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ISSUES IN POLICING

Increasing Organizational Diversity in 21st-Century Policing

Lessons from the U.S. Military

Abigail Haddad, Kate Giglio, Kirsten M. Keller, and Nelson Lim

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The U.S. military desegregated earlier and more successfully than other U.S. institutions, and racial minorities have served in all of the country's wars. In 1948, President Harry S. Truman issued the historic Executive Order 9981 declaring that "there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin."

In practice, of course, Truman's directive did not level the playing field overnight. There have been racial tensions and allegations of racial discrimination in the years since. Racial/ethnic minorities are still underrepresented in the officer corps—an issue the military is taking steps to address—and other challenges remain. But despite these lingering challenges, the military is often hailed as a model of racial integration, with far greater racial and ethnic diversity than many other U.S. institutions.

U.S. law enforcement agencies are among the organizations trying to increase minority representation, not only to atone for past deficiencies and as an indication of fair hiring procedures, but also to keep pace with the country's shifting demographics and to increase police effectiveness and perceptions of police legitimacy in the communities they serve. In 2000, racial and ethnic minorities made up only 31 percent of the U.S. population, which increased to 36 percent by 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Data suggest that racial and ethnic minorities will make up more than 50 percent of the U.S. population by 2045 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). About one in four police officers was a member of a racial or ethnic minority group in 2007, though minority representation in big-city departments is significantly higher (Reaves,

2010). Because both law enforcement agencies and military organizations draw their workforce from the U.S. population, it is critical that both

- know how to best manage an increasingly diverse workforce
attract, promote, and retain the "best and brightest" from an increasingly diverse population.

Additionally, some police departments report that having a more diverse force increases the efficacy of policing by promoting positive relations between police departments and the communities they serve (Viverette, 2005; Scrivner, 2006).

In this paper, we offer three important lessons learned from the Military Leadership Diversity Commission (MLDC) and present recommendations related to those lessons. The MLDC was established under the 2009 National Defense Authorization Act (Public Law 110-417, 2008) and was asked to "conduct a comprehensive evaluation and assessment of policies that provide opportunities for the promotion and advancement of minority members of the Armed Forces." The MLDC's findings led to 20 recommendations for improving diversity among senior leadership in the military.¹ Some of these lessons have to do with increasing the diversity of officers during the recruitment process, others with later decision points in officers' military careers. These lessons, when applied to U.S. law enforcement, can help police departments increase and manage diversity in their ranks to achieve a workforce reflective of 21st-century America.

We recognize that police forces are not the same as the armed forces. They differ in many ways, including mission, style, and geographic domain. However, they share key similarities, including a

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We would like to thank our reviewers, Maria Lytell at RAND and Mike White at the Center for Violence Prevention and Community Safety at Arizona State University.

¹ See MLDC (2011a) for additional information on the commission's findings and the full text of the final report.

rank-based hierarchical structure that makes it easy to measure employee success, historical reliance on standardized testing for employment and promotion, and high levels of public interest in their personnel composition. Furthermore, both are bureaucratic organizations and have the capacity to use force. More importantly, both have struggled with diversity, but the military much less so than police departments. We have fielded questions from several major police departments about diversity, and the questions echo the same problems, concerns, and themes that we have heard from members of the U.S. military. This led us to compile what we have learned so that U.S. law enforcement agencies can benefit from the military's examination of diversity issues.

Lesson 1: A Qualified and Diverse Workforce Is Available

The Military

Like many law enforcement agencies, the military operates as a closed personnel system, meaning that most leaders in the organization work their way up through the ranks. Finding and recruiting qualified minorities is one of the armed forces' perennial goals. The services seek to develop leaders from all demographic groups in the United States to ensure that those leaders represent both the forces they lead and the citizens they serve.

However, this goal has been hindered by lower eligibility rates among black and Hispanic youth (MLDC, 2011a). To serve in the U.S. armed forces, individuals must meet requirements related to age, citizenship, financial status, education level, substance use, language skills, moral conduct, physical fitness, and other qualifications. The MLDC found that "racial/ethnic minorities and, in some cases, women, tend to meet these [military] eligibility requirements at lower rates compared to whites and men" (MLDC, 2011b).

For example, Figure 1 compares levels of education attainment among different ethnic groups. The figure shows that lower percentages of Hispanics and blacks have obtained a high school diploma, compared with whites and Asians.

Similarly, Figure 2 shows that smaller percentages of Hispanics and blacks meet military aptitude test requirements for enlistment than either whites or Asians.²

Figure 1
Educational Attainment Rates, by Race and Ethnic Group

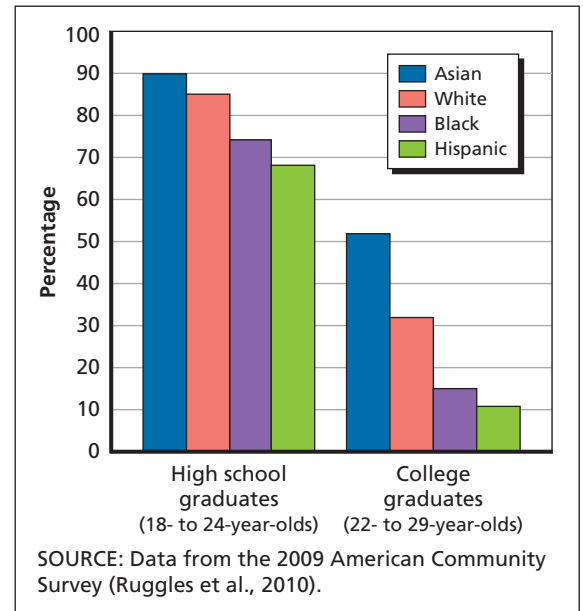
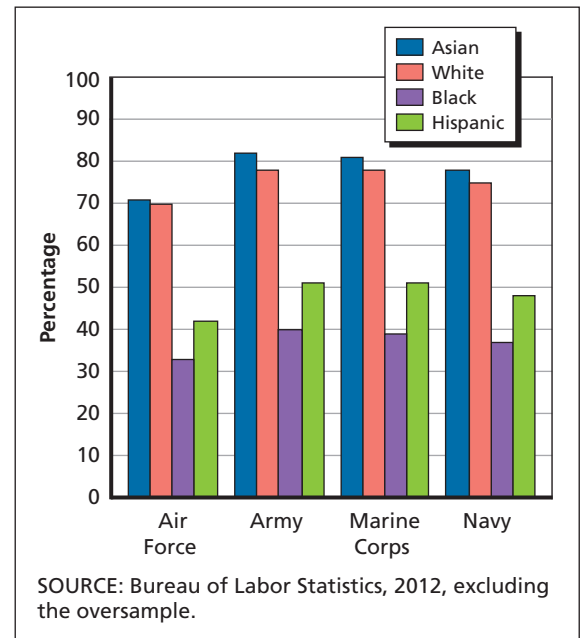


Figure 2
AFQT Pass Rate, by Service, Race, and Ethnic Group



data are from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1997 Cohort (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012), a population-representative sample. There is no more recent, publicly available, and nationally representative sample of ASVAB-takers. However, it is highly likely, based on more recent data on broadly similar tests like the SAT, that cognitive tests continue to cause higher pass rates for white and Asian applicants compared with black and Hispanic applicants.

Finding and recruiting qualified minorities is one of the armed forces' perennial goals.... However, this goal has been hindered by lower eligibility rates among black and Hispanic youth.

²To enlist, applicants must take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB). Each applicant's performance on the reading and math sections of the ASVAB is used to generate a population-normed percentile score called the Armed Forces Qualifying Test (AFQT). Each service has a cutoff score for the AFQT, below which it will not take new recruits. These

Together, these two figures suggest that there is a smaller pool of qualified minorities from which to recruit for employers who filter applicants based on their education level or aptitude score on tests such as the AFQT.

The military has been fairly successful in recruiting racial and ethnic minorities while keeping its selection standards in place.³ However, this is true much more in the enlisted component than among officers; non-Hispanic whites are significantly over-represented among officers compared with their share of the young adult population. A lack of minority representation is particularly evident among the top leadership (MLCD, 2011a).

To remedy this, the MLDC recommended that the services take steps to improve minority representation among military leadership.

Law Enforcement

Police departments use many of the same entrance requirements as the military, including education level attained, cognitive ability, U.S. citizenship, and criminal background, the last of which has negatively affected black and Hispanic eligibility rates. In contrast to the military, which desegregated early and independently of the judiciary, urban police departments have had their entrance requirements shaped by the court system's desire to minimize the adverse impact on minority eligibility in entry requirements.

As a result, some police departments have chosen to adopt less cognitively rigorous screening processes to comply with consent decrees from the Department of Justice to hire more women and racial/ethnic minorities. J. R. Lott (2000) writes of a 1993 survey that found that cognitive requirements had been made less rigorous: Out of 23 large police and sheriff's departments, three completely removed the cognitive portion of the police test, while the other 20 reduced its importance. Respondents to the survey reported that "adverse impact was considered when determining the selection process" to take into account the adverse effect this may have on minority recruitment.

However, the same principle that applies to recruiting a diverse workforce in the military applies to police departments: A diverse, qualified workforce is available. The MLDC's suggestions can be applied to law enforcement agencies seeking to increase ethnic and racial diversity across the force, as well as in leadership positions:

- *Partner with minority-serving institutions.* Partnering with organizations that work directly with talented ethnic and minority youth may help increase the pool of eligible recruits. Federal agencies, universities, and two-year colleges may be able to introduce potential recruits to a previously unexplored career option: serving in the police force.
- *Tap into the community.* The National Guard and Army Reserve draw from local candidate pools and have developed a number of unique recruitment strategies that law enforcement agencies may adopt. These include engaging community leaders and educators to promote partnerships and interest, and attending sports games, local fairs, and other community events where eligible recruits spend time. Participating in community mentoring programs may help attract youth mentors as well as the mentees they assist.
- *Create a media presence.* The armed forces have significant experience in using popular media formats to attract applicants (many remember the Army's "Be all you can be" campaign). Although law enforcement agencies may have fewer resources to spend on a media campaign than the military, they can conduct targeted advertising, such as creating marketing materials in multiple languages and advertising in newspapers at historically black colleges and universities and other minority-serving institutions. A virtual presence on social networking sites may also attract potential recruits and can increase general, positive visibility.

The same principle that applies to recruiting a diverse workforce in the military applies to police departments: A diverse, qualified workforce is available.

Lesson 2: Career Paths Play a Critical Role in Overall Institutional Diversity

The Military

The MLDC identified demographic differences in career paths as another major challenge to diversifying the military's senior leadership. In the military, servicemembers join a specific career field, such as infantry or combat support. Senior military leaders, such as general officers, are then drawn from these different career fields. The MLDC research team found that senior military leadership is overwhelm-

³ Blacks, for example, qualify for both enlistment and commission at lower rates than whites but make up 18 percent of the Army's junior enlisted soldiers, compared with 15 percent of the total relevant-age population of the United States (MLDC, 2009). Black representation is similar in the Air Force and the Navy; the Marine Corps is the only service in which blacks make up a lower percentage of junior enlisted members than they do in the broader youth population (Ruggles et al., 2009; Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2010). The takeaway here is that the actual number of recruits does not necessarily reflect the pool of those eligible for service; rather, it is possible for institutions to recruit different percentages of recruits from different racial and ethnic groups from the pool of all eligible recruits.

ingly composed of officers who come from what are known as “tactical/operational” career fields. For instance, the Air Force disproportionately promotes fighter pilots to the senior ranks, while the Marine Corps and Army promote from combat fields, such as the infantry. Furthermore, these tactical/operational career fields tend to be largely composed of whites, while minority officers tend to join lower-promoting, nontactical occupations. Diversity within the senior ranks is a somewhat different issue than diversity throughout the military organization. However, both of these—diversity throughout and diversity at the top—are of interest to the military and police departments.

Law Enforcement

Although there is more fluidity between specializations in law enforcement, police departments may face similar challenges if racial/ethnic minorities tend to occupy specific specialties that are less likely to result in promotion to leadership positions. There is very little research on this topic in the law enforcement context. However, a study in London found some small racial differences in the likelihood of having worked in specialist departments, such traffic or the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) (Bland et al., 1999). For instance, the study found that while 13 percent of white officers with five or fewer years of service had CID experience, only 5 percent of ethnic minority officers in that group had CID experience. However, in the group with five to ten years of service, numbers were similar, and they were actually higher for ethnic minorities with ten to 15 years of service. Therefore, this may be an important topic for future research. Police departments could analyze employment data to detect whether this is a factor in career progression and diversity or collaborate with other police departments to hire an outside analyst.

If police agencies find similar problems when examining their employment data, the following recommendations by the MLDC may prove beneficial in addressing this challenge:

- *Increase career mentoring.* Mentoring ensures that all members of an institution are educated about the promotion process early in their careers so that they can make informed decisions based on their career goals. Although informal mentoring likely already exists, law enforcement agencies may want to explore whether a more formal mentoring program based on effective mentoring practices would be helpful. Such mentoring programs should start early in an officer’s career and continue as his or her career progresses. Based on a review of rele-

vant research, the MLDC also recommended that mentoring programs include the establishment of clear objectives, mentoring training, and careful matching of mentors and mentees. Mentoring programs should also be monitored in some way to ensure that predetermined department goals of the program are being met.

- *Assess and remove institutional barriers.* For instance, the combat exclusion policy for women puts a barrier between many women and top leadership positions in the military. Although policies that may exclude all officers in a given group from attaining certain goals are unlikely to exist in a law enforcement context, law enforcement agencies can use a barrier analysis method to determine whether important barriers to advancement exist for racial/ethnic minorities and women.⁴ For instance, promotion decisions may involve the use of aptitude tests, similar to the AFQT used in the armed forces, that could result in fewer racial/ethnic minorities being promoted. Alternatively, there may be certain physical fitness requirements for selection to certain positions that could disqualify women at higher rates. If any such policies exist, they should be examined to ensure that they are necessary.

Lesson 3: Leverage Organizational Commitment to Diversity

The Military

The MLDC stressed the importance of total commitment to diversity. Many U.S. companies known for good diversity management have leaders who are directly involved with diversity-related initiatives. Leaders can promote an overall organizational commitment to diversity by creating an official statement that is shared throughout the organization. They can also incorporate these values into regular business activities, reinforce these values in day-to-day interactions, and incorporate diversity-related goals into the performance appraisals of others (MLDC, 2010). Some recommendations from the MLDC for the military include the following:

- *Appoint a leader.* All levels of an organization must be committed to increasing diversity, but individual leaders are the ones who inspire and orchestrate real change. The MLDC recommended that the Department of Defense create a position of Chief Diversity Officer.
- *Make diversity an integral part of organizational*

⁴ For a more detailed discussion of how barrier analysis can be used to help improve diversity, see Matthies, Keller, and Lim, 2012.

Law enforcement agencies can use a barrier analysis method to determine whether important barriers to advancement exist for racial/ethnic minorities and women.

culture. A single meeting, memo, or outreach event will not improve the diversity of an entire agency. Like the push of a button, single instances will only get things started. Rather, all organizational matters must be aligned to realize the goal. This includes hiring, retention, promotion, and management practices.

- *Institute mechanisms for accountability*. Outcomes related to diversity should be monitored and leaders held accountable for the results. The MLDC recommended that the services expand and standardize their collection of diversity-related metrics and that these quantitative data be discussed in regular meetings between leaders. Additionally, it recommended that diversity in leadership be used as a factor in considering candidates for promotion to the upper ranks of the military.

Law Enforcement

These three recommendations are also applicable to police departments:

- *Appoint a leader*. Individual law enforcement agencies can adopt this recommendation by appointing a leader from within their institutions who is in charge of developing goals, seeking outreach possibilities, maintaining positive relationships, and assessing how goals are being met. Because police departments are significantly smaller than the military, having a high-level leader devoted solely to diversity management may not be practical, but formally tasking a leader with this as part of his or her responsibilities may be feasible. Additionally, police departments could work with their local municipalities to establish a chief diversity officer for the local public sector, including the fire department and city government.
- *Make diversity an integral part of organizational culture*. For law enforcement agencies, organizational diversity can be consistent with enhancing police legitimacy and the community-policing paradigm.
- *Institute mechanisms for accountability*. Law enforcement agencies have greatly expanded their capacity to analyze crime data and could use those skills to assess diversity data. For instance, police departments could analyze whether promotion rates are equal across racial/ethnic groups, and, if not, what factors appear to be contributing to this difference.

Conclusions

Improving diversity both throughout their organizations and at the top is a priority for both the military

and police departments. The rationale for increasing diversity includes capturing talent throughout the workforce as well as—in the case of police departments—promoting police efficacy by improving relationships with the communities they serve. This paper presented three key lessons from the MLDC that may help law enforcement agencies, which are similar in many ways to the military, improve diversity throughout their organizations.

The broad lessons that can be drawn from the MLDC's findings are that qualified minority candidates are available, career paths affect diversity, and departments should leverage organizational commitment to diversity. Specific recommendations include developing partnerships with organizations that work directly with talented racial/ethnic minority youth to help increase the pool of eligible recruits; expanding career mentoring to ensure that all police officers are aware of what decisions will improve their likelihood of promotion; and formally tasking a leader with responsibilities related to diversity in recruitment, retention, and promotion.

Law enforcement agencies may benefit from additional findings and recommendations in the MLDC's final report (MLDC, 2011a).

We recognize that law enforcement agencies must work toward developing their own sets of diversity goals that reflect agency-specific recommendations. While there is much information and know-how to be gleaned from military and commercial entities, U.S. law enforcement has its own culture, policies, and challenges and therefore may benefit from more agency-specific research.

The broad lessons that can be drawn from the MLDC's findings are that qualified minority candidates are available, career paths affect diversity, and departments should leverage organizational commitment to diversity.

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About This Document

As the U.S. population continues to become more racially and ethnically diverse, law enforcement agencies can benefit from reflecting the shifting demographics of their respective communities. However, law enforcement agencies continue to face difficulties in developing a diverse workforce. This paper summarizes challenges and possible solutions related to improving diversity in law enforcement agencies based on recent work by the Military Leadership Diversity Commission (MLDC). The MLDC, established under the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 (Public Law 110-417), examined each stage of the military career to determine how to increase diversity throughout the officer ranks, as well as in the ranks of senior leadership. The MLDC's findings led to 20 recommendations for improving gender and racial/ethnic diversity.

This paper is one part of a series called "Issues in Policing." The series was funded by the RAND Center on Quality Policing's Research Consortium, which consists of the following law enforcement agencies and foundations: Ahmanson Foundation, California Communities Foundation, Chicago Police Department, Communities Foundation of Texas, Dallas Police Department, Houston Police Department, Houston Police Foundation, Los Angeles Police Department, Los Angeles Police Foundation, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, Miami-Dade Police Department, Parsons Foundation, Philadelphia Police Department, and Philadelphia Police Foundation.

This paper should be of particular interest to law enforcement agency leaders and human resources managers interested in developing a more diverse workforce.

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