



Hispanic Representation in the Military and Civilian Sectors

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE LITERATURE

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Abstract

The federal government has expressed concern in recent years about Hispanic representation in the Armed Forces, particularly in the senior ranks. The fiscal year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act calls for an analysis of Hispanic representation in the Services and a comparison of how each Service recruits, retains, and promotes its Hispanic servicemembers. In response to this requirement, our study aims to identify barriers to growing a more ethnically diverse force. In this report, we review policy documents and peer-reviewed literature on Hispanic representation in the civilian and military workforce. We also look at programs and initiatives implemented to grow Hispanic representation, along with evaluations of their effectiveness. Recommendations include addressing parental language gaps and misunderstandings, advertising military service as a path to citizenship, providing unconscious bias training, and implementing promotion standards that are agnostic to occupation. However, few of the proposed or currently implemented programs have been formally evaluated. The forthcoming phases of our study will include analysis to fill some of these gaps.

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Executive Summary

In recent years, the US government and Department of Defense (DOD) have increased their focus on the composition of the US military force, with numerous initiatives, strategies, and policy documents aiming to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion. Various government entities, including Congress, are particularly concerned with underrepresentation of Hispanic servicemembers in the officer and enlisted senior ranks across all Services. To improve representation and access for the growing Hispanic segment of American society, several federal government regulations as well as DOD and Service policies have attempted to address these gaps. However, barriers to Hispanic recruitment, retention, and promotion remain. In addition, the fiscal year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act called for a study of Hispanic representation in the Armed Forces. To fulfill this requirement, DOD's Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion asked CNA to conduct an analysis of Hispanic representation relative to the civilian population and a comparison of how each Service recruits, retains, and promotes Hispanic servicemembers.

The overall study effort will combine quantitative and qualitative approaches to understanding these issues, with a specific focus on identifying barriers to Hispanic recruitment, promotion, and retention and providing recommendations to build and sustain a more ethnically diverse force. This report lays the foundation for future analytic tasks by reviewing existing military and civilian literature that examines ethnic diversity in the military and civilian workforces, any programs and diversity initiatives implemented to improve Hispanic representation, and any program evaluations that identify strategies that do (or do not) work well. In conducting this literature review, we have identified insights from previous research that should be accounted for in the forthcoming phases of our analysis and gaps in the literature that future analysis should aim to address.

The literature shows that Hispanic people remain underrepresented in both the military (active and reserve components) and the civilian labor market. In the military, Hispanic servicemembers are underrepresented in the higher enlisted and officer paygrades, which mirrors trends in the private sector, in which Hispanic workers are disproportionately underrepresented in leadership positions and professional occupations. In both sectors—military and civilian—there are cultural challenges in Hispanic recruitment (e.g., language, citizenship), although these are amplified in the military. In particular, parental support and approval are paramount in the Hispanic community, and in some cases, recruiters face challenges in communicating with prospective recruits' family members. If a recruiter is unable

to communicate with parents in their first language and mitigate concerns about military service, language can serve as an impediment to recruiting some Hispanic people. Hispanic people also are less likely to qualify for military service than their non-Hispanic counterparts because of lower test scores, lower high school graduation rates, and higher rates of obesity. In addition, citizenship can be a disqualifying factor in joining some military occupations (e.g., Marine Corps intelligence).

Our synthesis of the literature also revealed challenges in increasing Hispanic retention and promotion. Previous studies have identified potential biases in evaluation processes and lower representation of Hispanic people in jobs with higher promotion potential. Surveys of the civilian workforce reveal that Hispanic retention is higher when Hispanic employees experience a greater sense of belonging in the workplace, which is influenced by their ability to easily communicate and socialize with their peers and by the overall demographic diversity in their workforce (i.e., when they are not outliers in an otherwise homogenous group).

These studies' primary recommendations for addressing barriers to increased ethnic diversity include the following:

- Address parental language barriers and potential misunderstandings by assigning bilingual recruiters to areas with large Hispanic populations and training them on how to temper misunderstandings about the military
- Participate in Hispanic affinity group events and make philanthropic contributions to grow the Hispanic community's perception of DOD as a trusted party invested in them
- Provide test preparatory materials; science, technology, engineering, and mathematics internships; and mentorship programs to improve Hispanic qualification for military service
- Advertise military service as a potential path to citizenship
- Provide unconscious bias training and remove references to race and ethnicity from promotion board materials (i.e., photographs and demographic data)
- Implement promotion standards that ensure that servicemembers in different occupations have equal opportunities to promote, taking into account that not all occupations afford servicemembers the same experiences and growth opportunities
- Make efforts to improve Hispanic servicemembers' sense of belonging, perhaps by pairing bilingual bunkmates with those who are less proficient in English or finding ways to emphasize work-life balance

Initiatives employed by civilian sector companies that DOD may also find fruitful include the following:

- Spotlighting Hispanic senior executives and leaders to emphasize career growth potential for Hispanic people

- Increasing engagement in local Hispanic communities via philanthropic endeavors and mentorship programs
- Conducting recurring organizational assessments to identify specific challenges in growing the Hispanic workforce
- Designing targeted initiatives to address those challenges and collecting the necessary data to evaluate program effectiveness
- Communicating to leadership the contributions of a diverse workforce to overall productivity

Despite the breadth of this literature, gaps remain in our understanding of the primary drivers of the Hispanic recruiting, retention, and promotion challenges, many of which are ripe for future analysis. A more broadly scoped follow-on effort could combine quantitative and qualitative data to address most of these knowledge gaps and would ideally include some combination of focus groups, surveys, and additional data collection. The gaps most ripe for additional analysis include the following (along with the general analytic approach required):

- Given the array of challenges faced in recruiting Hispanic servicemembers, which are most dominant? (focus groups)
- Is an increase in diversity on promotion boards observed following DOD's 2020 instruction? (quantitative data analysis)
- What are the retention effects of the accelerated path to citizenship from service? (focus groups and quantitative data analysis)
- Are citizenship concerns a current barrier to enlistment? (focus groups and surveys)
- Have the test preparation materials provided by the Army increased Hispanic servicemembers' test scores and thus their eligibility for more occupations? (quantitative data analysis)
- What are the predominant drivers of Hispanic recruits' occupational choice? Are midcareer occupation changes observed once eligibility hurdles are overcome? (focus groups and quantitative data analysis)
- Is there evidence that assigning bilingual recruiters to areas with large Hispanic populations has increased accessions in those areas? (quantitative data analysis)
- What is the conversion rate of Hispanic leads to Hispanic recruits, and how does this rate differ for non-Hispanic people? What are the characteristics of Hispanic people with the highest and lowest conversion rates? (quantitative data analysis)

Most important, we recommend that, moving forward, diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives be designed and implemented with evaluation in mind. Identifying the most effective avenues for increasing Hispanic representation across DOD will require carefully designed program and policy evaluation.

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Introduction

Over the last several years, the Department of Defense (DOD) has been concerned about the force's ethnic composition, particularly the underrepresentation of Hispanic servicemembers in the senior grades across the Services. In addition, Section 572 of the fiscal year (FY) 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) calls for a study of Hispanic representation in the Armed Forces. Specifically, the NDAA requests an analysis of Hispanic representation relative to a civilian benchmark and a comparison of how each Service recruits, retains, and promotes Hispanic servicemembers. DOD's Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion asked CNA to conduct a study to fulfill this NDAA requirement. In the overall study effort, we took a combined quantitative and qualitative approach to understanding Hispanic representation, identifying any barriers to Hispanic promotion and retention and crafting appropriate recommendations to help DOD build a more ethnically diverse force.

Increasing ethnic diversity is important for multiple reasons. The civilian literature has found that having a more diverse workforce—which includes employees from different backgrounds, cultures, races, genders, ages, and abilities—has both immediate and long-term benefits [1-3]. Although the military might not have “customers” in the sense that a private-sector business does, it does have people who it serves, and the benefits of a diverse workforce can extend to them. The immediate benefits identified by the civilian literature include increased creativity and innovation, better problem-solving, improved customer relations, and enhanced brand reputation. In the longer term, companies with more diverse workforces have been found to have better performance, higher employee retention, and more informed and thoughtful decision-making processes [4-6]. Additionally, a recent Office of People Analytics report found that improvements in diversity and inclusion also reap rewards in the military context. Specifically, survey results indicated that retention intentions, satisfaction with military life, member and unit preparedness, and member and unit morale were all higher among those active duty servicemembers who described their unit climate as “healthy” on multiple diversity and inclusion indicators (as compared to those who characterized the unit climate as “unhealthy”). The authors also found higher separation rates among those in unhealthy climates. Thus, there are clear returns to readiness and retention from ensuring a diverse and inclusive operating environment [7].

For background, we begin with a brief discussion of why workforce diversity matters. Then we discuss several Executive Orders (EOs) and DOD guidance that have been issued over the years as recent presidential administrations and DOD have prioritized increasing racial and ethnic diversity.

EOs and DOD guidance

Recent presidents have recognized Hispanic underrepresentation in the Armed Forces as well as throughout the federal government. In response, they have issued several EOs to address this concern. Although the EOs do not provide detailed strategies to increase Hispanic representation, they do offer broad directions from the highest level of government. In 2000, President Clinton issued EO 13171, “Hispanic Employment in the Federal Government,” which established programs to recruit and develop Hispanic federal employees [8]. It mandated that each federal department eliminate any barriers to Hispanic recruitment and retention by broadening the applicant pool, prohibiting non-merit factors from entering into recruitment decisions, and appointing Hispanic executives to performance review and promotion boards. The order also mandated management diversity training and required supervisors’ performance plans to include specific, measurable goals for diversity recruitment and career development [8]. In 2011, President Obama signed EO 13583, “Establishing a Coordinated Government-Wide Initiative to Promote Diversity and Inclusion in the Federal Workforce” [9]. This order called for the development of a government-wide Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan identifying best practices for eliminating barriers to diversity [9]. More recently, in 2021, President Biden issued EO 13985, “Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government” [10], and EO 14035, “Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce” [11]. These orders directed agencies to collect data on barriers to recruiting and retaining underrepresented groups, which will be used to update the Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan [8-11].

DOD and Congress have also collected data and issued broad guidance to increase diversity. DOD published its 2012–2017 Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan based on 20 recommendations from the Military Leadership Diversity Commission [12-13]. DOD’s Strategic Plan aimed (1) to ensure leadership’s commitment to diversity and inclusion efforts, (2) to employ an aligned strategic outreach effort, and (3) to develop, mentor, and retain top talent [14]. A later evaluation by the DOD Inspector General, however, revealed that only six of those recommendations were ultimately implemented, indicating that DOD and individual Services still have much work to do to meet the Strategic Plan’s three goals [13].

In addition, the individual Services created their own diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) strategic plans. For example, the Marine Corps’ plan seeks to increase diversity through recruiting and retaining diverse talent as well as creating a culture of inclusion through DE&I courses and demonstrated leadership commitment [15]. Similarly, the Army People Strategy Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Annex [16] seeks to increase diversity through ensuring leadership’s commitment, institutionalizing talent management, implementing diversity training, and creating an inclusive environment. In 2020, DOD ordered the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to review all policies that may negatively affect diversity

and recommend changes to address these issues. In addition, Section 572 of the NDAA for FY 2022 requires a federally funded research and development center to conduct a study on Hispanic representation in the Armed Forces. This study will fulfill this requirement.

Approach

The first step in our analytic process—documented in this report—is to review (1) the existing literature that examines ethnic diversity in the military and civilian sectors, (2) any programs and diversity initiatives implemented in the military or civilian sector that have attempted to improve Hispanic representation, and (3) any evaluations that identify strategies that do (and do not) work well. We first consider Hispanic representation in the Armed Forces and the civilian population. After documenting this baseline, we consider barriers to recruiting Hispanic servicemembers, including both cultural and qualification-related challenges. We then consider potential barriers to Hispanic servicemembers' retention and promotion, including any ethnic biases in the evaluation process, differences in representation by occupational field, Hispanic servicemembers' overall sense of belonging, and the important role of the work environment. For each of the barriers we present, we discuss solutions that have previously been proposed in the literature. However, few of these recommended efforts or initiatives have been implemented, let alone evaluated, so it is unclear whether they would ultimately be effective.

The intent of this review is both to ensure that insights from previous research are fully accounted for in the forthcoming phases of our analysis and also to identify any gaps in the literature that future analysis should aim to address. We consider a variety of sources, including previous research from CNA and other federally funded research and development centers, peer-reviewed publications, policy documents (including presidential EOs and DOD and Service-specific memoranda and instructions), corporate documents, news articles, and data from federal agencies.

The remainder of this report is organized as follows. We begin by describing the historical representation of Hispanic people in the DOD and the civilian labor market. Then, we document challenges to recruiting Hispanic servicemembers. For each obstacle, we document proposed solutions gathered from prior research focusing on both the Armed Forces and the civilian labor force. We then repeat this process of documenting challenges in and potential solutions for retaining and promoting Hispanic servicemembers. In the final section, we offer concluding remarks and highlight gaps in the literature that will inform the analytic plan for the next phases of our study.

Hispanic Representation

In this section, we describe the historical representation of Hispanic people in both the civilian labor market and DOD to illustrate that challenges in attaining and maintaining Hispanic representation are not unique to the Services. These comparisons also highlight the differences in representation challenges between the military and civilian sectors and therefore where different approaches may be needed to address the challenges. Within the military, we specifically explore variation in Hispanic representation by Service and paygrade.

Representation in the private sector

The Hispanic population is the largest ethnic minority group in the United States. There were 29 million Hispanic workers in the US labor force in 2020, making up 18 percent of total US workers [17]. Hispanic workers also have been found to be the main drivers of US labor force growth, therefore playing an important role in both the economic and social fabrics moving forward [18]. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the total number of Hispanic workers in the US labor force grew by 18.3 million (from 10.7 million to 29 million) between 1990 and 2020, and that number is expected to rise to nearly 36 million by 2030 [17]. Hispanic workers will account for almost 80 percent of net new workers during this period, despite trends showing that overall labor force growth has slowed over the last two decades [17]. This finding implies that most of the growth is due to the influx of Hispanic workers. Labor growth over the last 20 years for non-Hispanic workers was negligible, at 0.5 percent [17]. When Hispanic growth is factored in, overall labor growth increases to 4.5 percent, highlighting the importance of Hispanic workers to the overall health of the US labor market. Despite this overall growth, Hispanic workers continue to be disproportionately underrepresented in professional and leadership roles across the corporate landscape [19-23]. They also are more likely to be in jobs with fewer promotion opportunities [24].

DOD baseline

DOD has sought to develop a total force that represents the United States population [25]. One dimension of this representation is ethnicity. For enlisted personnel, Hispanic representation in the Armed Forces has steadily grown from 11.7 percent in 2009 to 19.6 percent in 2019, although it remains below the 2019 civilian benchmark of 19.9 percent [26].¹ Similarly,

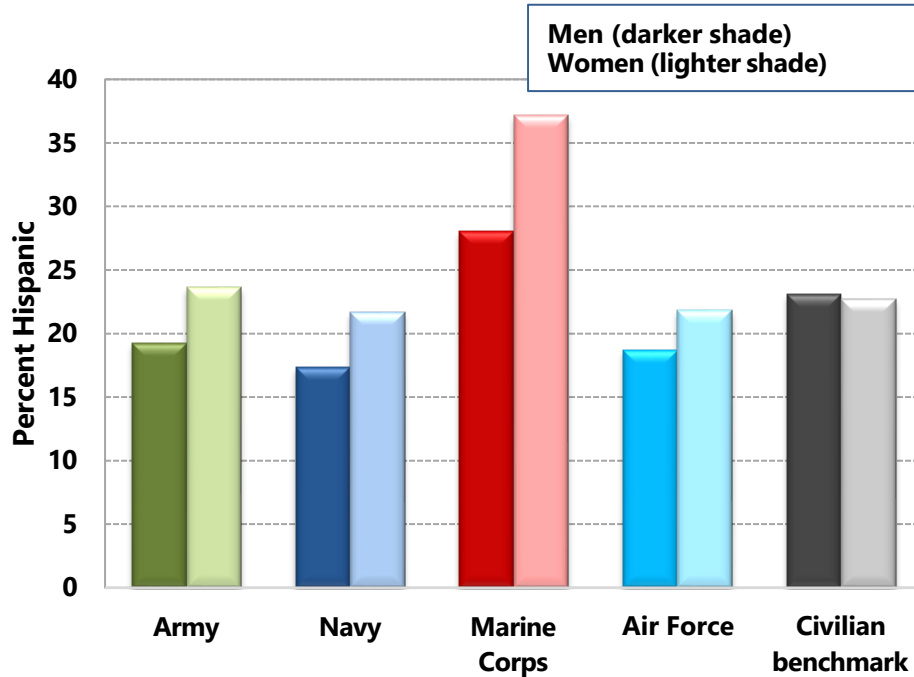
¹ The civilian benchmark is the share of Hispanic people in the 18- to 44-year-old civilian labor force.

Hispanic representation among commissioned officers has increased from 5.2 percent in 2009 to 8.7 percent in 2019, although it also remains below the 2019 civilian benchmark of 9.8 percent [26].² However, Hispanic servicemembers are not uniformly distributed across Services, genders, paygrades, or home states. When comparing 2019 AC enlisted and officer populations across Services, Hispanic servicemembers make up 17.1 percent of the Air Force, 18.0 percent of the Army, 21.9 percent of the Navy, and 24.1 percent of the Marine Corps [26].³ Among new accessions, Hispanic representation is higher among women. DOD-wide, Hispanic servicemembers make up 24 percent of female enlisted accessions and 20.6 percent of male enlisted accessions [26]. As shown in Figure 1, this relationship holds across all Services. For example, Hispanic servicemembers accounted for roughly 24 and 20 percent of female and male Army enlisted accessions in FY 2019, respectively [26].

² The civilian benchmark for officers is the share of Hispanic people among 21- to 59-year-old civilian college graduates.

³ These differences across Services are primarily attributable to differences in the Hispanic representation of enlisted servicemembers [26]. Based on the most recent data available from 2019, enlisted Hispanic servicemembers represent 16.1, 16.1, 22.1, and 24.4 percent of the Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marine Corps, respectively [26]. The differences among the officer corps are much smaller: Hispanic servicemembers represent 8.2, 7.7, 9.0, and 9.4 percent of Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marine Corps officers, respectively [26].

Figure 1. Active component non-prior-service enlisted accessions: percentage of Hispanic servicemembers by gender and Service, FY19



Source: [26].

Note: The civilian benchmark is the 18- to 24-year-old population.

In terms of representation by paygrade, Hispanic servicemembers are more prevalent among the junior enlisted ranks across all Services. Within the AC, Hispanic servicemembers make up 21.9 percent of the E-1 to E-4 population versus 19.9 percent of the civilian 18- to 44-year-old labor force [26].⁴ This civilian benchmark also reveals that Hispanic servicemembers are underrepresented in the AC's higher enlisted paygrades, accounting for 17.8 and 15.2 percent of the E-5 to E-6 and E-7 to E-9 paygrades, respectively [26].⁵ The Hispanic overrepresentation in junior enlisted paygrades likely reflects, at least in part, the general societal growth in the Hispanic population. It will take time, however, for this growing population to work its way through the ranks and for any corresponding increase in Hispanic retention or promotion rates

⁴ This benchmark was provided by the *Population Representation in the Military Services: Fiscal Year 2019 Summary Report* [26]. A more precise, but unavailable, comparison would allow the benchmarks to vary by paygrade and age.

⁵ Since 2009, Hispanic representation has increased by 8.3, 5.3, and 6.1 percentage points for AC E-1 to E-4, E-5 to E-6, and E-7 to E-9 paygrades, respectively [26].

to be realized. In addition to the general Hispanic population growth, the junior enlisted overrepresentation may also be partially attributable to their 4 percentage point lower attrition rates from bootcamp compared to their White non-Hispanic peers [27]. Although the precise mechanism for this low attrition rate is unknown and this study only considered Marines, Quester (2010) hypothesized that because virtually every Marine Corps recruit has graduated from high school and Hispanic people on average are less likely to complete high school than their non-Hispanic peers, Hispanic people who do earn high school diplomas may have especially high levels of perseverance [27]. As a result, Hispanic high school graduates would be more likely, in general, to fulfill their commitments and in this case complete bootcamp.

Focusing on officers, Hispanic people are proportionally represented among junior officer ranks (compared to the civilian benchmark of 21- to 59-year-old college graduates in the labor force) but underrepresented in the higher officer ranks.⁶ Specifically, Hispanic people make up 9.8 percent of O-1 to O-3 AC officers, which matches their representation in the civilian benchmark. However, Hispanic people represent only 6.9 and 1.8 percent of O-4 to O-6 and O-7 to O-10 AC officers, respectively [26, 28].⁷ Hispanic officers' proportional representation in junior officer ranks and underrepresentation in higher ranks may be attributable to differences in retention and promotion rates by ethnicity. Malone, Kelley, and Clemens (2011), for example, found that Hispanic Marines are more likely to remain in service until consideration for promotion, although they are less likely to ultimately be promoted [29]. Hispanic people remain proportionally represented among captains and majors because higher Hispanic continuation rates generate a larger pool of Hispanic candidates to offset lower Hispanic promotion rates. However, these lower promotion rates compound over time. Starting at lieutenant colonel, higher continuation rates can no longer compensate for lower promotion rates (i.e., there are not sufficiently large pools of Hispanic officers being considered for promotion to offset their overall lower selection rates). Lieutenant colonel was the first rank at which Hispanic servicemembers are underrepresented due to their lower promotion rates (at captain, major, and lieutenant colonel) compounding over time [29]. This underrepresentation then persists in the higher ranks.

Hispanic population density varies by geographic region of the United States, which affects both enlisted and officer recruiting. Focusing on enlisted servicemembers, Texas, California, and Florida have the most AC accessions [26]. These states also have large Hispanic

⁶ Admittedly, 21- to 59-year-old college graduates may not be the most relevant age range to compute a civilian benchmark because most junior officers will be in the lower half (if not third) of that age range. Nonetheless, these are the data and comparisons currently available in the literature.

⁷ Since 2009, Hispanic representation has increased by 4.1, 1.3, and 0.3 percentage points for AC O-1 to O-3, O-4 to O-6, and O-7 to O-10 paygrades, respectively [26, 28].

populations because they border Mexico or are located near several Caribbean nations. Focusing on the recruitable officer population, Hispanic students are highly concentrated among relatively few schools and regions. According to Malone et al. (2020), 18 percent of qualified Hispanic male Marine Corps officers attend only 1 percent of all United States colleges,⁸ whereas 55 percent of Hispanic college graduates live in 1 percent of all counties⁹ [30].¹⁰

Hispanic people remain underrepresented in the Armed Forces because of barriers to recruitment, retention, and promotion. In the following sections, we review the existing literature on these barriers to recruiting, retention, and promotion. In our review, we aim to determine trends in how both the military and corporate realms recruit Hispanic employees and foster work environments that lead to higher retention and improved promotion opportunities. We specifically seek to answer: What strategies are being developed, and which appear to be effective? What actions are falling short? This review considers the tools used to attract Hispanic employees as well as the relationships that form (and ultimately benefit workplace culture) between workers of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Psychology and sociology research provides recommendations on effective recruiting practices, tools to improve employee relations, and techniques to develop ties with underrepresented communities. Corporate policies promoting workforce diversity and a better corporate culture show that some companies are making more strides than others [31]. But those policies do not always translate to innovation that leads to better recruitment, retention, or development of Hispanic employees. The way these policies are devised, implemented, and executed matters.

⁸ Many of these colleges are located in areas with high concentrations of Hispanic people, including Texas, Florida, and California. Among those colleges with the highest number of Hispanic students qualified for Marine Corps officer candidacy are Texas A&M University at College Station, the University of Texas at Austin, Texas State University, Florida International University, the University of Central Florida, the University of California at Los Angeles, the University of California at Santa Barbara, and the University of California at Irvine [30].

⁹ The counties with the highest Hispanic college-graduate population, for both men and women, include Los Angeles County, California; Miami-Dade County, Florida; Cook County, Illinois; Harris County, Texas; Bexar County, Texas; New York County, New York; San Diego County, California; and Queens County, New York [30].

¹⁰ In comparison, only 11 percent of qualified White non-Hispanic male Marine Corps officers attend 1 percent of all United States colleges, whereas 29 percent of White non-Hispanic college graduates live in 1 percent of all counties [30].

Hispanic Recruitment

In this section, we review the literature on primary challenges faced in recruiting Hispanic servicemembers, including those that are cultural in nature as well as those affecting potential recruits' qualification for Service. For each obstacle presented, we also discuss strategies employed to date within DOD. We conclude by reviewing civilian sector strategies to increase Hispanic representation among new hires, some of which might also be effective among the military population. Although the effectiveness of most of these strategies has not been formally evaluated, they could provide DOD with a starting place for considering future efforts.

Addressing parental language barriers and misunderstandings about the military

Understandably, language barriers may restrict communication between recruiters and the parents of first-generation Hispanic Americans. Among Hispanic immigrants, only 37 percent speak English proficiently [32]. Although parents of all races and ethnicities are important influencers of their children, recruiters have found that Hispanic parents are more involved in their children's recruiting decisions than other parents and that "Hispanic recruits are quick to suggest that recruiters talk to their parents" [33]. Further complicating these interactions, some Hispanic immigrants may distrust militaries and servicemembers in general if they witnessed military corruption in their countries of origin [33]. They also may have specific distrust of the US military, and thus hesitancy in joining, based on their perceptions of US military involvement in their home countries or regions. These language and cultural gaps may inhibit communication and prevent recruiters from even attempting to alleviate these concerns.

Strategy: Translate promotional material

To enable communication with non-English-speaking parents, Hattiangadi, Lee, and Quester (2004) offered two recommendations. First, they recommended that the Services translate brochures and other informational material into Spanish [33]. For example, the "Yo Soy El Army" (I am the Army) campaign distributed Spanish-language recruiting materials to encourage Hispanic people to join the military [34]. Second, they recommended assigning more Spanish speakers to recruiting duty, especially in areas with large Hispanic populations

[33].¹¹ Research has shown that Hispanic populations are responsive to recruiters, as high-quality Hispanic Army and Navy enlistments sharply increase with the number of Spanish-speaking recruiters [37]. If able to communicate in their native language, parents can ask questions about the United States military that may mitigate their concerns.

Strategy: Tailor messaging to country of origin

In addition to simply providing translated materials, Hattiangadi, Lee, and Quester (2004) suggested that the Services collect information about recruits' ancestral country of origin to appropriately tailor their messaging [33]. For example, some countries have experienced much greater military corruption than others. Using country of origin data, the Services could personalize recruitment pitches to address military corruption concerns among Hispanic people whose families emigrated from these countries [33]. In addition, research suggests that the Services update marketing materials to represent all racial and ethnic groups [25]. Evidence indicates that such changes would be effective: 85 percent of Hispanic people have been found to be more likely to consider a product when they see a diverse or inclusive advertisement [38].

Strategy: Be transparent about the benefits and risks of military service

The literature recommends that recruiters remain transparent about military service. The Services must be sensitive to the fact that Hispanic people who come from low-income families may be particularly responsive and persuaded by monetary incentives [39]. Hispanic people are 1.5 times more likely to be in poverty than non-Hispanic people, suggesting that even relatively small bonuses may entice Hispanic people into the Armed Forces [40]. However, predatory recruiting efforts should be avoided at all costs. Although they may increase recruitment in the short term, these practices may perpetuate poor perceptions of the military and harm long-term recruiting goals.

¹¹ Any intentional assignment of Hispanic servicemembers to recruiting duty based on linguistic abilities should take potential career effects into account. Recent research has found that the relationship between recruiting duty and promotion potential varies by Service. Specifically, Navy officers' promotion potential declined after serving on recruiting duty, but there is no significant effect for Marine Corps officers [35-36]. The Services should be cognizant of potential unintended effects on average Hispanic officer promotion (and retention) rates if Spanish-speaking Hispanic officers are assigned to recruiting duty more often than their peers.

Strategy: Engage the community

To build further trust with potential Hispanic recruits and their families, prior work recommends that Services continue to attend affinity group events,¹² connect with community influencers, provide mentoring programs, and locate recruiting offices and Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) units in areas with large Hispanic populations [42].

Addressing education-related barriers

Graduation rates, test scores, and choice of college major (for officers) are the primary education-related barriers restricting the pool of qualified Hispanic candidates. On average, Hispanic students have lower high school graduation rates than their peers. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), 82 percent of Hispanic students graduate from high school within four years compared to 89 percent of White non-Hispanic students [43]. Because a high school diploma is essentially a prerequisite for military service,¹³ lower high school graduation rates limit the pool of qualified Hispanic candidates.

Attaining a high school diploma, however, is not the only education-related barrier to service for Hispanic people. Hispanic students also, on average, have lower standardized test scores, affecting their eligibility for both enlisted and officer service. Specifically, Hispanic people receive lower Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) scores than non-Hispanic people [45]. DOD policy requires that 60 percent of enlisted accessions score above the 50th percentile on the AFQT and that no more than 4 percent score between the 10th and 30th percentiles; lower AFQT scores therefore further restrict the pool of Hispanic candidates who are qualified to enlist [44]. Hispanic students also, on average, score lower on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and American College Test (ACT) [46]. Historically, colleges often impose minimum SAT and ACT score requirements, making Hispanic students less likely to be admitted to college, thereby reducing the number of Hispanic college graduates.¹⁴ Because commissioned officers must have bachelor's degrees, lower standardized test scores limit the pool of qualified Hispanic candidates [47]. In fact, 91 percent of Hispanic recruits fail to meet education requirements to become Air Force officers compared to 74 percent of White non-Hispanic recruits [48].

¹² As one example, the Marine Corps often participates in the League of United Latin Citizens' National Convention and *Latina Style's* National Symposium [41].

¹³ Per DOD Instruction 1145.01, only 10 percent of enlisted accessions may have alternate high school credentials or no high school diploma [44].

¹⁴ More colleges are now becoming "test optional," which could improve Hispanic representation at the undergraduate level.

In addition to test scores, college major or field of study may limit the pool of qualified officer candidates. Specifically, the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) and Naval ROTC programs both prioritize science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields when awarding competitive scholarships [49-50]. Hispanic students will likely remain underrepresented in ROTC programs as long as this practice continues because they are less likely to have bachelor's degrees in STEM fields than non-Hispanic White students and Asian students [51]. This ROTC discrepancy likely has a big effect on overall Hispanic representation because ROTC programs are the largest single source of AC commissioned officers, with 6,011 accessions in FY 2019 [26].

Strategy: Support efforts to increase high school graduation rates

Hattiangadi, Lee, and Quester (2004) recommended that DOD partner with the Department of Education to increase high school graduation rates, especially in areas with high concentrations of Hispanic high school students [33]. They specifically suggested promoting “stay in school” campaigns, such as the Army’s “Operation Graduation” campaign—a 2000s television campaign that encouraged youth to remain in school by highlighting the benefits of a high school diploma, including higher wages. Hattiangadi, Lee, and Quester (2004) also recommended that DOD lobby to raise the minimum age to take the General Educational Development (GED) test to 20,¹⁵ arguing that a higher minimum age requirement would prevent some high school students from dropping out early and using the GED as a shortcut to attaining a high school–equivalent credential [33]. If successful, these efforts could increase the number of Hispanic high school graduates, thereby expanding the pool of eligible Hispanic candidates.

Strategy: Provide test preparation assistance

The Army provides free Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), SAT, and ACT test preparation materials through the “March 2 Success” online program. To date, this program has not been evaluated to determine whether it has improved standardized test scores and therefore increased the pool of qualified applicants [53]. However, the Army piloted the Future Soldier Preparatory Course in 2022, which helped potential recruits improve their ASVAB scores. In the pilot, 95 percent increased their score in at least one test category [54]. The value of test preparation assistance is an area ripe for further research, particularly given the Military Leadership Diversity Commission’s (MLDC’s) recommendation that a review be conducted on the barriers that might adversely affect diversity on certain aptitude tests,

¹⁵ Currently, the minimum age to complete the GED is 16 to 18, depending on the state [52].

including the ASVAB, SAT, and ACT [47]. Similarly, the DOD Board on Diversity and Inclusion Report (2020) recommended that the Service academies and ROTC units incorporate noncognitive standardized tests—such as validated structured interviews or personality tests—into their admission criteria to mitigate racial and ethnic disparities [25].

Strategy: Support efforts to increase Hispanic STEM enrollment

To increase the number of Hispanic students enrolled in STEM programs (and therefore eligible for ROTC scholarships), the DOD Board on Diversity and Inclusion Report recommended that DOD offer internships for underrepresented groups in STEM fields in conjunction with its JROTC programs [25]. The MLDC also suggests that the Services increase ROTC enrollment and scholarships at Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and continue to provide summer seminar programs, academy preparatory schools, and parent weekends to increase college retention among less prepared prospective Hispanic officers at the Service academies [42]. These practices may expand the pool of qualified Hispanic officers, although to our knowledge no research exists on the actual effectiveness of these initiatives.¹⁶ For some of these initiatives, the lack of data and research may be due to privacy protections (e.g., data cannot be collected on minors).

However, increasing Hispanic STEM enrollment may not proportionally increase Hispanic recruitment. Although increased STEM enrollment will likely increase ROTC scholarship eligibility and thus the pool of qualified Hispanic officer candidates, Bradley, Macdonell, and Peterson (2014) found that STEM majors in Army ROTC programs had lower reported commissioning intentions and rates, potentially because of much stronger civilian labor market opportunities [55]. Given these negative effects on diversity and commissioning rates, the authors recommended that the Services reconsider prioritizing STEM fields when selecting ROTC scholarship recipients [55].

Addressing higher obesity rates

Obesity is another factor that may limit Hispanic representation in the Armed Forces. Specifically, obesity disqualifies potential candidates from serving, and Hispanic people on average have higher obesity rates than their non-Hispanic counterparts (i.e., non-Hispanic people of the same age, education status, and other characteristics) [45]. In addition, obesity rates have been steadily increasing, with half of the US adult population projected to be obese by 2030 [56]. However, it is difficult to determine whether obesity is frequently an

¹⁶ An ongoing CNA study is reviewing the Services' processes and criteria for selecting schools to establish a Senior ROTC program. It also is evaluating the relationship between STEM majors and career performance for military officers.

independently disqualifying characteristic, because many servicemembers who are ineligible to serve because of obesity are also ineligible for education-related reasons, such as having low AFQT scores or lacking a high school diploma [57]. In fact, obesity rates for Hispanic and non-Hispanic high school graduates are similar, suggesting that weight may not be the sole disqualifying characteristic for many of these individuals [47]. However, obesity remains the only disqualifying factor for some Hispanic recruits. In 2020, 11 percent of Hispanic people between ages 17 and 24 were ineligible for military service only because of their weight [58].

Strategy: Vary weight requirements by occupational field

The MLDC recommended varying weight requirements by occupational field but without reducing occupation-specific fitness or strength requirements [57]. This practice may increase Hispanic representation: 19 percent of Hispanic men between ages 18 and 25 are over, but within 5 pounds of, the weight limit [57]. When considering this reform, the Services must recognize that, on average, overweight servicemembers have higher attrition rates than their non-overweight counterparts. However, overweight Hispanic Soldiers are less likely to attrite than White Soldiers who meet weight standards [59]. Therefore, this reform could increase Hispanic representation without negatively affecting average retention for this population.

Strategy: Provide a weight loss program for new recruits

The MLDC also suggested that providing a weight loss program for new recruits may help Hispanic recruits overcome this specific barrier to entry [57]. It suggested that a weight loss program would likely be most effective for those recruits who are near the weight loss cutoff and recommended that eventual enlistment require meeting a specific weight loss goal [57]. In 2022, the Army ran a pilot of the Future Soldier Preparatory Course. This course's fitness track helped 87 percent of recruits meet body fat requirements [54]. However, like many of the other recommendations discussed, the likely effects of these policies—varying requirements by occupational field and providing weight loss programs—have not been evaluated.

Addressing citizenship barriers

Citizenship can be an additional barrier because non-citizen Hispanic servicemembers are restricted from certain military occupational fields that require security clearances. For example, non-citizens cannot join the Marine Corps' intelligence community [60]. Some potential recruits may forgo military service if their citizenship status prohibits them from their desired occupation. In addition, non-citizens attrite at about half the rate of citizens during their first term, suggesting that these potential recruits may increase Hispanic representation across junior paygrades, if DOD accessed more of them [61].

Strategy: Advertise path to citizenship through military service and opportunities to change occupations

Hattiangadi, Lee, and Quester (2004) recommended that DOD increase advertising for the streamlined path to citizenship through military service, highlighting that non-citizen recruits could ultimately obtain their desired occupation via this route [33]. In talking to non-citizen recruits, the authors found that several non-citizens were unaware that those having served honorably for any amount of time since the September 11 attacks are eligible for naturalization (by a still-active July 2002 EO) [33, 62].¹⁷ Similarly, the Services could advertise programs that expedite citizenship, such as the 09L program that allows non-citizens to apply for citizenship after attending Advanced Individual Training [63].

Other programs expanded the pool of eligible recruits. For example, the Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest (MAVNI) program, active from 2008 to 2017, allowed individuals who were not United States citizens, nationals, or permanent residents to enlist if they had a desired skill set. Specifically, MAVNI applied to those who spoke a language critical to DOD, such as Haitian-Creole or Portuguese, and to those who could fill shortages in particular medical specialties [64]. Although research on MAVNI's effect on recruitment is limited, descriptive statistics show that the number of military naturalizations declined from more than 7,000 in 2017—when the MAVNI program expired—to about 4,500 per year from 2018 to 2020 [65]. This sharp decline suggests that the expiration of MAVNI reduced non-citizen recruits and potentially Hispanic representation in the military.

Strategies employed in the private sector to increase Hispanic recruitment

In this subsection, we provide examples of how the corporate world strives to create connections with the Hispanic communities in their cities and regions. Should the DOD find it challenging to access Hispanic recruits, it may find some of these corporate strategies useful. Some organizations proactively support Hispanic communities outside the office with the goal of creating an inclusive environment in the office. Companies have adopted a wide range of strategies and initiatives to improve the diversity of their workforces. Some companies embrace outreach as a primary diversity strategy, often through charitable donations, internal development programs, and specific hiring initiatives in Hispanic communities [66-67]. Here, we provide examples of how some companies have attempted to increase representation in

¹⁷ Before that EO, non-citizens had to serve for three years before being eligible to apply for citizenship [33].

their workforces by increasing their community engagement. The Services could work to adapt similar strategies.

Strategy: Target advertising and tailor messaging

To make marketing more effective, managers and human resources specialists continue to adjust outreach programs for specific communities by using targeted advertising and increasing community visibility [68]. Companies often tailor their messaging to celebrate the achievements of Hispanic employees and demonstrate how the employment of diverse employees provides useful skills that not only improve job productivity but also aid in building broader interpersonal connections and networks that might not otherwise be possible [69-72].

Strategy: Increase local community investments

Companies often attempt to build relationships with local Hispanic organizations and communities to better understand the specific needs and challenges of Hispanic job seekers [73]. USAA makes long-standing commitments to the broader Hispanic-Latinx community. In 1999, USAA, in partnership with the University of Texas at San Antonio, started the Access College and Excel Program, which is a program designed to recruit top students from Latino schools and mentor them through their transition to college and graduation [74]. In 2020, USAA announced a three-year \$50 million program to reduce the barriers faced by communities of color and low-income military families [75]. This effort commits donations to nonprofit organizations aimed at addressing education, employment, and economic disparities in former military families in communities of color. The company is also a member of the Association of Latin Professionals in Accounting and the National Hispanic MBA Association. These USAA programs aim to help Hispanic professionals continue to develop and fill representation gaps in the workforce.

Strategy: Have successful Hispanic professionals engage the local community

New York Life, like many companies, seeks a workforce representative of the population it serves and has found messaging from the company's Hispanic leadership to be an effective strategy. In an interview with *Hispanic Executive*, Liliana Canedo, corporate vice president and Latino market manager, shared her career journey at New York Life and how the company has expanded to better serve its Hispanic customers [76]. Subsequently, the company grew the number of Hispanic New York Life agents serving the Hispanic market from 450 in 2010 to more than 2,000 in 2017. Canedo also led educational initiatives to improve financial literacy in the Hispanic and Latinx community. Notably, New York Life scores highly regarding their

advancement and career development opportunities: in 2018 the company was ranked No. 7 in the 50 Best Companies for Latinas in the United States by *Latina Style* magazine [77].

Strategy: Address potential biases

Companies have also worked to address biases in the hiring process, which are common. In a review of recent field experiments, Bertrand and Duflo (2016) highlighted the prevalence of discrimination in the labor force [78]. Such biases are not always overt or intentional but casually sneak into a hiring manager's standard operating procedures [79]. For example, members of underrepresented groups are more likely to be deemed "not the right cultural fit" [79]. Maxine Williams, the chief diversity and inclusion officer for Meta, argues that hiring managers should not only understand that potential employees from underrepresented groups will likely be suspicious about possible bias but also actively focus on providing support directly to such employees and their communities through consistent and clear engagement [79]. To account for such bias issues, companies started moving toward using analytics to make decisions based on quantifiable business needs rather than what Williams calls "gut-based" hiring decisions [79].

Summary

Although, if implemented, the aforementioned strategies may help address Hispanic underrepresentation at accession, these solutions will have little effect on increasing representation at higher paygrades if barriers to Hispanic retention and promotion are not also addressed. In the next section, we explore these challenges and discuss recommendations from previous studies and initiatives.

Hispanic Retention and Promotion

In this section, we review the literature on the primary barriers to retaining and promoting Hispanic servicemembers, including ethnic biases in evaluation, disparities in Hispanic representation across occupations, non-citizenship, diminished feelings of belonging, and unwelcoming work environments. Retention and promotion are interwoven. Of course, servicemembers cannot promote unless they remain in service long enough to be considered for promotion to the next rank. In addition, “up-or-out” policies prevent the Services from retaining servicemembers who fail to promote before reaching certain time-in-service limits. Finally, the likelihood of promotion may affect some servicemembers’ decisions to remain in service.

Addressing ethnic biases in evaluation and selection

Ethnic biases in evaluation may affect career trajectories and retention. Malone and Hoar (2014) found that final class rankings at The Basic School (TBS)—whose mission is to train and educate newly commissioned or appointed officers and which ultimately makes officer military occupational specialty (MOS) assignments—have a lasting effect on a Marine’s career trajectory. TBS rankings are a major factor in determining when Marines are promoted relative to others with the same commissioning date [80-81].

In addition, TBS ranking directly affects occupational assignments. Marines are divided into “TBS thirds” based on their overall ranking, which Manpower and Reserve Affairs (M&RA) uses, in conjunction with the officers’ ordered list of MOS preferences, to make MOS assignments. Specifically, M&RA assigns the top student in each third to their first choice MOS and then continues the process sequentially (i.e., the second-ranked student in each third followed by the third-ranked student in each third, and so on) until the MOS assignment process is complete [80].

Hispanic servicemembers, on average, have worse TBS rankings¹⁸ [81] and may therefore fail to receive their preferred MOS and ultimately promote more slowly. Their slower promotion rates reduce Hispanic retention because of the military’s “up-or-out” policy and frustration

¹⁸ Students at TBS are evaluated on academics, military skills, and leadership, which comprise 30, 30, and 40 percent of their overall TBS score, respectively. This study found that Hispanic officer candidates were equally disadvantaged in all three components of their overall score [81].

stemming from stagnation in rank. Reduced MOS selection may also harm retention if officers fail to receive their preferred occupation. In fact, retention rates have been found to fall when Marines are not assigned one of their top three MOS choices [82].

This source of decreased retention is particularly problematic if the evaluations are biased. In fact, the gaps in Marine officers' TBS scores by ethnicity are largest within the subjective leadership scores [81]. Similarly, research could not rule out evaluation bias in other Services, identifying racial and ethnic differences in both Navy Fitness Reports (FITREPs) [83] and Air Force promotion rates [48]. If Marine Corps TBS rankings also exhibit bias—which could emerge in the TBS evaluations' more subjective elements, in which implicit bias is more likely to affect evaluations—then this source of attrition is particularly problematic. This result would suggest that the Armed Forces may struggle to retain effective Hispanic servicemembers because of biased evaluations rather than actual performance.

Strategy: Create “ethnicity-blind” processes to the extent possible

To eliminate biases from personnel decisions, the 2020 DOD Board on Diversity and Inclusion Report recommended removing photographs and all references to race and ethnicity from the information reviewed by promotion boards [25]. In response, in December 2020 (via DOD instruction), the Secretary of Defense prohibited photographs from being included in the materials reviewed by promotion boards (and by assignment, training, education, and command selection boards) [84]. Relatedly, a 2020 DOD instruction encourages diversity in promotion selection board members “to the extent practicable”—in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender [84]. The instruction does not mandate diverse representation on these boards (e.g., a minimum percentage of board members who must be women or members of underrepresented groups); it is presented as more of a general goal or objective [84]. However, ignoring ethnicity is implausible for evaluators who interact with servicemembers regularly. It also is unclear whether addressing these issues in the promotion boards themselves will resolve racial/ethnic disparities in the promotion process. In a recent report, Horvath et al. (2022) found that FITREPs explain most of the racial differences in promotion selection rates, suggesting that addressing biases in evaluations—whether explicit or implicit—will be more important in completely removing ethnicity considerations from the promotion process [35]. That said, removing photographs and references to race and ethnicity from the board process will likely still have some effect if unconscious biases are at play.

Strategy: Improve awareness, training, and accountability

To reduce these biases, the DOD Board on Diversity and Inclusion Report recommended that DOD require evaluators to attend unconscious bias and communication skills training

seminars while simultaneously working to prohibit hate group activity [25]. Although research suggests that these programs alone may not eliminate bias, they may be used as tools to facilitate institutional change [85]. To increase accountability and evaluate the initiatives, the report calls for increased promotion selection board transparency as well as research analyzing demographic trends in performance evaluations.

Addressing differences in occupational fields

Hispanic representation varies by occupational field. This difference in representation is most important in the officer populations because officers promote by cohort instead of occupation, making these differences more likely to perpetuate as officers move through the ranks.¹⁹ Hispanic servicemembers represent only 7.7 percent of all officers in tactical operations, compared to 9.2 percent in all other occupations (i.e., their representation is 16 percent higher) [26]. This finding may be attributable to differences in either preferences or pre-commissioning performance.²⁰ As previously described, new officers provide their occupation preference list, but those with superior pre-commissioning performance receive priority.²¹ Of the two factors, research suggests that differences in preferences are more important [86-87]. These studies recommend conducting additional research to determine why Hispanic servicemembers are less likely to choose tactical operation fields and offering initiatives that address these disparities.

These differences in representation by occupational field have direct implications on retention, promotability, and promotion speed. Retention may decline because of differences in contract length. In the Air Force, most officers have four-year commitments, although several tactical operations officers incur longer commitments. For example, pilots must serve for 10 years. These varying service commitments mechanically reduce Hispanic retention because Hispanic servicemembers are underrepresented in fields with longer required commitments [48].

Focusing on promotions, tactical operation fields promote more quickly than others because these occupations are most closely linked to the Services' overall missions, according to the

¹⁹ Conversely, enlisted personnel promote *within* an occupational field. Thus, even if Hispanic servicemembers are more likely to be concentrated within certain occupations, such concentration does not necessarily have implications for promotability because promotion opportunities will be available within each occupational field.

²⁰ The precise manner by which pre-commissioning performance enters into occupational assignments varies by Service. In the Marine Corps, for example, cohorts at TBS are divided into thirds based on performance, with the top officers in each third being the first to voice their occupational preference; this process ensures a quality distribution across MOSs.

²¹ Some communities have additional test score or other qualification requirements that make them more competitive (and thus harder to enter), such as the aviation and submarine communities in the Navy.

MLDC [86]. Specifically, officers assigned to combat occupations in the Army and Marine Corps, pilot roles in the Air Force, and unrestricted line communities in the Navy experience higher promotion rates [86]. Hispanic servicemembers' lower representation in tactical occupations across DOD reduces the likelihood that a Hispanic servicemember receives a promotion, potentially contributing to underrepresentation in flag and general officer ranks.

Strategy: Adjust promotion processes to reflect occupational differences in opportunities

The Air Force revised its promotion procedures to promote servicemembers based on occupational field-specific thresholds rather than a single set of standards across all occupations [88]. Similarly, the Marine Corps' precept from the 2022 major and lieutenant colonel promotion boards guided the committee to

take care that no officer's promotion opportunity is disadvantaged by Service utilization policies [such as the Advanced Degree Program that may preclude a tour in the operating forces as a captain or major]....The overriding evaluation factor is the performance of assigned duties. [89]

Although these are promising reforms, evaluations of them remain incomplete.

Fostering a sense of belonging

A sense of belonging influences retention. For example, some Hispanic servicemembers may struggle to socialize with their peers because of limited English proficiency. Hattiangadi, Lee, and Quester (2004) recommended buddy systems that pair Hispanic servicemembers with bilingual bunkmates to encourage a sense of belonging [33]. Hispanic peoples' overall sense of belonging is certainly changed by how they experience their work environment. Over the last 20 years, several studies have outlined how the attitudes, perceptions, and expectations of Hispanic people—as informed by their personal experiences—affect their performance and retention. Dickerson et al. (2010), for example, found that Hispanic workers who felt that they were segregated into lower paying jobs were significantly less loyal to their employer, were not as willing to work hard, viewed company fairness negatively, and were more likely to leave for another job [90]. In the military, Hispanic servicemembers may be more likely to leave if they feel that they are not being treated fairly or as equal members of the community. In fact, an Institute for Defense Analysis report highlights the importance of a “climate for inclusion” that specifically fosters a shared sense of belonging [91].

DOD has made strides in recent years to implement policies and practices that acknowledge cultural differences and thereby contribute to a sense of belonging and inclusion. Specifically, DOD policies have addressed issues of work-life balance by providing sufficient time for

parental and familial obligations, known to be especially important in the Hispanic community. In 2023, parental leave for birth parents increased from six weeks to a total of 18 weeks of combined convalescent and caregiver leave [92]. Caregiver leave can also be taken in weeklong increments within the first year after childbirth, adoption, or long-term foster placement, providing new parents with flexibility in how they combine the responsibilities of work and parenthood [92]. Additionally, new parents can take advantage of the military's Career Intermission Program, established via DOD instruction in 2018. Under this program, servicemembers can spend up to three years in the Individual Ready Reserve at 1/15 of their base pay in exchange for an equivalent active component obligation after the intermission has ended [93]. Importantly, although servicemembers may not be promoted during this time and the intermission does not count for the purpose of any career benefits accrual, they face no penalties in career progression upon their return [93].

Other DOD- and Service-level initiatives implemented with the aim of improving cultural inclusivity include the following:

- All the Services' nametags now include hyphens and accent marks to reflect names and pronunciations accurately [94-97]
- The Army has redesigned its body armor to better accommodate the female form [98]
- The Army and Air Force provides language training to non-native English speakers prior to (or during) basic training [99-100]
- The Air Force updated the leave policy for travel to US territories—including Guam and Puerto Rico—so that only one level of approval is necessary (as is required for those taking leave within the US) [101]

These initiatives may increase Hispanic retention by easing their transition into the Armed Forces and demonstrating respect for them and their culture.

Strategy: Explore reenlistment options for noncitizens

Citizenship requirements also affect belonging because, although citizenship applications are expedited for servicemembers, the Air Force does not allow non-citizens to reenlist [102]. Policies that remove this restriction would likely increase retention, although more research must be done to understand the ramifications of this policy change.

Strategies employed in the private sector to increase Hispanic retention and promotion

Having reviewed strategies that have been employed (or recommended) to increase Hispanic retention and promotion opportunities in the military, we now turn to a review of what the civilian literature finds to be most effective. Researchers have shown that greater demographic

diversity in the workplace—which likely improves Hispanic employees’ sense of belonging and overall inclusiveness—plays a part in job satisfaction. Smith and Clark (2011) revealed that as the number of other Hispanic people in the surrounding community increases, Hispanic workers view themselves as more effective at their jobs [103]. Similarly, Riordan and Shore (1997) found that Hispanic workers are more likely to have a positive attitude toward their job if they work in a demographically diverse environment [104]. These findings provide important insight into what makes Hispanic workers comfortable, and theoretically more productive, in their jobs. In addition to the effects of diversity on individual productivity, there also is a growing literature on its effects on the overall workforce in both the short and long term. In the near term, companies must develop new management skills and policies that account for a more diverse employee base to ensure a functional and safe working environment for all [105-106].

Companies also have continued to build on programs aimed at closing opportunity gaps through mentorship, prioritizing increased diversity in board and leadership positions, and confronting unconscious bias [107]. Similar occupational differences are observed in the civilian workforce as in the military, in that Hispanic people continue to be underrepresented in professional and leadership roles [19-23]. As with military occupational fields with low promotion potential, on the civilian side, Hispanic people are more likely to find themselves in minimum wage jobs with fewer promotion opportunities, such as those in private households, food service, and agriculture industries [24]. Mentors could encourage Hispanic workers to pursue other employment options—even if they might initially seem out of reach—and to take the necessary steps to make themselves more competitive for future promotions. Mentors will be especially important as Hispanic millennials—who have higher educational attainment than previous generations and have been viewed as agents of organizational change—progress in the workforce; climbing the professional ladder is expected to become easier for Hispanic workers as this generation matures [108]. If effectively managed, a more diverse workforce should lead to improved productivity and more competitive advantages [109], although this “power in diversity” will be harnessed only if the institutional climate fosters inclusivity [110]. In the long term, a workplace that does not prove malleable and adaptable to the realities of the changeable nature of the US workforce risks significant financial, safety, and operational repercussions.

Strategy: Shift from diversity training to organizational assessments

In recent times, particularly since 2000, addressing diversity issues has become a primary goal for many organizations. Human resources specialists, managers, and diversity experts look for ways to manage a workforce that becomes more diverse each year, but numerous studies have revealed the often-limited effectiveness of diversity training programs. Several problems tend

to plague such training programs: their inability to change long-term behaviors or beliefs, the possibility that they might actually reinforce certain stereotypes, and the simple reality that people typically do not like being told how to think [111-114]. In lieu of training that might not lead to the ideal outcomes, the literature suggests focusing on organizational assessments, a process intended to avoid “quick-fix” solutions. Companies must not assume that the work is done once they have put a diversity program or initiative in place. Efforts need to be constantly evaluated for effectiveness. By regularly auditing diversity programs and practices to determine their strengths and weaknesses and recommend refinements as necessary, these assessments can help engender culture change and sustainable growth in the diverse workforce. Mathews (1998) argues that these periodic assessments should lead to meaningful change by convincing managers that problems exist and that solutions are not necessarily simple [115].

Recent studies have revealed racial differences in how workers feel about diversity policies in the workplace. Scarborough, Lambouths, and Holbrook (2019), for example, reported that Hispanic workers care more about policies that deal with inequality, discrimination, and educational/training opportunities than their non-Hispanic counterparts [116].

An important undercurrent through these discussions about diversity initiatives is the “emotional tax” that workplace culture can have on people of color—described as a constant state of being cautious or “on guard” for potential discrimination, which causes a particular kind of strain and stress; nearly 60 percent of workers of color report being in this state regularly [117]. A proactively more inclusive workplace should help mitigate this issue [117].

Strategy: Educate management on historical racial/ethnic disparities and the importance of supporting diversity initiatives

Tied closely to employee experiences is the need for managerial understanding of the historical and structural roles race and ethnicity play in the workplace [118]. Ray (2019) argues that organizations are not race neutral, citing usage of such terms as “Black capitalism,” “Black banks,” and “ethnic restaurants” while White-owned and -operated businesses are referred to simply as banks or restaurants [118].

Recent studies on corporate efforts to create diversity programs focus on how companies present diversity in ways that ensure the most support from the broadest set of employees. Gardner and Ryan (2020) found that the race of the those promoting diversity and inclusion goals matters [119]. In their study, those promoting goals related to their own race were seen as more self-interested than promoters who were not of that race. The sometimes-dissonant relationship between diversity programs and the way they are enforced throughout a business’ hierarchy can have a pronounced effect on employees. Brown, Brown, and Nandedkar (2019)

demonstrated that management style is important when determining the success of a diversity program, especially within homogenous as compared to heterogeneous populations [120]. Diversity management practices in homogenous institutions are more likely to have a difficult time garnering support from members of underrepresented groups. Ng and Sears (2020) emphasized the role that CEOs and human resources managers play in developing diversity programs, arguing that the former must obtain the trust of the latter for implementation practices to be successful [121].

Strategy: Create long-term plans for diversity program implementation

Research on diversity policies has largely found that corporate initiatives succeed (and fail) to varying degrees. One of the key reasons why they fail is the lack of a long-term plan. For example, rather than creating plans designed to decrease lawsuits, training should ingrain respect for diversity into the corporate/workplace culture [122]. Dobbin and Kalev (2016) point to initiatives such as diversity task forces and mentoring programs as avenues to success [122]. These include marketing campaigns that highlight equal opportunities, internal diversity programs for managers and general employees, and taskforces specifically charged with bringing people of different backgrounds together to help determine policy [31, 123]. Ely and Thomas (2001) conclude that many roads to diversity have positive outcomes but that leveraging the insights and skills employees have learned through exposure to multiple cultural groups has the longest lasting effects, echoing the importance that Dobbin and Kalev (2016) place on permanently changing workplace culture [124].

Strategy: Create diversity councils to collect data and increase investment in Hispanic employees

To improve the work environment, companies often create diversity councils [125-126] that initiate organization-wide culture change [127]. In the civilian workforce, diversity councils have been found to encourage data collection and increase investment in Hispanic employees.

Collect additional data

To better understand diversity, organizations have collected additional data. For example, the chemical company BASF's diversity council created a "diversity dashboard" to track the company's workforce composition [128], diversity initiative progress, and leadership decision-making processes [129]. As discussed throughout this document, many Hispanic initiatives remain unevaluated. As a result, these data may be relevant to assess many of the diversity initiatives that remain unevaluated.

Encourage investment in Hispanic employees

Diversity councils also encourage companies to invest in their employees. For example, American Airlines' Diversity Advisory Council fosters diversity efforts through educational opportunities and personal enrichment programs [130]. Similarly, American Express' Hispanic Origin & Latin American Network partners with organizations such as the National Society of Hispanic MBAs to offer career development sessions [131]. In addition, Leidos' employee resource group Hispano-Latino Leidos Asociación (HoLA) fosters professional growth and supports the retention of Hispanic employees and engagement and affiliation with the Hispanic community [132]. The group organized several relief drives for Hispanic communities during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic [132]. Prior work also recommends that organizations provide counseling to clearly communicate the resources and benefits available to Hispanic employees. Such resources may include one-on-one benefits counseling and enrollment assistance throughout every stage of employment. Making these types of investments has been found to help retain Hispanic employees.

Strategy: Foster inclusivity

In addition to investing in their employees, companies continue to build on programs aimed at closing the opportunity gap through creating an inclusive workplace [107]. For instance, Coca-Cola's Hispanic Leadership Business Resource Group provides development, networking, and community involvement opportunities [133]. They also update marketing to ensure that literal translations of taglines retain their meaning [133]. Similarly, Facebook's Latin@FB group celebrates diverse cultures during Hispanic Heritage Month. They held a Latin @Community Summit centered on embracing unique identities, empowering each other, and building community [133]. By proactively recognizing the value of diverse perspectives, companies highlight and promote Hispanic talent. An inclusive workplace also requires Hispanic employees in leadership positions, which further supports diversity by providing role models and mentors for early-career Hispanic employees [134].

Strategy: Engage the local community

Companies also engage with the local community to better connect with their Hispanic workers. Leidos' HoLA noticed that Hispanic people were disproportionately affected by COVID-19 nationwide [133]. They collaborated with the Reston, Virginia, Mayor's Office on Latino Affairs and Neighborhood Health to distribute face masks and hand sanitizer to Hispanic communities in Washington, DC, and Northern Virginia [133]. Similarly, Facebook launched Latinx Hispanic Business Boost, which provides support and insights such as trainings, small business panels, and external speaker sessions to Hispanic-owned businesses [133]. Further supporting Hispanic businesses, Bank of America's Hispanic/Latino Organization for

Leadership & Advancement highlights challenges facing Hispanic entrepreneurs in its annual Hispanic Business Owner Spotlight report [133]. By connecting with the local community, these companies attempt to build trust with Hispanic people.

Insurance company Aflac sponsors the Tri-City Latino Festival in Georgia—a festival designed to bring people from all walks of life together to celebrate Latin culture. Aflac was an early signatory of the Hispanic Promise, a pledge many businesses made to “hire, promote, retain, and celebrate” Hispanic people in the workplace [135]. In Salt Lake City, small business search optimization company Boostability asks its employees to suggest events in their communities that the company could support [136]. Citrix, located in Fort Lauderdale, was determined to continue challenging issues such as unconscious bias despite employees moving to remote status during the pandemic. Citrix provided specific training geared toward the company’s remote workforce and created several employee resource groups, such as Citrix Latino Professionals and Citrix Military Veterans, charged with supporting those employees and fostering a sense of community [137]. The company hosted a variety of events centered on Hispanic culture, such as the recognition of specific employees [138] and broader programs aimed at enhancing the company’s presence in local communities [139].

Strategy: Adopt flexible work arrangements

Flexible work arrangements (FWAs) have been found to positively affect employee satisfaction and morale [140-141]. Although FWAs are not designed specifically for Hispanic employees, some companies have adopted FWAs, such as telecommuting policies, that align with attributes important to the Hispanic population, such as a family focus [142]. Younger Hispanic people, in particular, tend to covet flexible and adaptable work schedules that allow them to prioritize their family [143]. FWAs help employees maintain work-life balance and broaden their opportunities, especially when accounting for the unique economic and social challenges Hispanic employees face [144]. For example, Hispanic employees may lack private vehicles and rely on public transit to commute to work. This transportation barrier limits the number of opportunities available to these workers [145]. Given widespread access to the internet, telecommuting removes this barrier. However, Hispanic workers are overrepresented in lower wage jobs for which telecommuting is not possible [146]. Educational attainment and occupation tend to be the dominant hurdles limiting Hispanic workers’ access to remote work options. As noted by Asfaw (2022), “Racial disparity in educational outcomes and [resulting] professional achievements affect the likelihood of teleworking, by influencing employment trajectories such as pay levels, titles, benefits and positions” [147]. In addition, these telecommuting options are rarely available in the military. Nevertheless, understanding these types of subtle barriers to Hispanic work-life balance is critical to retaining this population.

Conclusion

In this report, we have reviewed the literature regarding Hispanic representation in both DOD and the civilian sector. We find that Hispanic people remain underrepresented in the military's higher enlisted paygrades and officer ranks. This finding aligns with the trends observed in the private sector. In addition, Hispanic people will account for about 80 percent of the net new worker growth over the next decade. To ensure proportional representation and access to this growing segment of American society, several federal government regulations have attempted to address this underrepresentation. However, many barriers to Hispanic recruitment, retention, and promotion remain.

Hispanic recruitment challenges

To recruit Hispanic people, the Services must address parental language barriers and potential misunderstandings about the military that may discourage Hispanic youth from serving. The literature recommends translating promotional materials (including assigning bilingual recruiters where possible), tailoring messaging by country of origin, maintaining transparency about the benefits and risk from military service, and engaging in the local community to overcome this recruiting barrier.

Test score and educational attainment disparities further restrict recruitment—Hispanic students on average are less likely to meet these minimum qualifications. Potential avenues for mitigating these barriers include providing test preparatory material, supporting raising the minimum age for taking the GED (to encourage high school completion), and providing STEM internships and mentorship programs. Obesity and citizenship also limit Hispanic opportunities but may be alleviated through weight loss programs and advertised paths to citizenship through service.

Companies in the private sector rely on a variety of philanthropic endeavors, hiring initiatives, and marketing strategies to address their recruiting concerns. They have made efforts to target their advertising and tailor their messaging to ensure that it resonates with the Hispanic community, including spotlighting Hispanic senior executives and other successful professionals in their organizations. Private-sector companies also have increased local community engagement to ensure that they are “seen” by local Hispanic communities and viewed as invested in those communities’ growth. Prominent examples include mentoring local Hispanic youth and making donations to community-specific causes. If the DOD experiences challenges in recruiting Hispanic youth, it may consider adopting some of these strategies employed by the civilian sector, though any initiatives should be designed within a

program evaluation framework that allows for an iterative process of identifying efficiencies/inefficiencies and adjusting as needed.

Hispanic retention and promotion challenges

For Hispanic retention and promotion to improve, the Services must address potential ethnic biases in evaluation, perhaps through unconscious bias training or by removing any references to race and ethnicity from promotion board materials. However, these reforms will be effective only if the evaluation process is fair and unbiased. Because Hispanic representation varies across occupational field and is particularly low in occupations that are most likely to be promoted to the highest ranks, ensuring that servicemembers in all occupational fields have equal opportunity for promotion could improve Hispanic representation in the higher ranks. Findings from the civilian literature suggest that improving Hispanic employees' sense of belonging in their work environment—perhaps by pairing bilingual bunkmates with those who are less proficient in English, finding ways to emphasize work-life balance, or, in the case of the Air Force, allowing non-citizens to reenlist—may improve retention.

Private companies in the civilian sector have employed varied strategies to create a more inclusive and diverse workforce, with the aim of ultimately improving the retention and promotion opportunities of Hispanic employees. These strategies have included implementing organizational assessments to identify specific challenges in growing and maintaining a Hispanic workforce, designing initiatives tailored to those specific challenges, creating a long-term plan for rolling out initiatives over time, and, importantly, collecting the data necessary and applying data analytics to evaluate program success. They also have adjusted diversity training to ensure that senior leaders and management understand the value of diversity not simply as an end state but as contributing to individual productivity and overall organizational success. As previously noted, most of these strategies have not been evaluated for effectiveness, so it is unclear what lessons, if any, DOD should extract from the private sector experiences as it shapes its own policies and practices. That said, the private-sector strategies and initiatives we reviewed could provide DOD with ideas to consider as it develops pilot programs and determines what might be effective in its space.

Gaps in the literature

Our review of the literature has identified many recommendations to increase Hispanic representation, but few of these initiatives or programs have been implemented. For example, only one-third of the DE&I initiatives from the 2011 Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan have been enacted, likely because they lacked enforcement mechanisms [13]. In the subsequent

phases of our study, we will conduct analysis to help fill these gaps in policy evaluation. We specifically plan to do the following:

- Use data from the Defense Manpower Data Center to compare Hispanic accession, retention, and promotion rates before and after policy changes
- Consult with subject matter experts on program scope and implementation to better understand why some initiatives succeed (or fail)

This literature review also revealed gaps in our understanding of the primary drivers of the Hispanic recruiting, retention, and promotion challenges. A combined quantitative and qualitative approach would be necessary to address most of these knowledge gaps and would ideally include some combination of focus groups, surveys, and additional data collection. A few prime examples include the following:

- Given the array of challenges faced in recruiting Hispanic servicemembers, which are most dominant? Do recruiters struggle most in communicating with parents and influencers? Or is eligibility for service or some other factor the bigger barrier?
- Is an increase in diversity on promotion boards observed following DOD's 2020 instruction? Has this instruction had any effect on Hispanic promotion rates?
- What are the retention effects of the accelerated path to citizenship from service? Do Hispanic servicemembers who become citizens while serving continue beyond that term?
- Are citizenship concerns a current barrier to enlistment? Are non-citizen Hispanic recruits concerned about career implications if they are not granted citizenship? Do the limitations on occupations for non-citizens (at accessions) lead some not to enlist?
- Have the test preparation materials provided by the Army increased Hispanic servicemembers' test scores and thus their eligibility for more occupations?
- What are the predominant drivers of Hispanic recruits' occupational choice? Are midcareer occupation changes observed once eligibility hurdles are overcome?
- Is there evidence that assigning bilingual recruiters to areas with large Hispanic populations has increased accessions in those areas?
- What is the conversion rate of Hispanic leads to Hispanic recruits, and how does this rate differ for non-Hispanic people? What are the characteristics of Hispanic people with the highest and lowest conversion rates?
- What are the accession characteristics of Hispanic recruits most likely to remain in service and have successful military careers? How can DOD target Hispanic people with these characteristics? How can DOD improve the retention of those *without* these characteristics?

Finally, we recommend that future research pilot (and evaluate) new initiatives. That is, DE&I programs should be implemented with evaluation in mind. For example, DOD could institute a program to eliminate evaluation bias through training, precept mandates, and increased promotion process transparency (or some combination thereof). Analysis could then determine whether the “unexplained” variation between evaluations of Hispanic and non-Hispanic servicemembers decreases. If the initiatives are successful in decreasing bias, then differences in evaluations should be mostly attributable to differences in servicemembers’ qualifications and performance, not their ethnicity per se. Although prior research has identified potential solutions to the Hispanic representation barriers we discuss, these policies must be rigorously evaluated to identify which are most effective and can ultimately help DOD attain a total force that is representative of the population it serves.

Abbreviations

AC	active component
ACT	American College Test
AFQT	Armed Forces Qualification Test
ASVAB	Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery
DE&I	diversity, equity, and inclusion
DOD	Department of Defense
EO	executive order
GED	General Educational Development
FWA	flexible work arrangement
FY	fiscal year
JROTC	Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps
HoLA	Hispano-Latino Leidos Asociación
M&RA	Manpower & Reserve Affairs
MAVNI	Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest
MLDC	Military Leadership Diversity Commission
MOS	military occupational specialty
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
ROTC	Reserve Officer Training Corps
SAT	Scholastic Aptitude Test
STEM	science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
TBS	The Basic School

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