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The Civil-Military Divide and Veteran Employment

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About the Military, Veterans, and Society Program

The Military, Veterans, and Society (MVS) program addresses issues facing America's service members, veterans, and military families, including the future of the All-Volunteer Force, trends within the veteran community, and civil-military relations. The program produces high-impact research that informs and inspires strategic action; convenes stakeholders and hosts top-quality events to shape the national conversation; and engages policymakers, industry leaders, Congress, scholars, the media, and the public about issues facing veterans and the military community.

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Staff Sgt. Brian A. Barbour/ U.S. Army National Guard

Introduction

Both employers and veterans benefit from the recent spotlight on the business case for hiring veterans. There is a great opportunity for business to leverage the training and talent found among veterans for an improved bottom line. However, progress in veteran hiring and retention has, at times, been stymied by the civil-military divide, characterized by a growing gap between the public and those who serve (or have served) in the military.

Employers largely unfamiliar with military service or exposed mainly through media narratives may struggle to understand the different roles and training that encompass military service today. Similarly, both veterans and employers may struggle to translate military experience into comparable civilian credentials, be it direct skills such as logistics, aviation, public affairs, or "soft skills" like leadership and resilience under pressure. And for their part, veterans also may struggle to understand the civilian labor market, hindered in large part by the geographic, cultural, and social dimensions of the civil-military divide and the insularity of service in today's All-Volunteer Force. The broader questions posed by the civil-military divide and the lack of cultural understanding that may create obstacles in veteran employment are as follows: Which constituencies bear the responsibility for closing the civil-military gap? How much adjustment needs to be made by employers and veterans to effect employment outcomes? What skill sets can be improved within companies and among veterans? When do these adjustments, if any, need to be made?

This research aims to define the effects of the civil-military divide on veteran employment and the extent to which the divide may be, in part, the root cause for many transition challenges facing veterans. This paper examines the divide as it stands today, its effects on employers and society, and specifically how it affects veterans transitioning from service to civilian work. Based on these effects, this paper makes recommendations for the government, employers, and veterans to outline ways forward and to ameliorate aspects of the gap that may be impeding employer and veteran success in leveraging this source of talent.

Describing the Divide

The civil-military divide is characterized by a widening geographic, demographic, cultural, and social gap between the nation and those who serve in the all-volunteer military. Currently, only 1.1 percent of the population serves in the active-duty or reserve components of the U.S. military, or as Department of Defense civilians. Similarly, just 7 percent of the nation's population are veterans – approximately 22 million out of 320 million. These proportions reflect a number of demographic phenomena including the fading away of the large World War II, Cold War, and Vietnam War cohorts, the end of conscription, and the growth of the U.S. population relative to the size of the military. These trends are likely to continue, creating a broader and deeper divide between American society and those who serve in the military. The number of veterans in society has decreased dramatically over time (see Figure 1), from 35 percent of men in 1990 to only 16 percent of men in 2014. When considering the total population, men and women, the percentage of the population with military service declined from 17 percent in 1990 to only 8 percent in 2014.[1]

Recent data show the effects of these demographic trends on societal familiarity with the armed forces, with significant drops in subsequent generations since the introduction of the All-Volunteer Force in 1973. While approximately 60 percent of adults have reported having an immediate family member in the military, this figure has dropped precipitously for those under 40, only 40 percent of whom report a familial connection, and for those under 30, of whom only 33 percent have an immediate family tie to the military.[2] The familiarity gap poses challenges for understanding military service among civilians, or what has been deemed "military cultural competency." This term can cover a multitude of areas in which there is a lack of mutual understanding of what the military lifestyle entails, ranging from the ability of doctors to effectively treat military patients to understanding the seniority of certain ranks or specific military occupational specialties.

> **The civil-military divide is characterized by a widening geographic, demographic, cultural, and social gap between the nation and those who serve in the all-volunteer military.**

A parallel concept is "civilian cultural competency," or the idea that service members may lack complete understanding of what a certain post-military job requires, or how a civilian organization works. These are not necessarily equal, as the 0.4 percent of the nation that serves in the active-duty military, plus their families, inevitably interact with society. However, this divide may contribute to difficulty veterans feel when reintegrating into civilian life, with 44 percent of post-9/11 veterans acknowledging difficulty reintegrating after leaving service, as compared to only 25 percent of pre-9/11 veterans.[3] Despite the heavy engagement of the military in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past 15 years, there was no significant increase in the size of the armed forces, certainly nothing on the scale of past major wars. Instead, policymakers repeatedly deployed the same units, extended deployments and service contracts, and leaned heavily on the Guard and Reserve to continue supporting these missions. The impact of such policies may contribute to the increasing levels of isolation felt by the post-9/11 cohort of service members and their families, who have reported feeling disconnected from civilian life.[4]

FIGURE 1
U.S., Veteran, and Military Populations, 1865–2015[87]

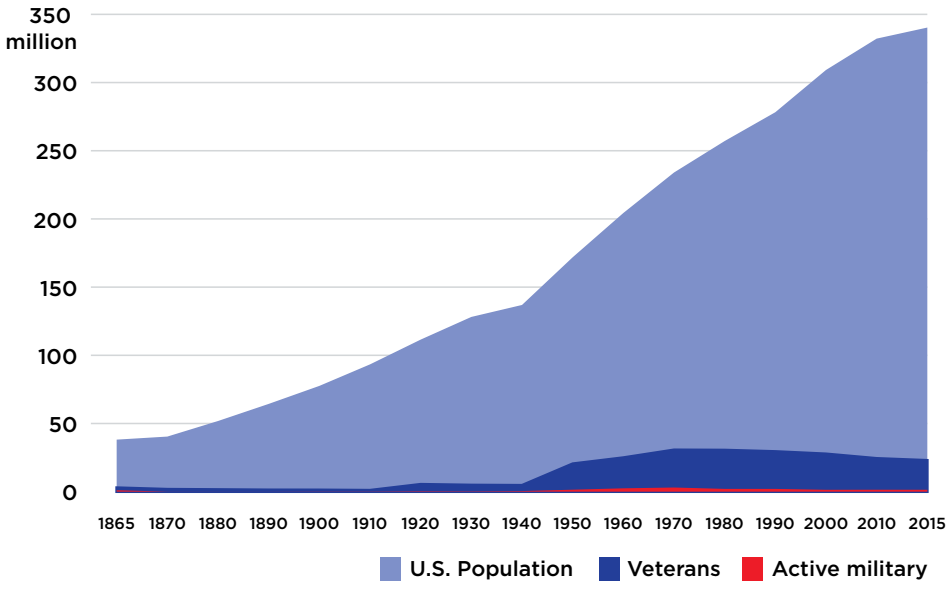
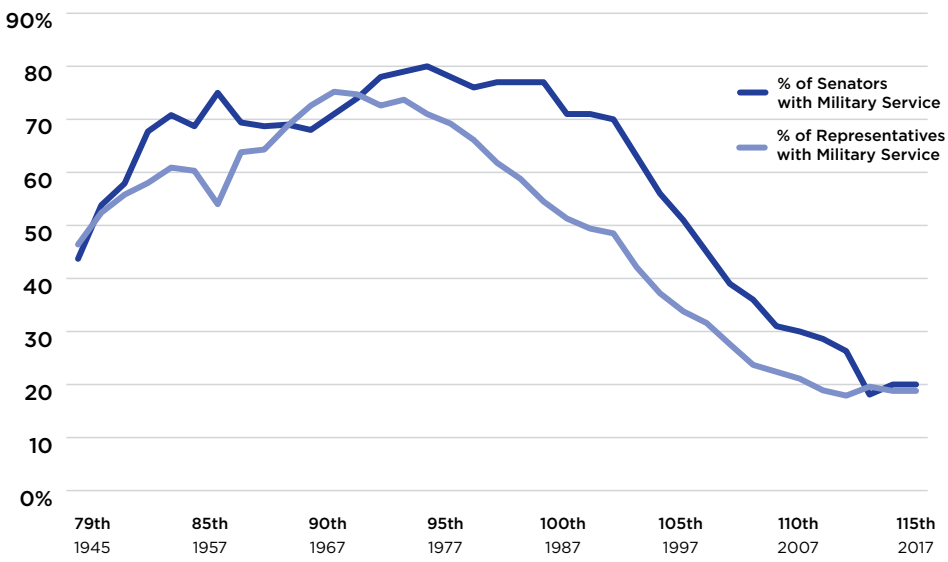


FIGURE 2
Percentage of Veterans in the House and Senate, 79th Congress–115th Congress (1945–2017)[83]



This divide is also reflected in Congress. Veteran representation in Congress has declined from a high of 75.2 percent of Senators in the 90th Congress (1967–69) and 80 percent of U.S. Representatives in the 94th Congress (1975–77) to the current representation of 18 percent in the Senate and 20 percent in the House of Representatives.[5] (See Figure 2). The demographic trends described above account for much of this decline. However, the net effect has been the elimination of veterans from the national political leadership class, as well as the elimination of visible representatives of the veteran population on the national stage. The decline of veterans in national politics deepens the civil-military divide, and also means fewer veterans will themselves shape legislation and policy affecting veterans.

In addition to their congressional representation, veterans may be represented among the business elite in the leadership of Fortune 500 companies, reflecting the leadership skills imbued by military service. A 2005 report produced by Korn Ferry found that male officers in particular were overrepresented among chief executive officers of Fortune 500 companies, 8.4 percent, as compared to their representation in the population writ large, only 3 percent.[6] Yet despite this overrepresentation, the percentage of veterans in these roles has declined over time, similarly to congressional representation and likely reflective of the shift from conscription to an all-volunteer force. The National Bureau of Economic Research in 2014 found that while in 1980 60 percent of CEOs of large, publicly held corporations had served in the military, in 2014 that had shrunk to 6.2 percent.[7] Military leadership at such prominent companies may have a positive impact on the view of veterans as business assets, though the preponderance of these leaders are former male officers, a small percentage of those transitioning out of service.

Portrayal of military service in the media also has evolved over time. The military has become the most lionized and trusted organization in the United States, but fewer Americans are familiar with it. Dual accounts of service members as either heroic or broken contribute to the sense of "other"-ness felt both by those who serve and the population writ large, who may struggle to identify or connect with veterans due to these disparate descriptions. The phenomenon may be enhanced by the concentration of popular narratives on the exploits of a few elite communities within the military – special operations and aviation in particular – that do not reflect the general experience of the typical enlisted service member or officer.[8] The idea that "veterans are people, too" is often lost in the mainstream or popular media, limiting areas where veterans and society may be able to find common ground and the range of emotions and experiences veterans may have, from diversity of political leanings to military experience.

The divide also becomes self-perpetuating, as veterans and service members are key influencers for future service. Those most likely to be exposed to key influencers are military family members and those stationed near military installations, promoting a level of homogeneity in service members. This presents an obstacle to achieving greater levels of diversity in the armed forces, as well as posing a challenge for ensuring future recruiting pipelines remain robust. Youth propensity to enlist has declined over time. The enlisted corps has faced a downward trend in the number of applications received over time, which, if combined with a drop in the quality of applications,[9] could cause the force to face a recruiting crisis in which either goals cannot be met or quality standards must be relaxed to hit the requisite targets.[10] The lack of diversity and the civil-military divide can be characterized across three main measures: geography, demography, and socioeconomics.

Demography

The familial connection to service also presents challenges and perpetuates the civil-military divide, as a family history of service may perpetuate that sense of "other"-ness among those serving. Demographically, there is a divide between enlisted personnel, who comprise 82.3 percent of the force, and officers, who comprise 17.7 percent.[11] The enlisted corps is slightly more racially diverse than the population writ large, and has more minority representation than the officer corps. Of the reported racial minorities in the armed forces, 87.1 percent are enlisted and 12.9 percent are officers. 77.2 percent of active-duty officers are white, while 66.8 percent of enlisted personnel are white. The Census Bureau estimates that as of July 1, 2015, 77.1 percent of the country is white. Thus, while enlisted personnel are more racially diverse than the overall population, the officer corps largely aligns with the population in terms of racial diversity. The veteran population is less diverse than the active-duty force, with 18 million, or approximately 82 percent of the veteran population reported as white.

There is also a gender divide in the force, with women representing 15.5 percent of the active-duty force, and varying from 7.7 percent of the Marine Corps to nearly 19.1 percent of the Air Force.[12] Though females' representation in the active-duty force has been increasing over time, they represent only 2 million of the nearly 22.3 million veterans in America, or only 9 percent. By contrast, women represent 50.8 percent of the U.S. population.[13]

The age of the active-duty force is also younger than the general population, with approximately 60 percent of all active-duty members falling between the ages of 18 and 30. The veteran population is much older on average, with the largest sample in the 60–74 age range. The U.S. population is at a relatively even distribution, with adults 35–54 comprising 26 percent of the population.[14] This, coupled with the relative size of each generational cohort of veterans, accounts for a significant part of the civil-military divide. The civil-military age gap means that most Americans have a grandparent or great uncle who served in the military; fewer have a parent, uncle, or aunt who served; and very few Americans below the age of 40 have a contemporary who has served, or is serving, in the military.

FIGURE 3
Service Members and Veterans by Ethnicity[84]

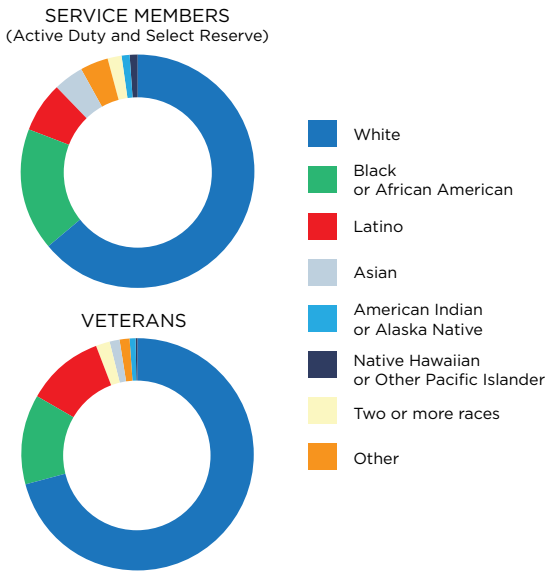


FIGURE 4
Service Members and Veterans by Gender[85]

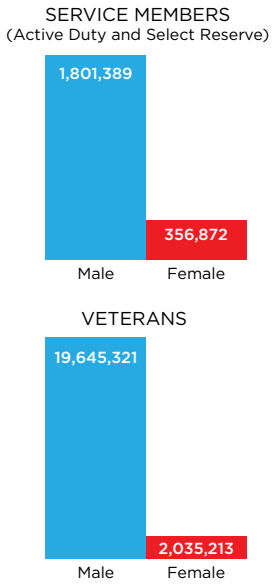
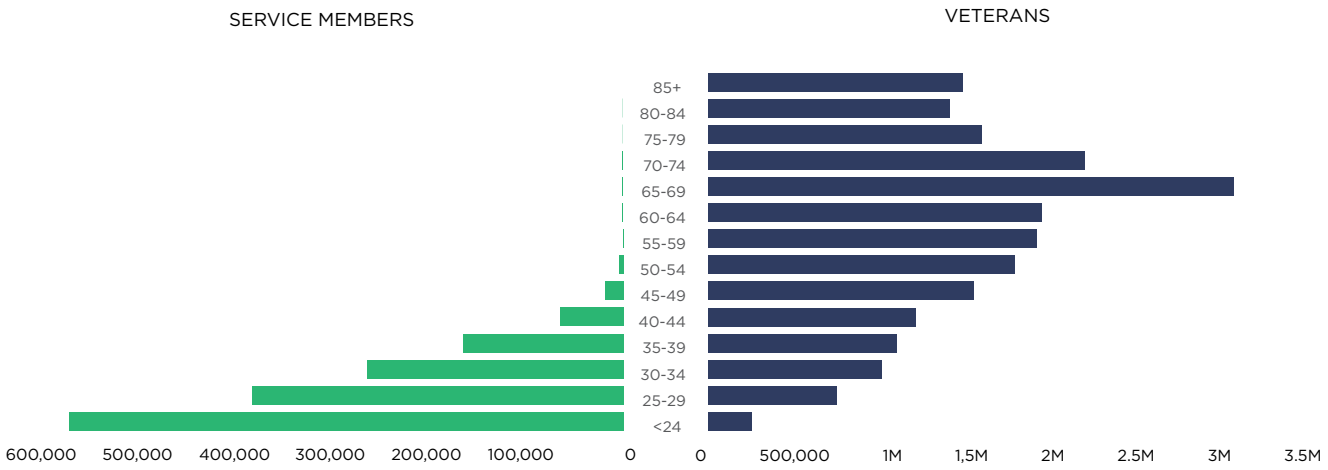


FIGURE 5
Service Members and Veterans by Age[86]

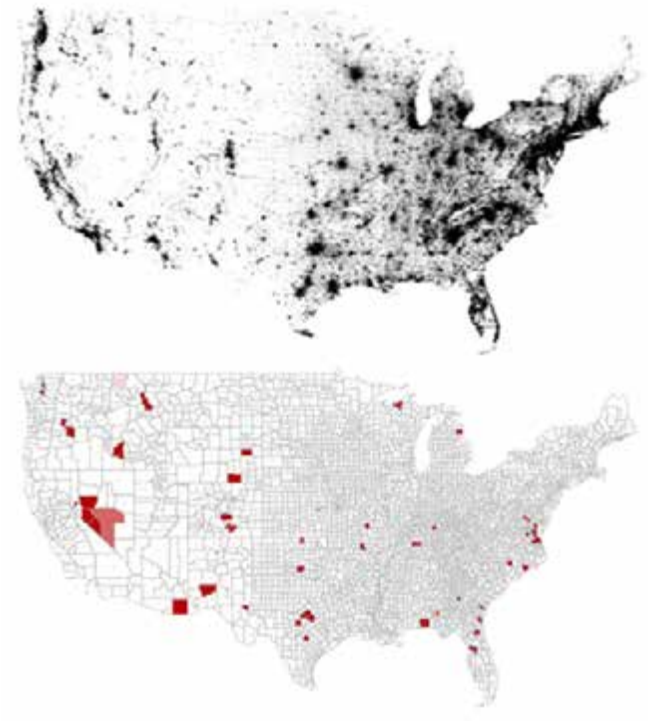


The civil-military age gap means that most Americans have a grandparent or great uncle who served in the military; fewer have a parent, uncle, or aunt who served; and very few Americans below the age of 40 have a contemporary who has served, or is serving, in the military.

Geography

Not only do the demographics of the force not reflect society at large, but the geographic dispersion of recruits, active-duty military, and veterans does not perfectly mirror society. The largest and densest populations in the United States exist on the coastlines and around major cities. By contrast, the largest active-duty populations live, for the most part, outside of major population centers, in places such as Fort Hood, Texas, or Jacksonville, North Carolina. This is by design: Large military formations need large training areas that cannot easily coexist with large, growing cities. Where large military populations do overlap with populated areas, they tend to do so by geographic coincidence, such as San Diego, where the presence of a large Southern Californian port is advantageous for both commercial and military reasons. The veteran population is further distinct from the national population and active military population, with its own dispersal pattern. Because of their age and demographics, the largest veteran populations today exist in retirement locations such as Southern California, Arizona, Texas, and Florida. However, the densest veteran populations exist in those places and around active military installations, likely driven by the availability of military jobs for working-age veterans, and access to base resources for military retirees.

FIGURE 6
Densest Areas of US Population (Per Capita) versus the 50 Densest County Veteran Populations (Per Capita)[88]



87 percent of the active-duty force is stationed in the United States, and of those, half reside in only five states: California, Virginia, Texas, North Carolina, and Georgia. Similarly, there are a disproportionate number of recruits from the South and West, who may choose to move home after military service if not gravitating to a military installation.

The geographic distribution of veterans across the United States, particularly when examining veterans under the age of 25, shows a strong concentration in rural areas and areas with a large active-duty military presence, such as Virginia and South Carolina, rather than clustering around large metropolitan areas like their civilian peers.[15]

If veterans are considered to be a key constituency with the opportunity to bridge the civil-military divide, then the geographic gaps between veteran and nonveteran populations present a problem because the two populations are not actually mixing or interacting.

There likely are numerous factors contributing to the dynamic of geographic dispersion, including job opportunities and social networks; however, what geographic separation between civilian and veteran populations amounts to in practice is a physical divide, in addition to any cultural divides that exist. If veterans are considered to be a key constituency with the opportunity to bridge the civil-military divide, then the geographic gaps between veteran and nonveteran populations present a problem because the two populations are not actually mixing or interacting. If these demographic trends continue, they will exacerbate the divide over time.

Socioeconomic & Education Levels

Socioeconomically, the military defies stereotypes that it is for the poor or those who could not find other options. Those who join the military by and large are members of the middle class,[16] with some contributing factors including the educational and health standards required to join, as well as traditions of service in areas that are middle class. Both the top quintile and the bottom quintile of the population are underrepresented in military accessions. The middle three quintiles of neighborhood affluence – $36,875–47,195; $47,196–56,635; and $58,636–76,980 – are overrepresented in the military services when compared to the civilian averages. Those making less than $36,874 and more than $76,981 are underrepresented when compared to civilian averages.[17]

This socioeconomic divide reflects several factors. Military entrance criteria affect the composition of recruit cohorts the most. Health, education, drug use, criminal justice, and security clearance criteria all contribute to a narrowing of the funnel for potential recruits. The narrowing of potential recruits disproportionately excludes poor and working-class Americans who do not meet the entrance standards for military service. Self-selection and family dynamics also a play a role; the presence of an immediate or proximate family member with military service exerts an extremely strong effect on the propensity of youth to serve. Finally, like other employment decisions, economics and competition play a role in determining recruit choice; the upper quintile of American youth generally choose higher education or other paths over military service, notwithstanding prominent exceptions who attend service academies, participate in ROTC at top universities, or enlist for patriotism or adventure.[18]

Education levels in the military vary between enlisted personnel and the officer corps. Officers are required to have an undergraduate degree to commission, and many (41.5 percent) have an advanced degree – almost a prerequisite for promotion in the upper ranks of the officer corps.[19] The entry requirements for enlisted personnel – a high school diploma or GED equivalent – drive a different educational profile. A small portion of enlisted personnel, 6.6 percent, hold a bachelor's degree, and 1 percent hold an advanced degree. Examining the military as a whole, 76.5 percent of all active-duty service members hold a high-school diploma, 12.9 percent have a bachelor's degree, and 8.2 percent have an advanced degree.

Comparing the veteran population with the civilian population, veterans are more likely than civilians to have completed some college, less likely to have a bachelor's degree, but more likely to hold an advanced degree.[20] 36 percent of veterans hold a high school diploma or equivalent, 30 percent have a bachelor's degree, 26 percent have an advanced degree, and 8 percent are unknown or have not attained a high school diploma or equivalent.[21] (These figures are cumulative; meaning that 92 percent have a high school diploma.) For the U.S. population, 86.7 percent of those 25 or older hold at least a high school diploma or equivalent educational credential, and 29.8 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher.[22] The bifurcation within the military between those without a bachelor's degree and those with advanced degrees likely represents a division between enlistees and officers respectively. However, the higher proportion of bachelors degrees among veterans reflects the availability of benefits like the post-9/11 GI Bill, which funds higher education for veterans after service.

Education is a key predictor of future economic success. Consequently, veterans – particularly prior enlisted veterans – may face obstacles during transition that require additional educational attainment.

The civil-military divide itself may be a significant root cause of many transition challenges, to the extent that it causes a lack of knowledge, familiarity, and interaction.

The Effects of the Civil-Military Divide on Veteran Transition

The social, demographic, geographic, political, and economic components of the civil-military divide exert powerful forces on the composition of the military. These forces are particularly powerful because of the voluntary nature of military service. For more than 40 years, self-selection has shaped the military population, as well as the populations of veterans and military families, to the extent these are directly linked. The All-Volunteer Force has existed for long enough that nearly all veterans currently in the workforce are, in fact, post-conscription veterans. Indeed, the last draftees (who would have turned 18 in 1972) will turn 63 this year, meaning that the entire conscription experience has largely vanished from the civilian workforce as well. Although many veterans and nonveterans alike may remember a period when military service was more prevalent in the workplace, the reality is that it has been on the decline since the 1970s, and will continue to decline as the national population grows while the military population remains relatively constant.

This civil-military divide shapes the transition issues faced by veterans when they leave the service and enter the workforce. Previous CNAS research focused on understanding employer attitudes toward veterans in the workforce,[23] or understanding the retention and job performance of veterans once in the workforce.[24] This research identified a number of challenges facing employers and veterans alike as they manage the transition process. However, this research also uncovered a deeper issue: *that the civil-military divide itself may be a significant root cause of many transition challenges*, to the extent that it causes a lack of knowledge, familiarity, and interaction between these communities, resulting in friction when veterans first engage with the employment market and with employers.

This section groups the effects of the civil-military divide into three categories: effects upon society, effects upon employers, and effects upon veterans. Each of these categories necessarily overlaps, with some arbitrariness as to the categories. However, the groupings assist in understanding the impacts of the divide, as well as potential recommendations for its closure or amelioration.

Society

GEOGRAPHIC ISOLATION

The geographic element of the civil-military divide is its most important element, because it reduces interpersonal contact between military personnel and the broader population they serve, creating much of the social and cultural distance between these populations. Separation between the two groups begins with accession trends, and continues to manifest itself among veterans. The past three decades have seen recruitment of enlisted personnel begin to draw more heavily from Southern and Western states than from the Northeast and Midwest. The "Sunbelt" population has accounted for an increasingly large portion of U.S. inhabitants, yet this region's per capita recruit contribution remains higher than other populous areas.[25]

Basing decisions follow the same high-interest, low-cost model, hindering public understanding through geographic isolation. The Army has closed facilities in the Northeast and West Coast, concentrating service members on larger bases in the Southeast, Midwest, and West.[26] These locations offer ample space to consolidate resources, but this trend has hindered the general public's ability to interact with service members. Active military personnel number at just under 1.3 million,[27] 1.1 million of whom live on military installations.[28] Bases are not only isolated, but security measures ensure that public access is limited. Service members and their families may find many, if not all needs met by military facilities: The commissary, exchange, schools, recreation centers, and hospitals provide cheap and convenient services within the boundaries of a base. They are, in many respects, the nation's most exclusive gated communities.[29]

The disparities between veteran and nonveteran locations correspond to a gap in employment opportunities. The densest clusters of veterans, by county, do not always align with the densest U.S. populations, or with areas where many employment opportunities concentrate. Part of this phenomenon may be a function of age and that veterans retire into communities near bases, yet the lack of overlap is significant. Many bases are located along the heavily populated coastlines, but a significant number are set well within the rural American heartland.[30] California, as the most populous state and largest economy in the United States, is underrepresented in per capita accessions, and lacks a county ranking in the top 50 of veteran density.[31] That veterans do not congregate in the same physical spaces as nonveterans indicates that this population exists apart from the same employment opportunities as civilian peers.

FAMILIARITY GAP

The physical component of the civil-military gap described above produces a familiarity gap across society that affects veterans when they transition from service. This lack of basic familiarity stemming from civil and military cohorts is the second element of the divide's impact on veteran's employment. Public attitudes toward the military reinforce the disconnect between these groups and define the scope of this familiarity. Most Americans are proud of the troops who served in Afghanistan and Iraq, and feel that the military and their families have made sacrifices in the years since 9/11. Yet most also report a lack of understanding the problems facing those who serve, don't wish to reinstate the draft, and are comfortable with maintaining an all-volunteer force.[32] The self-selective nature of the military has resulted in half of all Americans reporting the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have had little or no impact on everyday lives.[33]

The geographic element of the civil-military divide is its most important element, because it reduces interpersonal contact between military personnel and the broader population they serve.

The absence of familiarity becomes a veteran employment issue when service members transition to the civilian workforce. Most Americans believe that veterans are more likely than civilians to suffer from mental health problems,[34] while about half of veterans from one study reported that colleagues make negative assumptions about their military experience or political beliefs.[35] These views, left unchallenged, do little to bridge the civil-military divide, and allow employers to perpetuate conceptions of veterans, as employees, that are not based on a foundation of familiarity.

From a civilian perspective, there's not only a familiarity gap, but also confusion as to the role civilians play. For every well-meaning "thank you for your service" gesture or statement, there seems to be a divided response among the military population as to whether

it helps or hinders.[36] To a certain extent, it becomes difficult for civilians who want to give back to the military population to "win," trying to straddle the gulf between cultures and recognize service in a way that is respectful. 71 percent of civilians say that "the public does not understand the problems faced by those in the military or their families,"[37] and while many feel pride and trust in the military, less than 60 percent follow through on those feelings with any actions to help a member of the military community.[38] Despite the respect for military service among the public, 70 percent say that the sacrifices are "just part of being in the military," highlighting how the perceptions of the All-Volunteer Force may contribute to a lack of initiative or obligation to connect with or help the military community among the broader public.

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PERCEPTIONS OF VETERANS

Employers who lack everyday contact with the military or with veterans, and who are less likely to have a familial connection, are left with little insight into this pool of potential employees. They must form impressions of service members from news stories, the entertainment industry, and ubiquitous events honoring the military. The resulting narrative is one that portrays service members and veterans as heroes, victims, or both. Employers may find themselves motivated to hire veterans out of pity, rather than understanding the value these employees bring to an organization. Well-intentioned yet ill-informed hiring practices do not solve the underlying problem of unfamiliarity between employers and veterans, and ensure an inability to communicate in the workplace.

These perceptions are played out in a society that some in the military feel is largely unaware of the sacrifices involved with serving, even as service members and veterans often are singled out in public displays of gratitude. General John Kelly, now Secretary of Homeland Security, has spoken out against what he saw as the country's absent commitment to supporting few men and women who choose to serve.[39] Admiral Michael Mullen echoed this thought, writing of his concern that the American public will one day wake up to an unknown all-volunteer force.[40] General Stanley McChrystal has commented forcefully on the civil-military divide as well, arguing for the establishment of a national service option to reconnect society with service (in all forms). However, even as these leaders eloquently address the civil-military divide, it grows.

Men and women in uniform today are received with more public support than those of the Vietnam War, yet this doesn't indicate healthy civil-military relations. Military-civilian interactions are sometimes underwritten by guilt, aided by the indifference many Americans feel toward the military. Troops have reported feeling pity from the public they serve,[41] a public that admits it doesn't understand the problems faced by those in uniform. This trend has implications on how the military perceives itself: Some troops have expressed the belief that they adhere to a superior set of standards than American society.[42] Both attitudes (pity from the public, a sense of superiority from the military) risk increasing the civil-military divide and do not set the stage for mutual understanding in the realm of veteran employment.

Geographic isolation, lack of familiarity, and reliance on simplistic veteran portrayals limit employer estimation of those in uniform and will continue to perpetuate the effect of the civil-military divide on veteran employment prospects. Employers who feel sorry for veterans, and allow this to motivate hiring practices, perpetuate the same incomplete perception of veterans as those who believe that those who served are more likely to have mental health problems. The youngest veteran cohort, those who served in the years following 9/11, have a slightly higher unemployment rate (6.6 percent) compared to nonveteran peers (4.8 percent).[43] It is difficult to separate the effect the civil-military divide has on these numbers, yet a lack of understanding between each group undoubtedly will have repercussions on veteran transitions and employment.

Both attitudes (pity from the public, a sense of superiority from the military) risk increasing the civil-military divide and do not set the stage for mutual understanding in the realm of veteran employment.

Employers

Within society, the civil-military divide also specifically affects employers in several ways that have consequences for transitioning veterans. The narrative for hiring veterans has changed significantly from the Vietnam era to the post-9/11 era, evolving from an act of charity to a business case for hiring and empowering veterans.[44] Yet employers may still find that they lack the understanding, tools, or resources to adequately hire, develop, manage, and retain their veteran workforce. Much of this understanding gap reflects, directly or indirectly, America's civil-military divide.

DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS IN THE WORKFORCE

As of 2016, there were approximately 29 million businesses in the United States, employing 56.9 million (48 percent) of the approximate 118 million individuals employed by the private sector.[45] By comparison, the public sector (federal, state, and local governments) employs approximately 22.6 million individuals.[46] There are approximately 10.1 million veterans in the workforce,[47] comprising approximately 8.5 percent of the total.[48]

Given the general disconnection from the active-duty military, employers are challenged by a lack of familiarity with military service. While there has been significant growth in the general understanding of the value veterans bring to employers,[49] there is still a lack of specific knowledge on precisely which military skillsets translate to the private sector. Underlying this is a significant demographic shift in the workforce. Members of the large Cold War– and Vietnam-era cohorts are aging out of the workforce; most Vietnam veterans are already 65 or older.[50] The smaller post–Cold War and post-9/11 military means a smaller veteran population, dispersed more throughout an ever-larger civilian workforce. Employers thus are facing the challenge of garnering understanding and tailoring practices, processes, and programs for an ever-smaller minority of their employees.

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As a significant subset of employers, small businesses face unique challenges and opportunities in veteran employment. Small business comprises 99.7 percent of employer firms, accounting for 48 percent of all private sector employment.[51] Given the relative impact a small number of employees can make in a small business, as well as the limited manpower resources available with limited staff, the needs of a small number of veteran employees can be overlooked. Small businesses also wrestle with how best to support employees in the National Guard and Reserves, given the toll that military absences can take on small businesses, which have less ability to easily absorb an employee absence, let alone provide differential pay or other benefits during a reserve mobilization.

Several challenges and opportunities remain for employers. Key roadblocks include a lack of familiarity with veterans, which can contribute to underemployment and retention issues if veterans are not hired into the right role. There are also challenges with Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) compliance and support to reservists in the workforce, particularly for small businesses. Employers also have several opportunities to ameliorate issues with proactive steps to narrow the gap and empower both veterans and civilians.

Lack of Familiarity

As the number of veterans in the workforce decreases over time (a function of a smaller force and the older veterans' mortality rates), businesses will naturally have less exposure to the military and veterans. Employers thus will have less exposure to the specific needs of veterans in the workplace. Unfamiliarity with military culture and veteran issues may lead to challenges in initial job placement, underemployment, and retention.

Initial Job Placement

Lack of familiarity with the military may lead to problems at the point of hiring. Poor initial placement may be an unfortunate negative externality of worthwhile efforts to hire veterans; as companies make a concerted effort to hire more veterans, they may not account for proper fit. In a 2016 survey of supervisors and managers in large corporations, 83 percent of respondents indicated that their company has goals for hiring veterans.[52] Additionally, as a result of the civil-military divide, employers may not know how to adequately account for both the hard and soft skills that veterans bring to the workplace.

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In the post-9/11 era, significant efforts have been made to close the gap in civil-military relations for employers hiring veterans. The two most prevalent initiatives include skills translators and cultural competency training, with mixed results on success.

Skills Translators. Recognizing the gaps both employers and veterans face in translating military skill sets to the civilian hiring process, organizations and agencies from the White House and the VA to veteran service organizations and large corporations have developed "skills translators."[53] While skills translators can serve a useful role, particularly for technically-oriented jobs, they may unintentionally lead employers to overlook less tangible skills that veterans offer, such as engagement skills or leadership.[54] Poor skills translation can, in turn, contribute to underemployment among veterans whose expertise or experience does not translate fully or easily to civilian employment. Further, the landscape is replete with well-intentioned attempts at providing skills translators.

Cultural Competency Training. Veterans comprise a small portion of the workforce with a unique vocabulary and background. Efforts in the mental health community, providing military cultural competency training, have yielded some positive results[55] and some efforts to tie in the business community; however, this has not yet become prevalent among employers. Providing military cultural competency training to attempt to familiarize civilians with military experiences may prove fruitful, but also could prove difficult to scale given the ratio of civilians to veterans. There is also risk that such training conveys the wrong message about veterans, contributing to their "otherness," further deepening the civil-military divide.

Underemployment

Underemployment is a complex issue that can be challenging to fully capture. The Department of Labor tracks an explicit, visible measure of underemployment, defined as the total number of individuals employed part-time who would prefer full-time employment but are limited due to economic factors.[56] Yet this measure does not fully capture the nature of underemployment that veterans experience, in which individuals are employed full-time, but not at a level commensurate with their skills, experience, or abilities.[57]

While underemployment is typically framed as a challenge for the employee, it also has profound effects from the perspective of business. Underemployed veterans are more likely to leave a job for a better opportunity, driving down retention. Underemployment also represents a missed opportunity for business, to the extent that firms waste the expertise or experience of veterans who are underemployed.

Retention

Retention issues directly impact companies' bottom lines. The average cost-per-hire for companies is $4,129, and, on average, it takes 42 days to fill an empty position.[58] The costs associated with turnover include advertising, interviewing, screening, hiring, onboarding, and training a new employee. Additionally, intangible costs mount with employee turnover; the potential for lost productivity is high, as it can take a new employee upwards of two years to attain the level of performance of their predecessor.[59]

Efforts to retain veterans include affinity groups and mentorship programs. In a 2016 CNAS survey of hiring managers and supervisors at a variety of private sector firms,[60] 79 percent offered veteran affinity groups, and 73 percent offered veteran mentorship programs. However, the overwhelming majority of survey respondents (83.3 percent) worked for large corporations with more than 1,000 employees. Such resources may not be replicable in smaller companies. As the number of veterans in the workforce decreases over time, affinity groups and mentorship programs may become even more important in assisting veterans new to the civilian workforce to close the divide.

Underemployment represents a missed opportunity for business, to the extent that firms waste the expertise or experience of veterans who are underemployed.

OTHER CHALLENGES

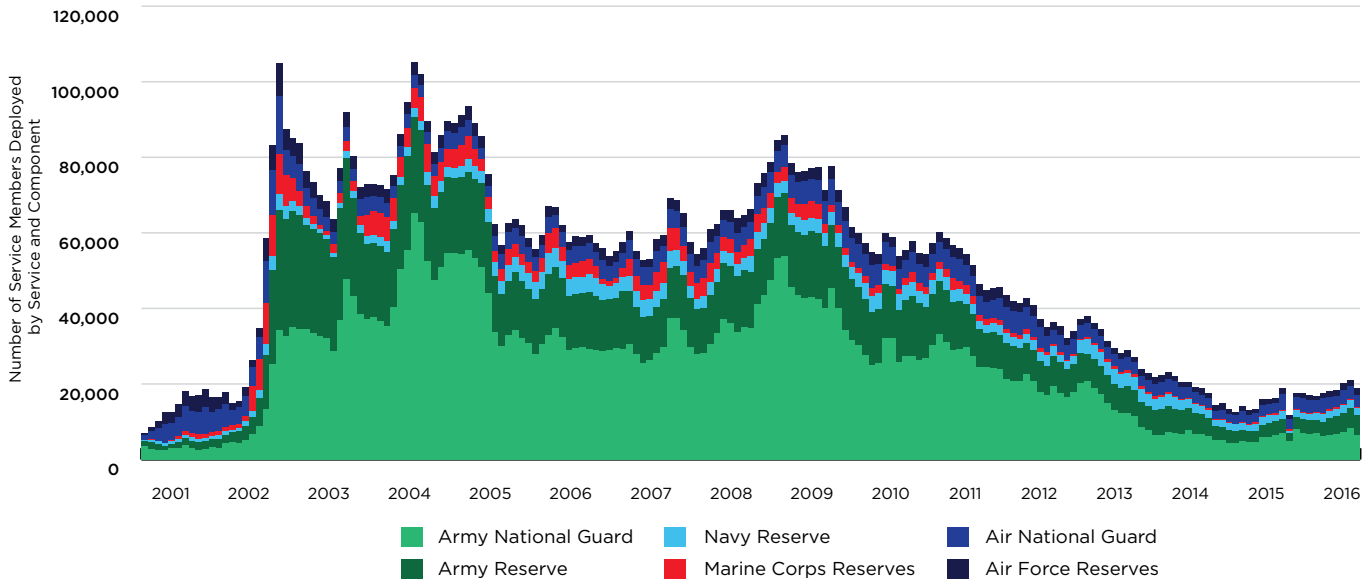
Supporting Reservists

The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA), passed in 1994, protects service members' rights in the workforce, focusing primarily on members of the reserve component and the issues they encounter juggling military service with civilian work, particularly for mobilizations like those that have been so prevalent since 9/11. The intent of the act is to protect both service members and their employers. Service members are guaranteed reemployment upon return from military service, as well as certain rights with respect to their employee benefits and family benefits during and after mobilization. Employers have the right to advance notification of military service, to the extent possible, and an expectation that service members will return to their employer in a "timely manner."[61]

It is important to note that between the time USERRA was developed and today, National Guard and Reserve utilization has changed in character and quantity. In the post-9/11 era, Guard and Reserve forces moved from a strategic reserve (in which reservists were only called upon for major contingency operations) to an operational reserve (in which reservists were routinely built into the deployment rotation). The possibility of deployment was low during the age of the strategic reserve. Since 9/11, roughly one-third of all deployed personnel have come from the reserve components, more than 900,000 personnel out of 2.8 million.[62] Accordingly, employers face many burdens and costs associated with support for reservists, including the recruitment of replacements and benefits for service members in their absence.[63]

While USERRA serves as a function in protecting individual employees, it also serves a distinct purpose in civil-military relations. The intent of the act is to "encourage noncareer service in the uniformed services by eliminating or minimizing the disadvantages to civilian careers and employment which can result from such service."[64] As noted in prior CNAS research, "USERRA currently protects some guardsmen and reservists while harming the employment prospects of many more by failing to address companies' concerns about employing veterans with ongoing commitment to the reserve component."[65] Small businesses in particular may face unique challenges in USERRA compliance. Approximately 42 percent of enterprises employ between one to four individuals; nearly 67 percent of enterprises employ 20 or fewer individuals.[66] However, neither the USERRA statute, nor its companion consumer protection statute (the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act) have been meaningfully amended since 9/11 to address the needs of active and reserve service members serving with a greater operational tempo. This, coupled with the familiarity gap and other elements of the civil-military divide, creates challenges for employers who are not entirely sure how to best support their employees who may be fresh off active duty or still serving in the reserves.

FIGURE 7
Total Deployed by Reserve Component, 2001-2016[89]



Potential Resentment Over Hiring Preference

While difficult to capture, some reports have indicated growing resentment toward veteran preference policies. In the federal government, one in three hires is a veteran, based on the powerful veteran hiring preference that exists for the federal workforce. This powerful preference has come under fire by a diverse array of voices, who assert that it is too strong relative to other diversity preferences, or that it frustrates hiring managers who want to hire the best possible candidates.[67] The preference also has been identified with gender disparity within the federal workforce, driven by the fact that the veteran preference disproportionately benefits men because of their proportion in the veteran population.[68] For now, the veteran preference appears likely to remain in place across the federal government, with efforts to modify it stymied in Congress by veteran organizations who argue it is still necessary to combat anti-veteran sentiment and reward veterans for service. However, these tensions reportedly have also surfaced in the private sector, where veteran hiring programs exist alongside other diversity hiring programs and must compete within companies for corporate resources and attention. In the absence of hard performance data supporting the value proposition of hiring veterans, veteran hiring programs may be vulnerable in both the public and private sectors.

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Veterans

The civil-military divide affects veterans as they enter and navigate the job market as well. For the great majority of transitioning veterans – enlisted personnel who entered the service shortly after high school graduation – the military represents the most significant professional experience of their lives. For however long they served in uniform, military personnel lived and worked in the nation's most exclusive gated communities, participating in a workforce with its own compensation structure, jargon, uniforms, human resources systems, and unique work conditions.[69] However, when they transition (and all will do so at some point, whether after four years or 30 years), these veterans must compete in a civilian labor market that operates very differently from the military. To succeed, veterans must translate their expertise and experience into civilian terms, acquire educational or other credentials, establish professional networks, and above all else, manage their own careers and expectations in a free market. This transition process can involve a great deal of friction and often lasts significantly longer than the jump from active service to the first job or educational institution after service.[70]

Employment has proven to be a critical factor for overall veteran wellness, yet many veterans do not feel adequately prepared to competitively enter the private sector after attending the government-run transition programs. Consequently, many veterans reach the labor market unprepared for what lies ahead, and with the burden shifting to the private nonprofit sector to help veterans succeed in their post-service pursuits. In response, the private and nonprofit sectors have launched a number of initiatives to encourage hiring veterans, both making the business case and emphasizing the broader moral obligation to the men and women who have chosen to serve. These, coupled with overall improvements in the economy, have greatly improved the situation for transitioning veterans over the past several years. However, the military's very structure and insularity continue to create challenges for veterans as they leave the service, in ways described more fully below.

A CIVILIAN EMPLOYMENT SKILLS GAP

Much ink has been spilled describing the "skills translation" problem facing transitioning service members. If only they could translate their incredible military skills and experiences into civilian terms, they would succeed, or so goes the conventional wisdom.

However, the translation of those hard skills constitutes just one part of the transition process for new veterans. They also must acquire a broader set of soft skills relating to personal networking, job searching, salary negotiation, and workplace interactions. Learning these soft skills may, in fact, be more consequential for their long-term economic performance than translating hard skills. However, it can be difficult to learn soft skills quickly, or through the kinds of transition classes offered by the Department of Defense; they typically develop more slowly, on the job or in institutions of higher education.

Low Civilian Skills

The calcified personnel system at the heart of the AVF treats individuals as cogs in the machine, ensuring interchangeability at the expense of nearly everything else. One consequence of the antiquated assignment and training system is that service members do not apply or interview for jobs, two crucial skills for transitioning out of the military and into civilian employment.[71] Though many service members may have skills that apply directly or indirectly to a civilian job, translating these skills from their military-specific titles to more readily understandable civilian parallels can prove daunting. Furthermore, some of the experiences that contribute to valued skills, such as leadership or the ability to function well under pressure, come directly from military experiences that may be hard to summarize on a résumé or to explain in a civilian-friendly way.

There may be a parallel to "military cultural competency" in the idea of "civilian cultural competency" – that there is a certain vocabulary and culture to civilian life with which veterans may not be familiar. As discussed previously, the idea of "skills translation" from military roles to comparable civilian experience is an area in which employers should be actively engaged to best leverage veteran talent. It is also important, however, for veterans to proactively recognize the various skills they have acquired via military service, whether technical expertise or "soft skills" such as leadership and management.

The military assignment system mostly functions without applications or interviews, and, as a consequence, many veterans have little to no experience interviewing for a job.

Similarly, interviewing is a skill that most in the workforce practice repeatedly over the course of their careers. By contrast, the military assignment system mostly functions without applications or interviews, and, as a consequence, many veterans have little to no experience interviewing for a job. Though certainly a skill that can and should be learned, it's unfortunate that "learning by doing" in this case may cost veterans good opportunities. In addition to inexperience, the civil-military divide also likely manifests itself in the interview experience, particularly in small businesses or opportunities outside of the South and Midwest, where military service is most common.

Finally, there are several instances where military experience directly translates to civilian skills, but the requisite licensing or credentialing required to legally perform such roles slows the veteran transition and precludes an easy transition to the civilian sector. In areas such as truck driving and nursing, individual state licensing and other barriers prevent what otherwise would be a smooth transition into a parallel civilian workforce.

ALIENATION AND THE FEELING OF "OTHER"-NESS

One trend that has emerged among veterans is a sense of "other"-ness, which may manifest as entitlement or superiority due to their veteran status or a desire to hide their military service. Though there are many factors that may contribute to such a phenomenon, including the physical and educational standards required for recruitment, the experience of service (particularly during wartime), and the familiarity gap of the civil-military divide, feeling "other" may work against future success in the civilian sector. The inability of veterans to relate to civilians – and vice-versa – and perceived awkwardness or stigma may contribute to the one in four veterans who avoid drawing attention to their military service.[72] Though many veterans may feel this is necessary, it may make breaking down stereotypes more difficult as neither civilians nor veterans are able to "bridge the gap." This separation may make it more difficult to integrate into a civilian workplace or, in the case of entitlement, lead to misalignment of expectations for initial post-transition opportunities.

EXPECTATIONS AND UNDEREMPLOYMENT

There exists a fundamental disconnect between what veterans expect of employment and what employers expect of veterans. Veterans, for their part, have been shaped by the experience of their service. They selected military service over other employment or educational operations; many elected to continue their military service after their first enlistment. During service, veterans found themselves on a team contributing to a cause greater than themselves; many found deep meaning in that *raison d'etre*.[73] This sense of purpose matters greatly to service members and veterans; it shows up in surveys as a dominant reason why many continue their service, and also among veterans as a dominant reason why many continue to serve their communities.[74] However, this ethic of service and purpose may clash somewhat with the dominant purposes of employers and the private sector broadly. Learning to manage this tension is an important part of the transition process. A significant number of veterans reconcile this tension by returning to public service for employment, either with government or the nonprofit sector. Many other veterans succeed by finding outlets for continued public service alongside their employment, such as participation in groups like The Mission Continues, Team Rubicon, or Team RWB. Employers often assist veterans with this tension by sponsoring affinity groups or service activities that enable veterans to participate in corporate social responsibility activities, and these play an important role too.

Alongside this clash, there exists a collision of expectations relating to work and compensation. Veterans emerge from the military with relatively good compensation compared to the private sector. For a variety of reasons, it is difficult to calculate an accurate comparison of military and civilian compensation.[75] However, the congressionally mandated Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation (QRMC) has done so during its past two cycles to assist Congress in deciding on the adequacy of pay raises. In 2012, the 11th QRMC found that average "regular military compensation" for enlisted personnel corresponded to the 90th percentile for comparable civilians, and for officers corresponded to the 83rd percentile for comparable civilians.[76] To the extent that any civil-military divide exists with respect to compensation, this divide favors the military today, who are generally well compensated relative to the civilian workforce.

The numerical comparison of compensation tells just one part of the story. Regular military compensation includes a variety of allowances (to include housing and subsistence), some of which come with a substantial tax advantage. All military pay may be tax-exempt during deployments. In addition to current compensation, service members earn substantial deferred compensation in the form of eligibility for the military's generous "defined benefits" pension at 20 years of service. And, beginning in 2018, service members also will earn a government contribution to their Thrift Savings Plan 401k account as part of the military's new blended retirement system. Service members and their families also benefit from significant non-monetary benefits, the largest of which is health care. While on active duty, troops and their families can seek free health care through military facilities, or heavily subsidized care through TRICARE. Active and reserve troops also earn non-monetary benefits such as 30 days' paid leave each year (regardless of rank or years of service), access to discounted base facilities like commissaries and gyms, and other subsidized support services.

This entire compensation package plays a vital role in both recruiting and retention.[77] However, the flip side of the military compensation package is that it's so good that it creates unrealistic expectations for service members and families when they transition, because it's unlikely they will earn the same (or better) compensation immediately after leaving the service. Service members may enter the civilian workforce with unrealistic expectations for a starting salary based on how their military salary compares to similar jobs in the private sector. Similarly, military families may find civilian benefits programs lacking when compared to the comprehensive benefits package offered to service members and their families. The adjustment to more junior roles within a civilian company, the learning curve associated with breaking into a new field, and potentially lower benefit and compensation packages may be frustrating for many veterans. Such frustration may contribute to a sense of underappreciation for military service or the skills veterans bring to bear.

There exists a fundamental disconnect between what veterans expect of employment and what employers expect of veterans.

Beyond compensation, veterans also emerge from service having had a transformative experience in service of their nation. While serving, veterans likely moved through positions of increasing responsibility, acquiring more rank and respect as they progressed in

their military careers. A typical junior enlisted person with four to eight years of service may have progressed to leadership of a small unit composed of five to ten individuals; a comparable officer may have commanded a unit of 40 or 150 by the time he or she departs service. More important, veterans perform their jobs under stressful circumstances with a great deal riding on them, for a common cause that inspires patriotism and selfless service.

These factors can be difficult to replicate in the private sector after transition. The intense crucible of military service contributes to substantial feelings of nostalgia after service, as well as difficulty with replicating the same sense of mission and purpose in the civilian workforce. Civilian employers generally lag government agencies, let alone the military, in conferring rank and responsibility. Few employers will immediately put a transitioning veteran, or any employee for that matter, in a position that is comparable in responsibility and management to their last job in the military. This may be a pain point for transitioning veterans that leads to the feeling of "underemployment" and portends a negative dynamic that may be driving low veteran retention at the first post-employment company.

Employers, for their part, have reasonable expectations of veterans that do not always align with what veterans expect based on their military experience. While most veterans consider themselves ambitious, this ambition does not appear to be fully realized in the post-transition workplace. One gap between employer expectations and those of veterans comes from an unfulfilled sense of motivation: 64 percent of veterans report that they felt greater purpose in the military compared to their current job.[78] Active duty service members also have higher rates of well-being than employed veterans.[79] The disparity between active-duty and employed veteran workplace satisfaction may be due to the unique opportunities and camaraderie inherent to military service. Yet civilian employment offers stability, predictable work-life balance, schedule flexibility, and for many, better pay. Employers must be aware of the professional and social difficulties associated with transitioning out of military service, and be prepared to handle veterans' expectations during the onboarding process. Employers also must effectively communicate both appreciation for the unique skills a veteran contributes to the workplace, and the benefits he or she will be able to enjoy.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social networks can provide strong pathways for career progression after transition from military service. There is likely a wide variance in post-service opportunities amid different types of veterans. Those who attended a service academy or four-year university likely have robust networks more able to readily assist in providing job leads, recommendations, and advice on the hiring process. The service academies in particular create strong alumni networks in the private sector. As an added benefit, these connections are highly competent with respect to military culture and understanding of the transition process.

For veterans, this network may make the difference in establishing a foothold in the civilian workforce. The presence of such networks also indicates a strong likelihood that their employers are more likely to actively hire veterans, and to have established veteran resources such as affinity groups. With only 2 percent of veterans reporting they have a more senior advocate and 38 percent reporting leaders do not see their full potential, the importance of established networks and finding more senior mentors is a key element to future veteran success.[80] Yet the majority of transitioning personnel are prior-enlisted and lack both the robust post-service networks that might enable their success and a four-year degree, which may make finding employment after service more difficult.[81]

Recommendations

The contemporary civil-military divide reflects broad societal trends and decisions, such as the increasing size of the U.S. population and the choice to maintain a relatively small, professionalized military. Given these realities, the civil-military divide is likely a semi-permanent feature of the national landscape. Changing the divide itself is likely impossible. With this in mind, this paper aims to provide a deeper understanding of the divide and its effects on veteran employment, and recommends solutions that can be taken by the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, as well as veterans, to ameliorate the effects of the civil-military divide on veteran employment.

Government

At a fundamental level, the U.S. government is responsible for the creation of veterans through military service and the direct support to veterans through programs mandated by law such as the post-9/11 GI Bill for higher education, and DoD's Transition Assistance Program (TAP). Within the scope of this mandate, there are ways the government (particularly the Pentagon) can better prepare veterans to navigate the civilian labor market after discharge, including:

- Regularly reviewing and revising the TAP curriculum to take into account labor market trends, employer feedback, and other new information, similar to the ways that college placement offices adjust their programs over time based on market feedback.
- Considering a fundamentally different approach to TAP that partners with private sector organizations (like chambers of commerce or colleges) to provide these programs in locales where veterans go, instead of on the bases from which they depart service. This alternate approach would abandon the current model that uses personnel from government agencies and their contractors to teach the TAP curricula, based on feedback from veterans and employers regarding the effectiveness of these courses, and their nexus to the labor markets where veterans are going to after service.
- Improving TAP and other courses to better prepare veterans with the discrete skills necessary for transition to the civilian sector, including interviewing and résumé building. For better or worse, service members do not develop such skills within the current military personnel system, and the government must do more to imbue these civilian workforce skills before discharge.
- Encouraging active-duty personnel to foster professional networks, particularly for enlisted service members, fully leveraging social networks, social media, and veterans' organizations, among other pathways. Such professional networks can be particularly valuable to the extent that they circumvent the existing ethics and acquisition rules that preclude private sector employers and nonprofits from directly accessing military bases to conduct education or recruiting.
- Clearly defining the value of credentialing, licensure programs, and education for both a military career and future civilian employment opportunities. DoD necessarily optimizes its military education and training system for military ends. However, DoD also spends hundreds of millions of dollars each year on tuition assistance for service members, and the VA spends billions more each year supporting service members and veterans through the post-9/11 GI Bill. To the extent possible, government agencies should tie these investments to educational, credentialing, and licensure programs that carry value in the civilian workforce after separation from service.
- Supporting reserve component personnel through better policies and programs. Providing more predictability to employers for Guard and Reserve deployments to ease USERRA compliance issues, particularly for small businesses. The government also should consider improvements to USERRA that would recognize the changed expectations of reserve service and provide incentives to employers to hire and retain reservists, such as tax credits for differential pay and benefits.
- Recognizing the role of spouses and family members in the transition process, particularly in high-cost areas where dual-income families are the norm because of the cost of living.[82] Military spouses should have parallel eligibility for TAP and other programs that are not space-available; support programs like Military One Source should be explicitly extended into civilian life to provide support to spouses and families during transition.
- Improving base community relations programs, particularly at military bases in populous states, such as California and New York, that lack significant veteran populations. Here, the active components of DoD should explicitly work more closely with the Reserve components, as well as civilian agencies like the VA and Department of Labor, who have greater footprints in these parts of America.

Employers

Veterans present a tremendous opportunity to employers. Their skills and experiences are an asset to company cultures and bottom lines. In order to navigate the civil-military divide and employ the latent talent in the veteran population, employers can take the following steps:

- Building military cultural competency, particularly among those who screen résumés and conduct hiring interviews, as well as managers responsible for veteran employees. Such training may reduce the clash of expectations and the familiarity gap while also assisting nonveteran managers and executives in companies with retaining, mentoring, and championing veteran employees.
- Establishing Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) for veterans that may help veteran employees overcome any communication or management misalignment. Ideally, these programs would leverage existing EAP infrastructure, but add additional cultural competency to assist veterans within the workforce.
- Facilitating affinity groups for veterans and expanding such groups through networks for small businesses that may lack the capacity to develop veteran mentorship programs. These affinity groups should focus on building social capital for their veteran members to be competitive in the workforce, and also on creating opportunities for purpose and service in the corporate context.
- Improving internal company familiarity with the military experience, and providing adequate resources for civilian employees on best practices for engaging with newly onboarded veterans. Human resources personnel, hiring managers and executives should all become familiar with military service and the veteran experience so that they can more effectively lead and manage the veterans entering their workforce.

Veterans

Of all the key stakeholders, veterans have the potential to make the greatest impact on reducing the impact of the civil-military divide. The incentives for overcoming the divide are higher for veterans than any other stakeholder; nearly 100 percent of veterans will seek employment, while only a small proportion of any businesses' employees are veterans. As such, veterans can mitigate the effects of the civil-military divide and veteran employment through a variety of ways:

- Mentoring subordinate or newly hired veterans to ensure success in the workforce. Veterans who have transitioned have a responsibility to "pay it forward" for those who will follow. They can set the example through their performance and also help provide critical information and insights back to new veterans, which can bridge the information gaps caused by the civil-military divide.
- Mentoring civilian coworkers on the skills and experiences veterans bring to bear. As a corollary to mentoring veterans who follow them, veterans in the workforce also should seek to educate their nonveteran peers about the military, its experiences, and its people, to help build cultural competency and understanding among the majority of colleagues who have no personal connection to the military.
- Building comprehensive professional networks that include veterans, service members, and civilians. This is particularly important given the barriers to direct access for employers, nonprofits, and others. Veterans can construct social and professional networks using social media and other tools that get "inside the wire" of military bases and access veterans in ways that can help bridge the civil-military divide. These networks also can help equip veterans with the social capital necessary to identify and pursue opportunities after transition.
- Building ties in the community through civic engagement. It can be difficult for employers to replicate the same sense of mission and purpose that veterans enjoyed while in the service. Nonetheless, veterans in the workforce can continue to serve in many ways after they leave the military. In doing so, they can set a positive example for their firms, continue to serve their country and community, and build a community of practice with the potential to better retain and support veterans who share a common commitment to service.

Conclusion

The civil-military divide presents challenges and opportunities both to employers and veterans seeking employment. Growing gaps in geographic distribution and professional experience contribute to misperceptions and misaligned expectations between employers and veterans. The divide leads to adverse outcomes for veterans, including unemployment and underemployment. The divide further leads to suboptimal outcomes for employers, including high turnover rates and the possibility of missing out on a unique and competitive talent pool.

Veterans are a critical asset to the American workforce. The skill sets, experiences, and leadership they can provide to companies is invaluable. Moreover, successful employment of veterans in the workforce can serve to mitigate the civil-military divide; as veterans enter the civilian labor force, they expose civilians to the assets, talents, and experience that military service brings to bear. As the military continues to represent smaller proportions of society over time, engagement with veterans in the workforce has the potential for a large degree of positive impact.

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