cite fear of death or injury (72 percent), PTSD (63 percent), and competing career interests (46 percent) as primary reasons for not recommending service.

Economic incentives do matter, but only for those who are inclined to serve in the first place. However, economic conditions alone cannot create propensity where none exists. Rather, they influence the timing and likelihood of enlistment among those already considering service as a viable option. More effort needs to be placed on making military service desirable.

The issue of propensity for military service will only grow in importance in the next decade and a half. Between 2025 and 2041, the number of Americans turning 18—the population targeted for initial entry into military service—will decline by 13 percent. This projected decrease, combined with the fact that only 23 percent of youth currently meet eligibility standards, means that maintaining current propensity levels will not be enough. The military services must compete more effectively for a shrinking pool of eligible candidates—and the responsibility lies across the federal government and society.

Recommendations

PRESIDENT

Use public platforms such as the State of the Union addresses, Medal of Honor award ceremonies, and other public addresses to highlight military service. The focus of these public addresses should emphasize the professionalism and character of those who have served or are currently serving. Public addresses can also include highlighting American youth who are choosing to join the military, and the public acknowledgment of young Americans receiving appointments to the military service academies.⁵⁸

Leverage the Presidential Fitness Test to emphasize opportunity (while also increasing eligibility).⁵⁹ President Donald Trump reestablished the Presidential Fitness Test on July 31, 2025.⁶⁰ The implementation of the test at schools nationwide encourages physical fitness among American youth while also providing an opportunity for teachers, parents, and other influential adults to discuss the option of military service with American youth across their developmental years.

Deploy the military responsibly. Declining trust in the presidency and Congress—more than trust in military leaders—most closely correlates with American adults' willingness to recommend military service. The stakes emphasize the necessity for the president as commander in chief to effectively and publicly outline the rationale for use of the military, and for Congress to transparently justify any authorizations for the use of military force (AUMFs). Clear, justified rationales for AUMFs are essential to maintaining veteran confidence in military service—particularly among the post-9/11 veteran cohort.⁶¹ Such confidence directly shapes their willingness to recommend military service to future generations.

Keep the military out of partisan politics and be mindful of optics to protect the military profession. Individuals in positions of influence over youth decision-making from across the partisan political spectrum report unease with the politicization of the military. Presidential attention

on the valor, commitment, and professionalism of military service members is vital for inspiring service; politicization of the military risks alienating potential or current service members from across the political spectrum. Presidents from both political parties should avoid putting uniformed service members in professionally and ethically challenging positions during public events by ensuring that no partisan politics are discussed in public or private events; the practice has proved challenging for leaders from both parties in recent years.

Highlight the experience of successful American leaders with military experience. The perception that better opportunities exist outside of military service than within it can contribute to a belief that military service is an option of last resort. By emphasizing successful service members and veterans from across a range of industries, the president has a unique opportunity to shape a different narrative around military service as a compelling career opportunity.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE AND SERVICE SECRETARIES

Expand pre-commitment exploration programs. Potential recruits have limited understanding of what military service entails, and enlistment or commissioning represent significant commitments for young Americans. To bridge the gap, the DoD and the service secretaries should create structured, realistic opportunities for candidates to experience military life before making commitments, currently modeled through the Marine Corps Platoon Leaders Class (PLC) as one avenue to complete Officer Candidate School and the services' realistic one-week summer camps across the military service academies for rising high school seniors.⁶² These experiences screen promising potential candidates, enabling the services to gather more information on the participants' realistic performance while also allowing potential candidates to explore whether military service would be a good fit for them.

Pathways for realistic exploration of enlisted service member experience prior to formal contracts may open the possibility of military service to those who are

unsure that they want to sign a contract before considering further. The Army's Future Soldier Prep Course demonstrates the value of pre-exposure to military standards and lifestyle. Nonremedial versions of such programs could attract candidates who already meet the standards but remain uncertain whether military service aligns with their goals or preferences.

Establish real-time, public-facing recruitment transparency. The American public deserves clear visibility into how its military recruits the AVF—and exposure to the data may increase civic engagement in the recruiting process. The Department of Defense should create a publicly accessible dashboard, requiring the military services to keep data up to date, updated monthly at a minimum. While protecting personally identifiable information, the platform should include information about the number of applications, acceptances, and enlistments by state and congressional district; service-specific metrics enabling comparison across the military services; waiver statistics regarding the number, type, and approval rates; and data regarding the costs of investment per recruit and long-term data regarding rates of first term of enlistment completion and reenlistments. Such data can provide state and local leaders, military service leaders, and Congress with up-to-date information that can be used to better calibrate recruiting messages and efforts to local dynamics.

Invest in quality-of-life issues—especially service-member housing in barracks and installation housing. Quality-of-life issues may not be the primary reason adults discourage military service, but they matter—and unlike concerns about combat risk, these issues are entirely within the DoD's control. The recent establishment of the Barracks Task Force signals recognition of the problem and intended solutions, but sustained action and accountability will determine whether it translates into meaningful improvement.⁶³

Maintain high standards for entry to service, performance, and training. Historical JAMRS data and the CNAS/YouGov survey data consistently find that the leading reason adults recommend against military service—and the leading reason youth cite that they will not pursue military service—is related

to the possibility of death or physical injury. The nature of military service requires service members to enter inherently dangerous situations on behalf of the nation's security, and the risks of the work are high. However, risks of death or physical injury during training and combat can be mitigated through effective training. Service-level leadership should ensure that training replicates operational demands, requiring realistic simulation technology and challenging field exercises. Training should further adapt to evolving threats and technology. Commanders and senior noncommissioned officers should be trained not only in effective tactics, but in the development of those serving under them in training and in combat. Such continuous investments serve a dual purpose: mitigating risk and increasing lethality.

Embrace talent management. Perceptions of better career opportunities in the civilian sector can be countered by emphasizing the distinctive nature of military service: the opportunity to employ individual knowledge, skills, abilities, and other attributes in service of national security and a purpose beyond self-interest. The military services, particularly the Army, are experimenting with talent management systems that leverage individual performance and preferences to meet the needs of the service.⁶⁴ These efforts yield three strategic benefits: enhanced force effectiveness through talent allocation, improved retention of high-performing service members whose skills align with institutional needs, and strengthened recruiting appeal to candidates seeking careers that combine professional growth with meaningful service.

CONGRESS

Fund recruiting and quality-of-life efforts as strategic priorities. Recruiting challenges and quality-of-life deficiencies threaten national security as directly as outdated weapons systems or suboptimal readiness levels. The AVF depends on Americans choosing to serve and remain in service. Congress must adequately sustain funding for the recruiting enterprise, including funding of innovative programs such as pre-commitment exposure opportunities that inherently will not convert all participants into

enlistees. While Congress should require regular reporting of the effective use of resources from DoD and the services, it must view recruitment costs not as overhead to be minimized, but rather a strategic investment in force quality and capability. Congress must further appropriate dedicated funding for barracks and military housing—with proper oversight of the use of those funds.

Hold services and the Pentagon accountable for reporting requirements. While Congress should invest further in appropriations supporting the recruiting enterprise, it should also increase its effective oversight of the use of those resources. Through the NDAA, Congress should specify annual reporting of applicant pool demographics and geographic distribution, acceptance rates by service and military occupational specialty, waiver types and approval rates, correlations between waivers and training attrition, costs per recruit by service branch, and longitudinal retention rates for service members who enlist after a change in policy to identify effective efforts. Congress should further mandate that these reports be publicly accessible.

Hold annual oversight hearings specifically focused on military personnel issues, including military recruitment. The Senate and House Armed Services Committees should hold annual oversight hearings specifically focused on recruitment, retention, and personnel issues. These hearings should be

separate from annual force posture hearings, which traditionally take place in April. The committees should call the secretary of defense, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, service secretaries, and service chiefs accountable for current recruiting efforts and outcomes. The committees should also consistently call the service-level personnel chiefs and the under secretary of defense for personnel and readiness to testify on an annual basis.

STATE AND LOCAL LEADERSHIP

Make military service visibility a priority. State and local leaders can personalize military service by tying it to values distinct to their community's identity, making military service feel less like an abstract national institution and more like a community tradition. Governors and mayors should regularly and publicly recognize in-state service members.

Support military spouses and transitioning service members through policy efforts. Governors and state legislators can make a profound impact through policy, including professional and license recognition for active-duty spouses and transitioning service members. Investing in state and local veteran transition programs serves two purposes: aiding veterans in successful reintegration into civilian life while exposing employers and communities to realistic accounts of military service—demystifying the military and narrowing the civil-military divide.

APPENDIX:

Survey Instrument

The Center for a New American Security partnered with YouGov to field the following survey between January 2, 2025, and January 15, 2025. YouGov surveyed 2,814 U.S. citizens, who were then matched down to a sample of 2,500 representative of age, gender, race, and education. The sample was also politically representative of the nation, based on American Community Survey public use data, public voter files, the 2020 Current Population Survey Voting and Registration supplements, the 2020 National Election Pool exit poll, and the 2020 Cooperative Election Study survey. The survey instrument is provided below.

1. Do you have children?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. [If yes to Question 1] What are their age(s)?
3. Do you engage with individuals under the age of 25 on a regular basis (at least one hour per week)?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. [If yes to Question 3] In what capacity do you interact with individuals under the age of 25 regularly?
 - a. Teacher
 - b. Coach
 - c. Counselor
 - d. Principal
 - e. Faith leader
 - f. Volunteer
 - g. Community member
5. We'd like to know whether you or someone in your immediate family is currently serving or has ever served in the U.S. military. Immediate family is defined as your parents, siblings, spouse, and children. Please check all boxes that apply.
 - a. I am currently serving in the U.S. military
 - b. I have immediate family members currently serving in the U.S. military
 - c. I previously served in the U.S. military but I am no longer active
 - d. Members of my immediate family have served in the U.S. military but are no longer active
 - e. Neither myself nor any members of my immediate family have ever served in the U.S. military
6. [If "a" or "c" were selected for Question 5] In which branch(es) of the military did you serve? Check all that apply.
 - a. Air Force
 - b. Air Force Reserve
 - c. Air National Guard
 - d. Army
 - e. Army National Guard
 - f. Army Reserve
 - g. Coast Guard
 - h. Coast Guard Reserve
 - i. Marine Corps
 - j. Marine Corps Reserve
 - k. Navy
 - l. Navy Reserve
 - m. Space Force
7. [If "a" or "c" were selected in Question 5] What was your pay grade upon separation from military service, or, if still serving, what is your current pay grade?
8. [If "a" or "c" were selected in Question 5] How many years of military service have you completed?
9. I believe that the federal government does what is right
 - a. All of the time
 - b. Most of the time
 - c. Some of the time
 - d. Never

Short Supply: Identifying and Addressing the Root Causes of Declining Propensity for Military Service

10. How much confidence, if any, do you have in the following institutions?

	A great deal	Some	Very little	None	No opinion
Organized religion					
The military					
The presidency					
The Supreme Court					
Congress					
The police					
Big business					
Small business					
Public schools					
Higher education					
Newspapers					
Television news					

11. The U.S. decision to send troops to Afghanistan in 2001 was the
 - a. Right decision
 - b. Wrong decision
12. Considering the costs versus benefits to the United States, do you think the war in Afghanistan was
 - a. Worth fighting
 - b. Not worth fighting
13. The U.S. decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan in 2022 was the
 - a. Right decision
 - b. Wrong decision
14. How many hours per week, if at all, do you volunteer? [drop down]
15. Are you a member of a faith community?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
16. [If yes to Question 27] How many times per week do you engage with your faith community? [drop down]
17. Are you a member of an affinity organization in your community (i.e., Lions or Elks club, Knights of Columbus, etc.)?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
18. [If yes to Question 29] What organization(s)? [fill in]
19. In the next few years, how likely is it that you will recommend service in the military to youth in your network?
 - a. Definitely
 - b. Probably
 - c. Probably not
 - d. Definitely not
20. What would be the main reason(s) you would recommend military service? [Check all that apply]
 - a. Financial security
 - b. Service to country
 - c. Educational benefits
 - d. Health and medical benefits
 - e. Development of discipline
 - f. Development of professional skills
 - g. Other [fill in]

21. What would be the main reason(s) you would NOT recommend military service?
 - a. Possibility of physical injury/death
 - b. Possibility of PTSD or other emotional/psychological issues
 - c. Distance from home and community
 - d. Living conditions
 - e. Better career options outside of the military
 - f. Possibility of interference with college education
 - g. Length of commitment
 - h. Possibility of sexual harassment/assault
 - i. Lack of trust in military leadership
 - j. Lack of trust in political leaders (the president, congress)
 - k. Other [fill in]
22. Imagine you are advising a high-school senior on their available post-graduation opportunities. Please rank order the opportunities you would encourage, with "1" being your first recommendation and "X" being your least likely recommendation.
 - a. Attend a four-year university on a scholarship
 - b. Attend a four-year university, paying out of pocket
 - c. Attend a two-year university on a scholarship
 - d. Attend a two-year university, paying out of pocket
 - e. Attend a trade school
 - f. Join the military
 - g. Pursue full-time employment
23. If you were to recommend active-duty military service to a male family member, student, or member of the community, which service would you recommend first?
 - a. Air Force
 - b. Army
 - c. Coast Guard
 - d. Marine Corps
 - e. Navy
 - f. Space Force
 - g. I would not recommend military service to a young man in my family or community.
24. If you were to recommend active-duty military service to a female family member, student, or member of the community, which service would you recommend first?
 - a. Air Force
 - b. Army
 - c. Coast Guard
 - d. Marine Corps
 - e. Navy
 - f. Space Force
 - g. I would not recommend military service to a young woman in my family or community.
25. What is your birth year?
26. What is your gender?
27. What is your race?
28. Do you identify as Hispanic?
29. What is your highest level of education?
30. What is your marital status?
31. What is your employment status?
32. What is your family income?
33. Do you have children under the age of 18 in your household?
34. Political identification (3-point scale)
 - a. Democrat
 - b. Republican
 - c. Independent
 - d. Other
 - e. Not Sure
35. Political identification (7-point scale)
 - a. Democrat
 - b. Not very strong Democrat
 - c. Lean Democrat, Independent
 - d. Lean Republican
 - e. Not very strong Republican
 - f. Strong Republican
 - g. Other
 - h. Not Sure
36. Who did you vote for in the 2016 presidential election?
 - a. Hillary Clinton
 - b. Donald Trump
 - c. Gary Johnson
 - d. Jill Stein
 - e. Evan McMullin
 - f. Other
 - g. Did not vote for president
37. Who did you vote for in the 2020 presidential election?
 - a. Joe Biden
 - b. Donald Trump
 - c. Jo Jorgensen
 - d. Howie Hawkins
 - e. Other
 - f. Did not vote for president

38. What is your state of residence?
39. Are you registered to vote?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't know
40. How would you identify your ideology?
- a. Very liberal
 - b. Liberal
 - c. Moderate
 - d. Conservative
 - e. Very conservative
 - f. Not sure
41. How interested are you in politics?
- a. Most of the time
 - b. Some of the time
 - c. Only now and then
 - d. Hardly at all
 - e. Don't know
42. Religion
- a. Protestant
 - b. Roman Catholic
 - c. Mormon
 - d. Eastern or Greek Orthodox
 - e. Jewish
 - f. Muslim
 - g. Buddhist
 - h. Hindu
 - i. Atheist
 - j. Agnostic
 - k. Nothing in particular
 - l. Something else
43. How frequently do you attend religious services?
- a. More than once a week
 - b. Once a week
 - c. Once or twice a month
 - d. A few times a year
 - e. Seldom
 - f. Never
 - g. Don't know
44. Do you identify as "born again"?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
45. How important is religion in your life?
- a. Very important
 - b. Somewhat important
 - c. Not too important
 - d. Not at all important
46. How frequently do you pray?
- a. Several times a day
 - b. Once a day
 - c. A few times a week
 - d. Once a week
 - e. A few times per month
 - f. Seldom
 - g. Never
 - h. Don't know

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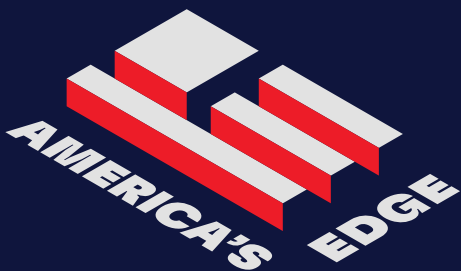
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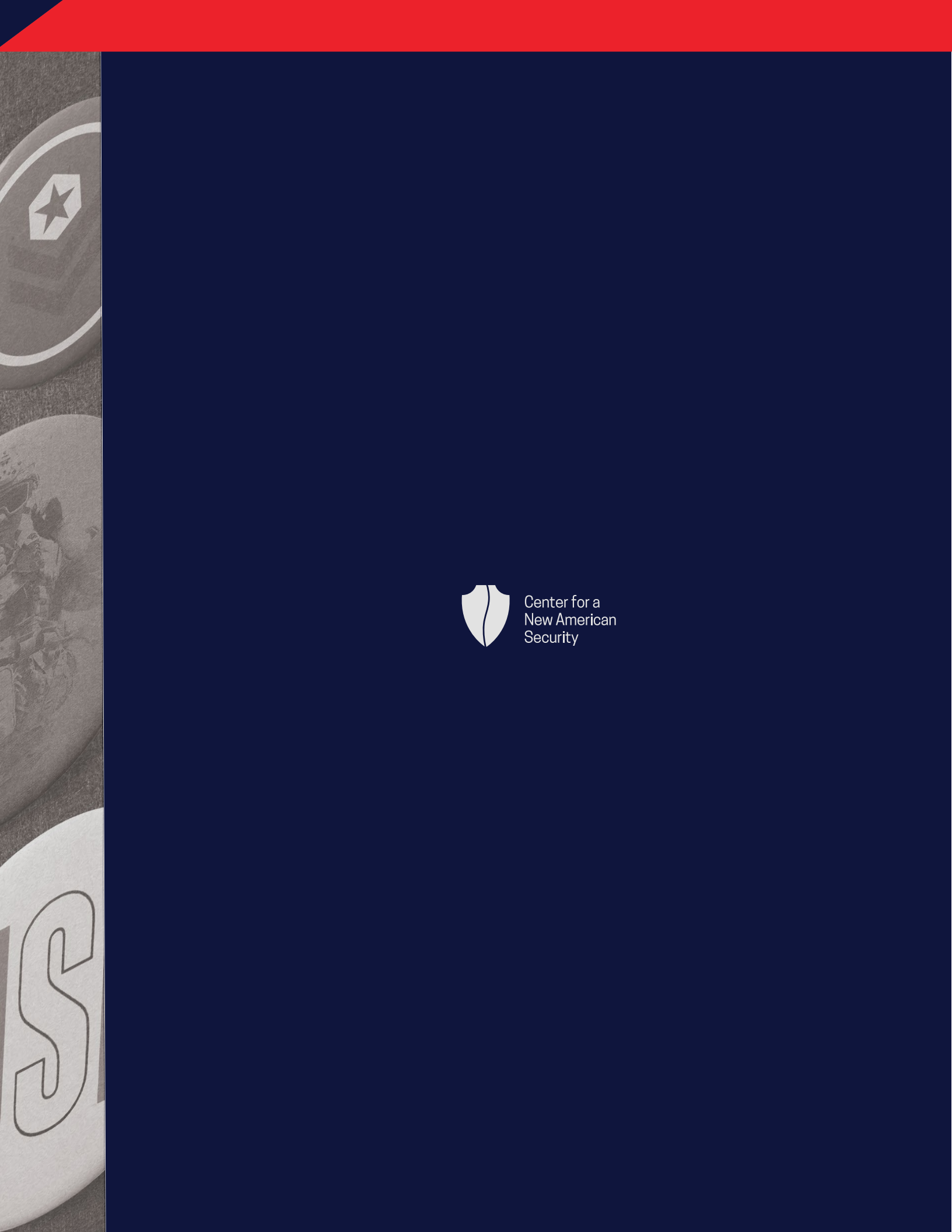
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