



Pew Research Center

MENU

RESEARCH AREAS

SEARCH

APRIL 13, 2017



# 6 facts about the U.S. military and its changing demographics

BY **KIM PARKER** ([HTTP://WWW.PEWRESEARCH.ORG/STAFF/KIM-PARKER](http://www.pewresearch.org/staff/kim-parker)) , **ANTHONY CILLUFFO** ([HTTP://WWW.PEWRESEARCH.ORG/STAFF/ANTHONY-CILLUFFO](http://www.pewresearch.org/staff/anthony-cilluffo)) AND **RENEE STEPLER** ([HTTP://WWW.PEWRESEARCH.ORG/STAFF/RENEE-STEPLER](http://www.pewresearch.org/staff/renee-stepler))

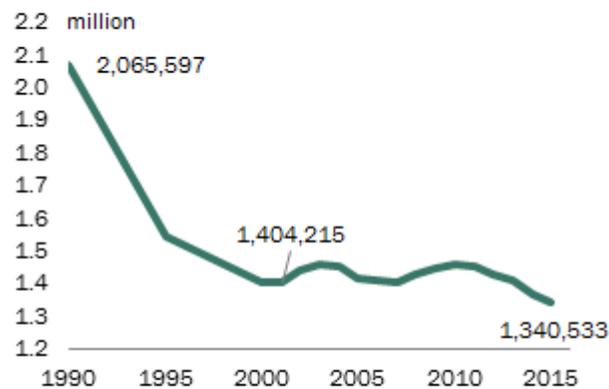


Troops assembled at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar in December 2013. (Mark Wilson/Getty Images)

feedback

## Active-duty force is decreasing in size

Total size of U.S. active-duty force



Note: Includes the four military branches of the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security active-duty Coast Guard. Data labels are for 1990, 2001 and 2015.  
Source: Defense Department annual "Demographics Profile of the Military Community" reports.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

([http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/13/6-facts-about-the-u-s-military-and-its-changing-demographics/ft\\_17-04-12\\_militarydemographics\\_size/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/13/6-facts-about-the-u-s-military-and-its-changing-demographics/ft_17-04-12_militarydemographics_size/)) As the size of the active-duty U.S. military has edged downward, its demographic makeup has changed, largely in ways that reflect trends in the broader society.

There were 1,340,533 active-duty troops in 2015 (including those serving in the U.S. Coast Guard). This marks the smallest active-duty force since 2001, according to a new Pew Research Center analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Defense (<http://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2015-Demographics-Report.pdf>) (DOD). In addition, the share of Americans serving in the active-duty military has declined marginally to 0.4% of the population in 2015 (down from 0.5% in 2009).

Here are some key facts about today's military.

**1** ([http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/13/6-facts-about-the-u-s-military-and-its-changing-demographics/ft\\_17-04-12\\_militarydemographics\\_branch/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/13/6-facts-about-the-u-s-military-and-its-changing-demographics/ft_17-04-12_militarydemographics_branch/)) **The Army remains the largest branch of the U.S. military.** In 2015, 36% of all active-duty military personnel were serving in the Army. The Navy and Air Force were comparable in size, each accounting for roughly a quarter of active-duty personnel. The Marine Corps made up 14% of the active-duty military, while the Coast Guard made up 3%.

The Army, Navy and Air Force are substantially smaller in numbers today compared with their size in 1990. The size of the Marine Corps' active-duty force has also decreased, but not to the extent of these other branches. By comparison, the number of active-duty members of the Coast Guard has ticked up.

**The active-duty force remains largely male-dominated, but women have made inroads in recent decades.**

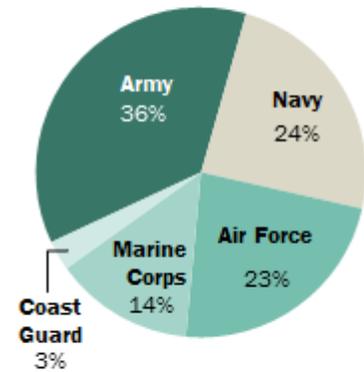
Overall, 15% of DOD active-duty military personnel are women, up from 11% in 1990. In 2015, 17% of active-duty officers were female – up from their share of 12% in 1990. And 15% of enlisted personnel were female in 2015, up from 11% in 1990. The share of women in the ranks varies significantly by service branch. Women comprise nearly one-in-five active-duty personnel in the Air Force (19%) but only 8% of all Marines. Women make up 18% of the Navy and 14% of the Army.

feedback

# 2 3

## Active-duty service by branch of military

% of all U.S. active-duty personnel in each branch, 2015

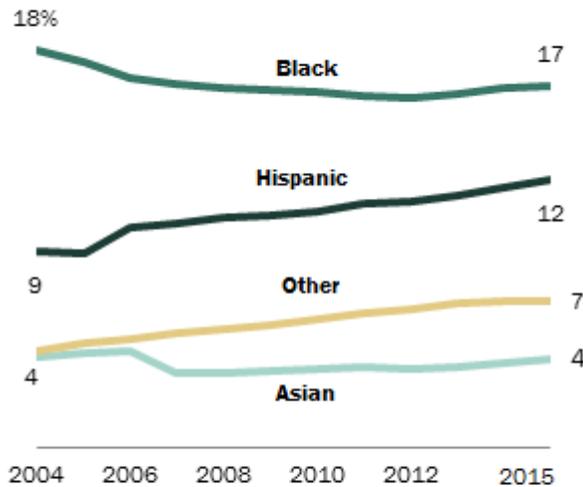


Source: Defense Department "2015 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community" report.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

## Hispanic share of active-duty ranks rises

% of U.S. active-duty military forces that are ...



Note: Includes only the four military branches of the Department of Defense. Black, Asian and Other include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race. "Other" includes American Indians, Native Hawaiians or Pacific Islanders, multiracial and other/unknown. Source: Defense Department annual "Demographics: Profile of the Military Community" reports.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

([http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/13/6-facts-about-the-u-s-military-and-its-changing-demographics/ft\\_17-04-12\\_militarydemographics\\_hispanic/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/13/6-facts-about-the-u-s-military-and-its-changing-demographics/ft_17-04-12_militarydemographics_hispanic/)) **As the country has become more racially and ethnically diverse, so has the military.** Racial and ethnic minority groups made up 40% of Defense Department active-duty military in 2015.

feedback

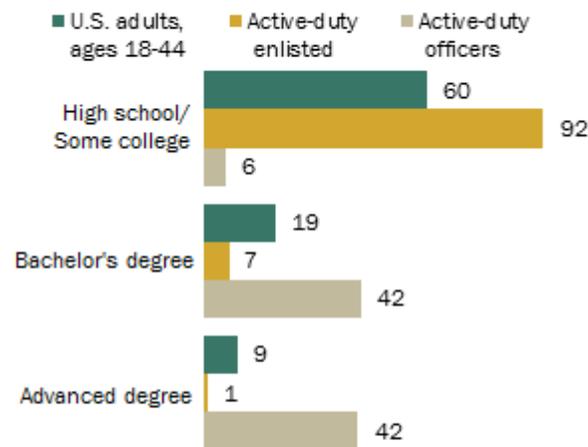
25% in 1990. (In 2015, 44% of all Americans ages 18 to 44 were racial or ethnic minorities.)

In the same year, blacks made up 17% of the DOD active-duty military – somewhat higher than their share of the U.S. population ages 18 to 44 (13%). Blacks have consistently been represented in greater shares among enlisted personnel (19% in 2015) than among the commissioned officers (9%). The share of the active-duty force that is Hispanic has risen rapidly in recent decades. In 2015, 12% of all active-duty personnel were Hispanic, three times the share in 1980.

**4 The active-duty military has grown older in the past 40 years.** Roughly two-thirds of all DOD active-duty military personnel were ages 30 or younger in 2015. Only about one-in-ten (9%) were older than 40. Even so, since the military draft ended in 1973, the average age of officers and enlisted personnel has increased. The average military officer was roughly 34.5 years old in 2015, up from 32.1 in 1973. And the average enlisted member was just over age 27 in 2015, compared with age 25 in 1973.

### Roughly four-in-ten active-duty officers have an advanced degree

% of \_\_\_\_ by educational attainment, 2015



Note: Includes only the four military branches of the Department of Defense. The 12% of adults ages 18-44 and less than 0.5% of enlisted personnel and officers without a high school diploma are not shown. Educational attainment is not known for 0.6% of enlisted personnel and 9.7% of officers.

Source: Active-duty enlisted and officer data from Defense Department "2015 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community" report. U.S. adult data from 2015 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

([http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/13/6-facts-about-the-u-s-military-and-its-changing-demographics/ft\\_17-04-12\\_militarydemographics\\_education/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/13/6-facts-about-the-u-s-military-and-its-changing-demographics/ft_17-04-12_militarydemographics_education/)) The age gap between officers and the troops they lead has remained consistent over that time period.

**5 Military officers have considerably higher levels of educational attainment, on average, than enlisted personnel and U.S. adults.** More than eight-in-ten DOD active-duty officers have at least a bachelor's degree, including 42% who hold an advanced degree. They are four times as likely as average adults ages 18 to 44 to have completed a postgraduate degree.

feedback

The educational profile of enlisted personnel is much different. The vast majority of enlisted personnel (92%) have completed high school or some college. This compares with 60% of all U.S. adults ages 18 to 44. Fewer than one-in-ten enlisted personnel (7%) have a bachelor's degree, compared with 19% of all adults ages 18 to 44.

**6** ([http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/13/6-facts-about-the-u-s-military-and-its-changing-demographics/ft\\_17-04-](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/13/6-facts-about-the-u-s-military-and-its-changing-demographics/ft_17-04-12_militarydemographics_reserves/)

[12\\_militarydemographics\\_reserves/](#)) **There is much more to the U.S. military than the active-duty force.** In recent conflicts around the world, the National Guard and Reserves have often fought alongside the active-duty military. In 2015, 826,106 adults served in the Selected Reserves – those National Guard members and reservists who were available to be called to active duty. An additional 275,247 adults are in the Inactive National Guard and Individual Ready Reserve and do not engage in regular training or active-duty drills.

The Army National Guard and the Army Reserve make up the largest share of the Selected Reserves (roughly two-thirds together). The Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve account for an additional 21%.

*Related posts:*

*The changing face of America's veteran population*

(<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/10/the-changing-face-of-americas-veteran-population/>)

*U.S. active-duty military presence overseas is at its smallest in decades*

(<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/22/u-s-active-duty-military-presence-overseas-is-at-its-smallest-in-decades/>)

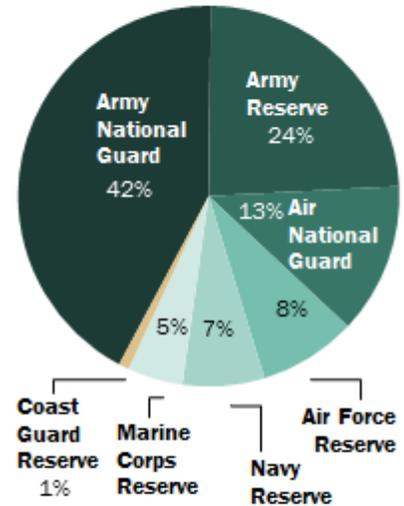
SHARE THIS LINK:

<http://pewrsr.ch/2p0kAoX>



### The Selected Reserve

*% of the U.S. Reserves and National Guard forces (826,106) in each branch, 2015*



Note: An additional 275,247 are members of the Inactive National Guard and the Individual Ready Reserve. These individuals do not train regularly and do not participate in active-duty training exercises with members of the Selected Reserve. Source: Defense Department "2015 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community" report.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**



Kim Parker (<http://www.pewresearch.org/staff/kim-parker>) is *director of social trends research at Pew Research Center.*

**POSTS | EMAIL | BIO | @KIM\_C\_PARKER**



Anthony Cilluffo (<http://www.pewresearch.org/staff/anthony-cilluffo>) is *a research assistant focusing on social and demographic trends at Pew Research Center.*

**POSTS | EMAIL**





Renee Stepler ([http://www.pewresearch.org/?post\\_type=staff&p=305610](http://www.pewresearch.org/?post_type=staff&p=305610)) is a research analyst focusing on social and demographic trends at Pew Research Center.

[POSTS](#) | [EMAIL](#)

[feedback](#)