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Military Leadership Diversity Commission
1851 South Bell Street
Arlington, VA 22202
(703) 602-0818

<http://mldc.whs.mil/>

Recent Command Selection Outcomes for Female and Minority Officers

Abstract

The MLDC has been tasked with examining the command selection process for officers by race/ethnicity and gender. In another issue paper (IP), the command selection board process is described. In this IP, we focus on command selection board outcomes, namely the O-5 and O-6 command selection outcomes for officers in specific communities in fiscal years 2006–2010, which we break out by race/ethnicity and gender. In general, O-5 command selection rates during this period were lower for minorities compared with nonminorities but were not uniformly lower for women compared with men. The selection rates for O-6 command for minority officers were somewhat higher than for nonminority officers, but gender differences in O-6 selection rates had similar patterns as O-5 selection rates. The most consistent pattern for both O-5 and O-6 command selection outcomes during this period was that a vast majority (over 80 percent) of officers selected for command were white and male. Although these findings seem provocative, they are based on simple command selection outcomes, and we therefore do not know whether they indicate a lack of fairness in command selection or are the result of correlations between demographic characteristics and other factors that determine command eligibility.

The MLDC has been tasked with examining the command selection process for officers by race/ethnicity and gender. One way to examine the process is to look at its outcomes, which are the focus of this issue paper (IP). During the November 2009 MLDC meeting, three of the Services presented O-5 and O-6 command selection outcomes by race/ethnicity and gender for selected communities. This IP summarizes

these outcomes and presents the key findings from these briefings.

It is important to acknowledge what the data presented here can and cannot tell us about racial/ethnic and gender differences in command opportunities and the overall fairness of the command selection process. Demographic differences in selection outcomes do not, on their own, indicate that there is bias in the selection process. Instead, the raw selection rates reported in this IP show whether there are average, aggregate differences in selection outcomes between men and women and between minorities and nonminorities (i.e., whites) and whether the differences are large enough to merit additional investigation into their underlying causes.¹

The Command Selection/Screening Process

Selection for command is competitive. The number of positions is limited, and eligibility for command positions often requires special certification. Furthermore, an officer's eligibility for consideration depends on his or her active federal commissioned service. For example, Army officers are no longer eligible for command selection at the colonel rank after their 26th year of service (U.S. Department of the Army, 2010, p. 19).

Although the Services did not describe why they use command selection boards, a Marine Corps briefing at a 2008 meeting of the National Naval Officers Association provides some insight into this issue that may apply, to some degree, to the other Services. Before the introduction of command selection boards in the Marine Corps, commanders were chosen from within major subordinate commands. Thus, selection was at the discretion of individual general officers. This led to the perception of an old boys' network because officers from less-populous military occupational specialties had fewer opportunities to command. To change this perception, selection boards were introduced and charged with selecting the best and most fully

qualified leaders, ensuring equal opportunity to command (U.S. Marine Corps, 2008).

The command selection process is described in a separate IP (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010c). Based on information about the composition of selection boards, precept language, and information provided to board members, it appears that the only potential source of systematic bias against (or in favor of) minorities and women is the provision of demographic indicators in candidates' records.

Calculating Command Selection Outcomes

Based on the data presented by the Services, we were able to compare outcomes of the O-5 and O-6 command selection/screening processes for the command selection boards, by fiscal year (FY), in FY 2006–FY 2010 for the Army, FY 2007–FY 2009 for the Marine Corps, and FY 2007–FY 2009 for the Navy aviation community and the Navy surface warfare officer (SWO) community.² We looked at selection outcomes in two ways:

- First, we calculated *within-group selection rates*, which are the percentages of selected individuals from the eligible pool within each race/ethnicity or gender group (e.g., the percentage of eligible female officers who were ultimately selected for command).
- Second, we calculated the *percentages of total selectees from race/ethnicity and gender groups*, which are the percentages of selectees who were nonminorities (i.e., white), minorities, and female.

Command Selection Rates at the O-5 Level

Table 1 shows the within-group command selection/screening rates at the O-5 level. For all four communities, nonminority selection rates were higher than minority selection rates. The largest difference was in the Army, where 14.5 percent of nonminority O-5 officers were selected for command but only 9.7 percent of minority O-5s were selected for command.

Similarly, male selection rates were higher than female selection rates for the Army and the Marine Corps. For example, 15.9 percent of women were selected for O-5 command in the Marine Corps, whereas 19.4 percent of men were selected for O-5 command in the same occupational specialty. In contrast, in the two Navy communities, female selection rates were higher than male selection rates.

A caveat to the findings for gender is needed: Except in the Army, the numbers of women eligible for O-5 commands were low (i.e., less than 25). For example, only 16 women were eligible for command at the O-5 level in the Marine Corps, compared with 494 men. Thus, small changes in the number of women selected for command in these Services may have led to sizable changes in the selection rates. For example, only 20 women were eligible for O-5 command in the Navy SWO community, so the selection of just one more woman would have yielded a 5-percentage-point increase in the selection rate for women in that community.

Command Selection Rates at the O-6 Level

Table 2 shows the within-group command selection/screening rates at the O-6 level. As with O-5 selection rates, the minority O-6 selection rate was somewhat lower than the nonminority selection rate in the Army—11.4 percent versus 13.9 percent, respectively. In contrast, minority selection rates were somewhat higher than nonminority selection rates in the other three communities. For example, the minority selection rate for the Marine Corps was 35.1 percent, compared with 22.6 percent for nonminority officers.

The gender outcomes were similar for O-5 and O-6 command selection: Compared with men, at the O-6 level, women had somewhat lower command selection rates in the Army and in the Marine Corps but somewhat higher command selection rates in the two Navy communities. Like the O-5 command selection results, the O-6 command selection results should be interpreted with caution because of the low

Table 1. Command Selection at the O-5 Level for Selected Years, FY 2006–FY 2010

| Service | Nonminority | Minority | Female | Male |
|---------------|-------------|----------|--------|------|
| Army* | 14.5 | 9.7 | 11.3 | 13.6 |
| Marine Corps | 19.5 | 17.5 | 15.9 | 19.4 |
| Navy SWO | 22.3 | 18.4 | 30.0 | 21.3 |
| Navy Aviation | 17.8 | 17.2 | 21.6 | 17.6 |

NOTES: All figures are expressed as percentages. The Army data include the eligible officer and selectee counts from the FY 2006–FY 2010 selection boards. The Marine Corps data include the eligible officer and selectee counts from the FY 2006–FY 2009 selection boards. The Navy data include the eligible officer and selectee counts from the FY 2007–FY 2009 selection boards.

*The Army data include command selections from tactical and nontactical competitive categories, whereas the Marine Corps and Navy data are for tactical competitive categories only. As shown in an earlier IP (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010b), women and minorities are concentrated in nontactical competitive categories in the Army, and these categories may yield different command opportunities than do tactical competitive categories. This may affect the overall command selection rate for females and minorities. Without further analysis, however, the size and direction of the effect on the overall selection rates for women and minorities is unclear.

numbers of eligible women. That is, not many women were eligible for O-6 command selection between FY2007 and FY2009 in the Marine Corps and in the two Navy communities. For instance, only seven women were eligible for command in the Navy aviation community.

Race/Ethnicity and Gender Percentages of Total Selectees for O-5 and O-6 Command

Turning to racial/ethnic and gender shares of command selectees, the data in Table 3 show that the vast majority of personnel selected for O-5 or O-6 command during the period under review were men and nonminorities. Across the Services discussed in this IP, men and nonminorities made up at least 80 percent of the population of officers selected for O-5 or O-6 command. The largest disparities in terms of race/ethnicity and gender at the O-5 level were in the Marine Corps: Only 9.6 percent of the officers selected for O-5 command were minorities, and only 1.7 percent were women. At the O-6 level, the largest disparities were in the Navy aviation community, where only 5.4 percent of the officers selected for command were minorities and only 1.2 percent were women.

The small sample of minority and female officers eligible for command selection raises an important point. In addition to command selection rates, several processes have shaped the percentages shown in Table 3. Racial/ethnic and gender differences in accessions, branching, retention rates, and promotion rates prior to command have had a cumulative effect on minority and female representation among those selected for command. An analysis that takes into account all of the contributing factors that influence the minority and female representation among those selected for command is necessary to provide a full understanding of the demographic diversity of command assignments.

Summary of Recent Command Selection Outcomes by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

The simple selection outcomes for O-5 and O-6 command in the Army, the Marine Corps, and the two Navy communities for selected years between FY2006 and FY2010 yielded the following main findings:

- Race/ethnicity:
 - For O-5 command, minority selection rates were about 1–5 percentage points lower than nonminority selection rates.
 - For O-6 command, minority selection rates were about 2–13 percentage points higher than nonminority selection rates in the Marine Corps and the Navy SWO and aviation communities. In the Army, the minority selection rate was about 3 percentage points lower than the nonminority selection rate.
- Gender:
 - For O-5 command, female selection rates were about 2–4 percentage points lower than male selection rates in the Army and the Marine Corps and about 4–9 percentage points higher than the male selection rates in the Navy SWO and aviation communities.
 - For O-6 command, female selection rates were about 2–6 percentage points lower than male O-6 selection rates in the Army and the Marine Corps and about 4–9 percentage points higher than the male selection rates in the Navy SWO and aviation communities. Whereas almost 400 women were eligible for command at the O-6 level in the Army, no more than 30 women were eligible in the Marine Corps, the Navy SWO community, or the Navy aviation community.
 - Even when the data are combined for several recent years, the small sample sizes for women in the Marine Corps and Navy data cast doubt on the strength of the findings for gender. In addition, the Army data include tactical and nontactical competitive categories, which has an unknown effect on the selection rates for women and minorities.

Conclusion

Although the data show that command selection rates in the Services and communities examined in this IP do differ by race/ethnicity and gender, these differences are not so great that we can draw firm conclusions about their root causes. Small sample sizes greatly limit the interpretation of the female selection rates, particularly for the Marine Corps and the two Navy communities. Also, where sample size is not an

Table 2. Command Selection at the O-6 Level for Selected Years, FY 2006–FY 2010

| Service | Nonminority | Minority | Female | Male |
|---------------|-------------|----------|--------|------|
| Army* | 13.9 | 11.4 | 11.3 | 13.6 |
| Marine Corps | 22.6 | 35.1 | 17.9 | 23.7 |
| Navy SWO | 32.6 | 34.2 | 36.4 | 32.8 |
| Navy Aviation | 19.2 | 22.5 | 28.6 | 19.2 |

NOTES: All figures are expressed as percentages. The Army data include the eligible officer and selectee counts from the FY 2006–FY 2010 selection boards. The Marine Corps data include the eligible officer and selectee counts from the FY 2006–FY 2009 selection boards. The Navy data include the eligible officer and selectee counts from the FY 2007–FY 2009 selection boards.

* Table 1’s discussion of tactical and nontactical competitive categories and their effect on outcomes applies here as well.

issue (i.e., in the Army data), differences in selection rates may be due to factors other than race/ethnicity and gender. In particular, the Army selection rates do not control for occupational specialty, so differences in overall command selection rates by race/ethnicity and gender may in fact be caused by the combination of differences in minority and female representation in tactical versus nontactical occupations and in command opportunity by occupation.

Minority and female representation in recent cohorts of command selectees is indeed low. This is likely to be the combined result of racial/ethnic and gender differences in accessions, branching, retention rates, and promotion rates prior to command selection. The importance of being selected for command to an officer's advancement to the most senior officer ranks cannot be overstated. Analyses that take into account the effect of all of these factors on minority and female representation among those selected for command is necessary to develop effective policies to increase minority and female representation.

Endnotes

¹A separate IP (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010a) provides a more general discussion of the methodological limitations of using raw rates to inform policy decisions. For example, even though differences across groups may be statistically significant, they may not be meaningful from a policy perspective. Furthermore, characteristics that raw rates do not capture may affect outcomes for race/ethnicity and gender groups.

²We want to note what each Service provided in terms of information about command outcomes. The Army brief to the MLDC provided command selection rates for the Army's active competitive category, which means that officers are selected by a central board based on competitive category. The Marine Corps brief to the MLDC provided command screening results. We used only data on individuals who were selected to command (i.e., who were on the primary, not alternate, list for command). The Navy brief

to the MLDC did not supply command selection rates for the submarine community. Therefore, we could not provide command selection rates for this community.

³A selection rate is calculated as the total number of members of a group selected during the period for which data are available divided by the total number of members of a group eligible during that period. A percentage of total selectees is the total number of members of a group selected during the period for which data are available divided by the total number of selectees during that period.

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Table 3. Percentages of Total Selectees from Race/Ethnicity and Gender Groups for O-5 and O-6 Commands for Selected Years, FY 2006–FY 2010

| Service | Nonminority | Minority | Female | Male |
|--------------------|-------------|----------|--------|------|
| O-5 Command | | | | |
| Army | 83.9 | 16.1 | 7.4 | 92.6 |
| Marine Corps | 90.4 | 9.6 | 1.7 | 98.3 |
| Navy SWO | 80.6 | 19.4 | 2.8 | 97.2 |
| Navy Aviation | 85.7 | 14.3 | 2.7 | 97.3 |
| O-6 Command | | | | |
| Army | 84.9 | 15.1 | 6.8 | 93.2 |
| Marine Corps | 88.4 | 11.6 | 2.2 | 97.8 |
| Navy SWO | 81.5 | 18.5 | 3.0 | 97.0 |
| Navy Aviation | 94.6 | 5.4 | 1.2 | 98.8 |

NOTES: All figures are expressed as percentages. The Army data include the eligible officer and selectee counts from the FY 2006–FY 2010 selection boards. The Marine Corps data include the eligible officer and selectee counts from the FY 2006–FY 2009 selection boards. The Navy data include the eligible officer and selectee counts from the FY 2007–FY 2009 selection boards.