



# Racial/Ethnic and Gender Differences in Attitudinal Measures of Retention Intentions Among National Guard and Reserve Servicemembers

## MLDC Research Areas

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This issue paper aims to aid in the deliberations of the MLDC. It does not contain the recommendations of the MLDC.

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## Abstract

Paralleling issue papers (IPs) on retention intentions among enlisted and officers in the active-duty component, this IP examines racial/ethnic and gender differences in retention intentions and in satisfaction with the military way of life among members of the Reserve Components of the U.S. military.

Retention intentions and satisfaction with military life matter because they may indicate both potential future retention problems and underlying problems with morale and perceptions of climate. Particularly important for the MLDC is whether minority members of the National Guard and the Reserve express either a desire to leave the military or low levels of satisfaction in greater proportions than their majority peers. The results of this analysis suggest that, across components, women and racial/ethnic minorities in the National Guard and the Reserve components are as likely as their white male counterparts to be satisfied with the military way of life and to report positive intentions to remain in the military. Thus, there is no indication that future retention will differ in a way that will keep women and minorities from reaching the top ranks.

**T**he MLDC charter has one specific task that is directly relevant to retention: "Measure the ability of current activities to increase continuation rates for ethnic- and gender-specific members of the Armed Forces." As part of the effort to address this tasking, this issue paper (IP) assesses whether there are gender or racial/ethnic differences in retention attitudes and intentions among members

members of the Reserve Component (RC) of the U.S. military (which includes the National Guard and the Reserve) as measured by responses to the 2008 Status of Forces Survey. It also assesses whether these direct and indirect measures of retention intentions tell a consistent story across gender and race/ethnicity groups.<sup>1</sup>

Studying retention attitudes and intentions is important for the MLDC for two reasons. First, by examining current retention attitudes and intentions, we can assess whether potential future differences in actual retention rates are likely to occur. Second, retention intentions can be a signal of job satisfaction, or lack thereof, and may indicate problems with morale and perceptions of climate. Thus, this IP also examines whether there are underlying differences in job satisfaction (specifically, satisfaction with the military way of life) and organizational commitment that may indicate that climate is perceived and experienced differently by different race/ethnicity and gender groups. Of particular importance to the MLDC is whether minority members of the RC express a desire to leave the military in greater proportions than their majority peers. If this is the case, then retention intentions, and especially career intentions, may be one important contributing factor to unequal representation at higher ranks.

## Data and Measures

Retention intentions have been shown to be a strong predictor of actual retention behavior among military samples (Guthrie, 1992; Marsh, 1989; Janega & Olmstead, 2003). Although intentions based on survey data tend to overestimate actual behavior, individuals who report a desire to leave an organization are more likely to actually leave the organization than counterparts who do not express

a similar opinion (Jans & Frazer-Jans, 2006). According to Jaros (1997), “turnover intentions are the strongest, most direct precursors of turnover behavior, and mediate the relationship between attitudes like job satisfaction and organizational commitment and turnover behavior” (p. 321).

The data for this analysis come from the Defense Manpower Data Center’s (DMDC’s) Status of Forces Survey (SOFS), which is designed to capture attitudes and opinions on a wide range of quality-of-life issues among military personnel. The analysis in this IP is based on the two questions related to retention that are included in the RC SOFS. The first question asks, “Overall, how satisfied are you with the military way of life?” The response categories were *very satisfied*, *satisfied*, *neither satisfied nor dissatisfied*, *dissatisfied*, and *very dissatisfied*. The second question asks, “Suppose that you have to decide whether to continue to participate in the National Guard/Reserve. Assuming you could stay, how likely is it that you would choose to do so?” The response categories were *very likely*, *likely*, *neither likely nor unlikely*, *unlikely*, and *very unlikely*. For ease of presentation, we combine answer categories for all survey items into three categories: *very satisfied and satisfied* (or *very likely and likely*), *neither satisfied nor dissatisfied* (or *neither likely nor unlikely*), and *very dissatisfied and dissatisfied* (or *very unlikely or unlikely*).<sup>2</sup>

The survey responses are presented for six Reserve Components:

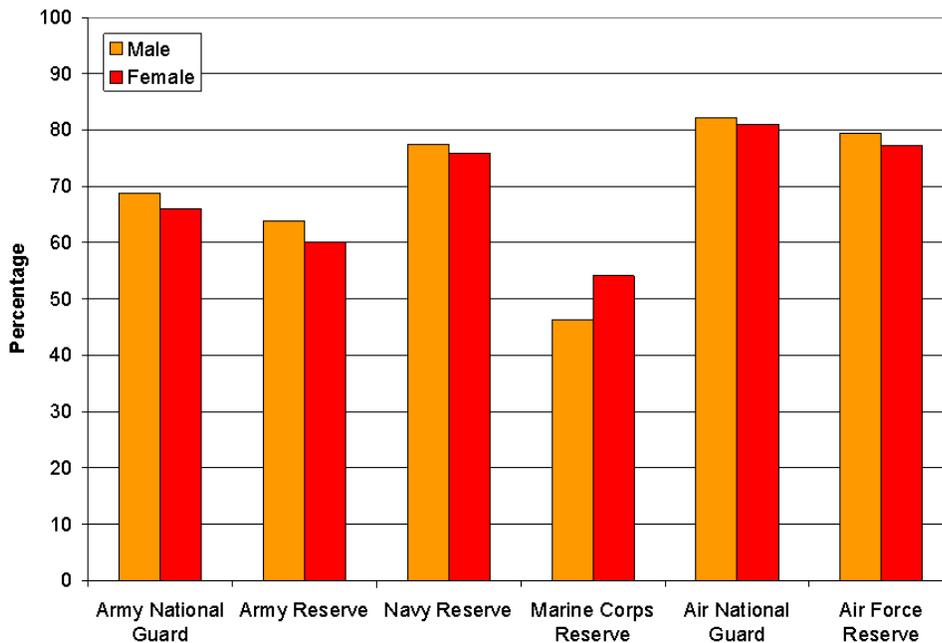
- the Army National Guard
- the Army Reserve
- the Navy Reserve
- the Marine Corps Reserve
- the Air National Guard
- the Air Force Reserve<sup>3</sup>

and five race/ethnicity groups:

- white, non-Hispanic
- black, non-Hispanic
- Asian and Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic
- other, non-Hispanic (includes American Indians, Alaska natives, and individuals of more than one race)
- Hispanic.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, note that, in the figures and tables, a star indicates a statistically significant difference between men and women or between whites and minorities. The appendix contains more details on the data used in this IP and explains how significant differences are defined.

**Figure 1. Percentage of National Guard and Reserve Servicemembers Who Say It Is (Very) Likely That They Would Stay in the National Guard or Reserve, by Gender**



SOURCE: Defense Manpower Data Center, 2008.

**Results: Retention Intentions**

Figure 1 shows the percentage of men and women across the RC who reported positive retention intentions. None of the differences between men and women is statistically significant. Roughly two-thirds of men and women in the Army National Guard and roughly three-quarters in the Navy Reserve, Air National Guard, and Air Force Reserve said they would be likely to remain in the Guard or Reserve if they had to choose. However, only 60 percent of men and women in the Army Reserve and 50 percent of men and women in the Marine Corps Reserve reported being likely to remain.

Figure 2 presents the results for positive retention intentions by race/ethnicity group across the RC. There is little variation in the percentages of servicemembers who reported that they would be very likely or likely to stay in the National Guard or Reserve across race/ethnicity groups, with most reporting positive retention intentions. In fact, only two significant differences emerged between minority groups and whites. First, a significantly smaller proportion of those in the “other” race/ethnicity group (versus whites) in the Army National Guard said that they would be likely or very likely to remain in the National Guard. Second, a significantly larger proportion of those in the “other” race/ethnicity group

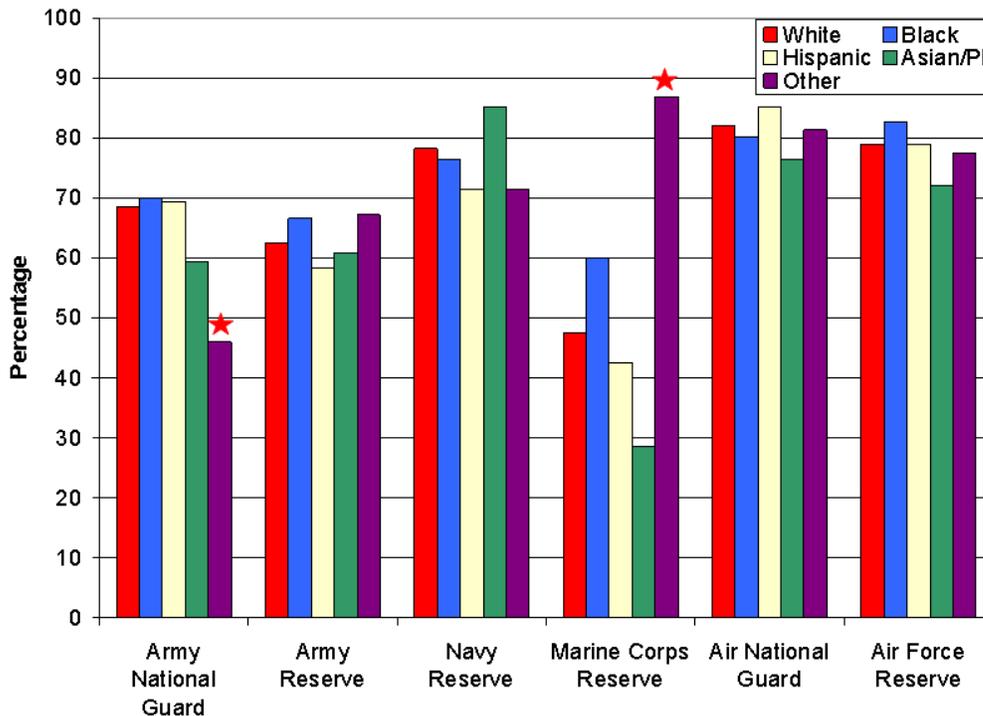
(versus whites) in the Marine Corps Reserve said that that they would be likely or very likely to remain in the Reserves. These results should be interpreted with caution, given the small number of “other” individuals represented in the survey data who are in the Army National Guard (n = 32) or Marine Corps Reserve (n = 30).

**Satisfaction with Military Life**

Figures 3 and 4 show the percentage of men and women who reported being satisfied and dissatisfied, respectively, with the military way of life. From the figures, it is clear that the overwhelming majority of both men and women in the RC reported being very satisfied or satisfied with the military way of life. None of the differences between men and women is statistically significant.

Figures 5 and 6 present results from the same survey item by race/ethnicity group. Regardless of race or ethnicity, the majority of RC members reported being satisfied with the military way of life. Although some of the differences between whites and nonwhites appear large, only one is statistically significant. In the Marine Corps Reserve, a significantly lower percentage of those in the “other” race/ethnicity group reported dissatisfaction with the military way of life

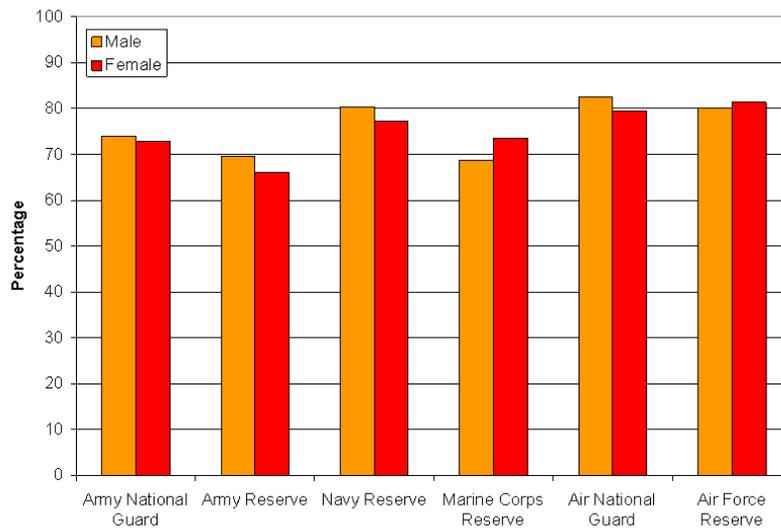
**Figure 2. Percentage of National Guard and Reserve Servicemembers Who Say It Is (Very) Likely That They Would Stay in the National Guard or Reserve, by Race/Ethnicity Group**



SOURCE: Defense Manpower Data Center, 2008.

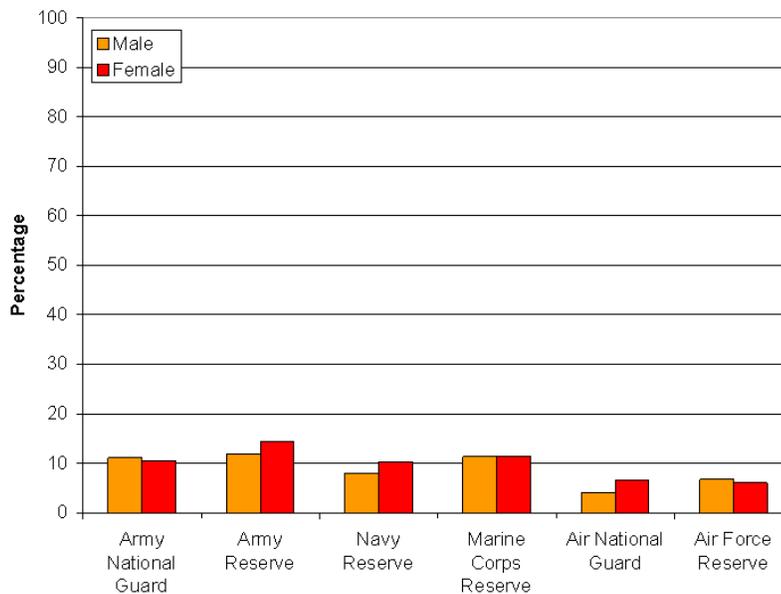
NOTE: A star indicates that the difference between the minority group and whites is statistically significant at the p < .05 level.

**Figure 3. Percentage of National Guard and Reserve Servicemembers Who Are (Very) Satisfied with the Military Way of Life, by Gender**



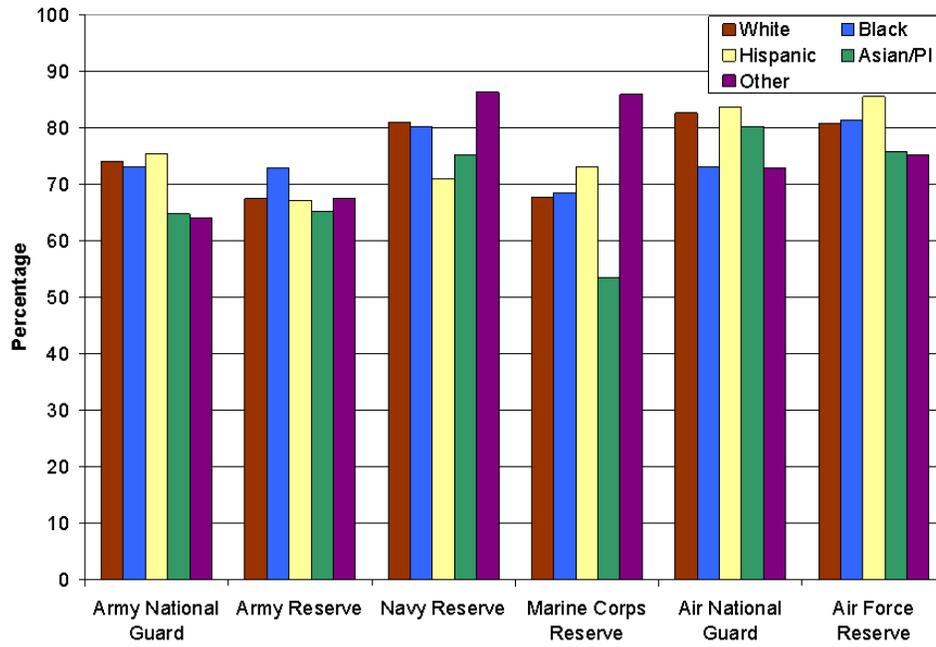
**SOURCE: Defense Manpower Data Center, 2008.**

**Figure 4. Percentage of National Guard and Reserve Servicemembers Who Are (Very) Dissatisfied with the Military Way of Life, by Gender**



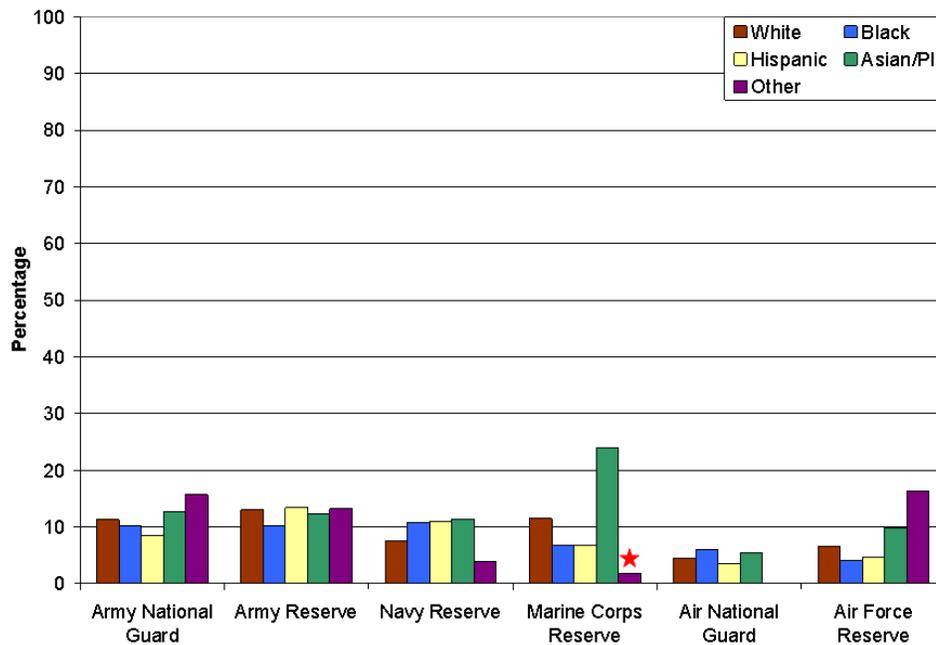
**SOURCE: Defense Manpower Data Center, 2008.**

Figure 5. Percentage of Servicemembers Who Are (Very) Satisfied with the Military Way of Life, by Race/Ethnicity Group



SOURCE: Defense Manpower Data Center, 2008.

Figure 6. Percentage of National Guard and Reserve Servicemembers Who Are (Very) Dissatisfied with the Military Way of Life, by Race/Ethnicity Group



SOURCE: Defense Manpower Data Center, 2008.

NOTE: A star indicates that the difference between the minority group and whites is statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level.

compared with whites. Again, given the small sample size of the “other” group in this component of the Reserve (n = 30), we are cautious about using this single result to make any inferences about racial/ethnic differences in satisfaction among members of the RC.

### Conclusion

Based on the results presented here, compared with their majority counterparts, women and racial/ethnic minorities do not report a higher likelihood of separating from the RC. Nor do they report lower levels of satisfaction with the military way of life. In as much as actual retention behavior can be predicted by retention intentions, these results do not indicate that future retention is likely to differ by race/ethnicity or gender in a way that will keep women and minorities from reaching the top ranks. They survey results also do not indicate that women and minorities perceive the climate differently than white men. However, trends in retention intentions and satisfaction should continue to be monitored because they may be one early indicator of future changes in minority representation.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Other IPs present actual retention rates for active-duty officers and enlisted (see Military Leadership Diversity Commission 2010a; Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010b) and retention intentions and satisfaction among both active-duty officers and enlisted personnel (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010c; Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010d).

<sup>2</sup>Unlike the SOFS used in the two IPs on active-duty servicemembers’ attitudes toward retention, the National Guard and Reserve SOFS used in this IP does not contain information about organizational commitment (i.e., affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment) or career intentions.

<sup>3</sup>The RC SOFS does not include responses from members of the Coast Guard Reserve.

<sup>4</sup>See Military Leadership Diversity Commission (2009) for an explanation of note that, for this analysis, Asian and Pacific Islander are combined into a single category to be consistent with other IPs.

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## Appendix

### Data

The June 2008 Status of Forces Survey of Reserve Component Members was collected via the Web between May 27 and July 17, 2008. The total sample consisted of 78,557 RC members from the Selected Reserve in Reserve unit, Active Guard/Reserve, or Individual Mobilization Augmentee programs from the Army National Guard, the U.S. Army Reserve, the U.S. Navy Reserves, the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, the Air National Guard, and the U.S. Air Force Reserve who had at least six months of service at the time of the questionnaire and were below flag rank. A total of 15,440 eligible members returned usable surveys. The adjusted weighted response rate was 25 percent.

In the results section, we present weighted percentages of survey responses by race/ethnicity, gender, and Service in order to ensure that the results reflect the larger populations of active-duty and RC military members. The weights, created by DMDC, account for three things: (1) Not all individuals have an equal probability of being selected for the survey, (2) certain demographic characteristic may be differentially associated with the probability of completing the survey, and (3) various demographic groups represent different proportions of the known populations of active-duty and RC servicemembers.

Throughout this IP, we note statistically significant differences between male and female RC servicemembers and between minority and white RC servicemembers. When statistical significance exists, we can say with 95-percent certainty that the identified differences did not occur randomly or by chance. In contrast, a lack of statistical significance does not necessarily mean that differences are random—it only means that we cannot say with at least 95-percent statistical certainty that they are not. To identify statistically significant differences, we estimate a 95-percent confidence interval around subgroup parameters (i.e., percentages). When these confidence intervals overlap, the difference between the two groups being compared is not statistically significant. When these confidence intervals do not overlap, the difference between the groups is statistically significant.