



Highlights of [GAO-05-952](#), a report to Congress Requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The high pace of military operations, thousands of casualties in ongoing military operations, and the services' recruiting challenges have raised questions about who is serving in today's military and concern that certain subgroups of the U.S. population may be disproportionately represented among those fighting and dying in support of the war on terrorism. These challenges and concerns have increased the need for information on the demographic characteristics of military personnel.

GAO was asked to address three questions: (1) What are the demographic characteristics of servicemembers and how do they compare to the comparable U.S. civilian workforce? (2) How well are the services meeting their overall recruitment goals, and what influences whether or not individuals join the military? (3) What are the demographic characteristics of servicemembers who remained in the military in fiscal years 2000, 2002, and 2004? GAO was also asked to examine the demographic characteristics of servicemembers who died or were wounded in combat in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends four actions to enhance Congress' ability to monitor demographic changes in the military.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-952.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Derek B. Stewart at (202) 512-5559 or steward@gao.gov.

MILITARY PERSONNEL

Reporting Additional Servicemember Demographics Could Enhance Congressional Oversight

What GAO Found

Since the institution of the All Volunteer Force in 1973, the military has become older and better educated, with increasing representation of racial and ethnic minorities, females, spouses, and parents. Today's force also differs from the U.S. civilian workforce in a number of important ways. For example, the military is younger than the civilian workforce. From a racial diversity perspective, the military, as of December 2004, had proportionately fewer Whites, partly because the military has proportionately more African Americans. Although Hispanic representation in the Active Component has markedly increased from 5 percent in 1993 to 9 percent in 2004, it is below the 11 percent for the U.S. civilian workforce. The representation of women in the military, at 16 percent, is below that of women in the U.S. workforce, at 48 percent, partly because of military policy and federal statutes. Although the 1997 government-wide requirements for the collection and reporting of information on race and ethnicity were to have been implemented by January 1, 2003, DOD has not yet fully implemented the requirements and its internal monthly reports continue to use some of the former racial/ethnic categories. This situation makes it difficult for Congress to monitor and directly compare the military and U.S. civilian racial and ethnic compositions.

Over the past decade, the Active Component met its overall recruiting goals more frequently than has the Reserve Component. GAO found that a combination of personal, demographic, family, and societal factors, as well as the availability of economic and educational incentives, influence youths' decision to join or not to join the military. DOD reports that over half of today's youth are not qualified to serve because they cannot meet the military's entry standards for health, education, aptitude, or other requirements. DOD has not collected information on a recruit's socioeconomic status since 1999. Recent DOD research using recruits' zip codes as a proxy to indicate socioeconomic status and community population density found that the median income of recruits' communities is similar to that of other youth and that the majority of recruits come from rural and suburban areas. Without ongoing research on recruits' socioeconomic status and communities, DOD will not be able to promptly and accurately inform Congress and the public about how representation in the services matches that of the applicable U.S. population.

In fiscal years 2000, 2002, and 2004, AC enlisted personnel had lower retention rates than officers and there were no consistent differences between the rates of racial/ethnic subgroups. While DOD prepares retention rates, it does not publish active duty retention rates which could be used by Congress in its oversight of military retention and related issues.

As of May 28, 2005, 1,841 servicemembers had died and 12,658 had been wounded in support of Operations Iraqi Freedom or Enduring Freedom. Most of those who died or were wounded were Active Component Army or Marine Corps junior enlisted personnel. Among those who died, 71 percent were White, 10 percent were Hispanic, and 9 percent were African American.