
ARE MINORITIES UNDERREPRESENTED IN SOF?

This chapter first presents the racial/ethnic minority composition of SOF. We use three comparison groups to address the question of underrepresentation: (1) the active duty male population in the associated service; (2) source populations within each service who meet the entry criteria for SOF in terms of ASVAB score cutoffs and age, grade, and military occupational specialty (MOS) restrictions; and (3) eligible populations adjusted for the proportion of minorities likely to be nonswimmers and to have received nonjudicial punishments (NJPs).¹ Nonswimmers may self-select out of the eligible pool because of the rigorous swimming requirements, whereas those receiving NJPs are generally ineligible for SOF because a clean discipline record is a prerequisite in both the Army and Navy SOF. Estimating the eligible population is largely a notional exercise because we do not have firm data on the proportion of nonswimmers and NJPs among the source population, but it is useful in showing the constraints facing SOF in their attempts to increase minority representation.

RACIAL/ETHNIC MINORITY COMPOSITION OF SOF, 1997

The Department of Defense SOF community is small and consists of a little over 10,000 operators. Table 2.1 shows the number of SOF operators in each SOF community. The Army SF is clearly the

¹NJP (sometimes known as “Article 15”) is part of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). This allows commanders to impose punishments for minor violations and infractions of the UCMJ.

Table 2.1
Number of SOF Operators, by Service, FY97

	Officer	Enlisted
Army		
SF	1,041	4,020
Rangers	127	1,783
Navy		
SEALs	492	1,889
SWCC	—	591
Air Force		
CCT/PJs	60	419
Total	1,720	8,702

SOURCE: USSOCOM.

largest, consisting of approximately 1,000 officers and 4,000 enlisted personnel. The Air Force CCT/PJ community is the smallest, consisting of 60 CCT officers (there are no PJ officers) and about 400 CCT and PJ enlisted operators. The comparatively small size of the U.S. SOF community with respect to other units in the military is important for two reasons: First, it allows SOF to be more selective and stringent with respect to entry criteria because these forces need small numbers of people; second, as we see below, if the community wishes to increase its minority representation, even programs that provide only small increases in the number of minority personnel may be worth implementing.

Figure 2.1 presents the racial/ethnic composition of SOF in the three services as of FY97. Included in the chart are blacks, Hispanics, and all other racial or ethnic minorities grouped into the category “other.” The last category includes primarily Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans. The omitted group is white, non-Hispanics.

Overall, the aggregate percentage of minority officers in SOF ranges from 8–10 percent in the Army to a little over 6 percent in the Navy SEALs and 5 percent in the Air Force CCTs. Among enlisted personnel, minorities account for 10–14 percent of Army SF and Rangers, 9 percent of Navy SEALs, and 7 percent of Air Force CCTs/PJs.

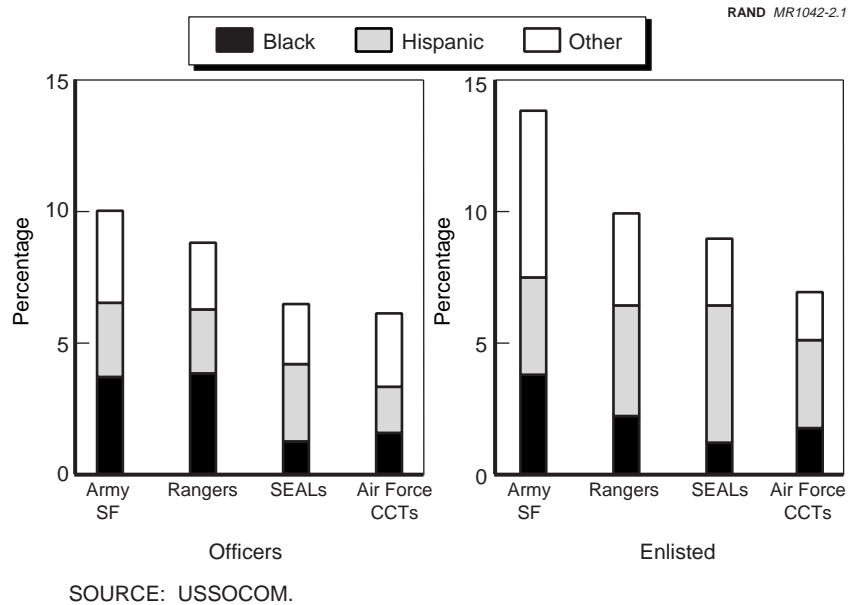


Figure 2.1—Racial/Ethnic Minority Composition of SOF Officers and Enlisted Personnel, FY97

SWCC, although not shown here, have the highest percentage of minorities among enlisted personnel: 17 percent. In addition, the percentage of minorities in the Air Force SOF increases to 7 percent among officers if we broaden the definition of operators to include pilots, navigators, and others with the “S” designation.² Among enlisted personnel, the proportion of minorities increases to 10 percent if we include flight engineers, loadmasters, sensor operators, and aerial gunners serving on SOF-specific aircraft.

Presenting data on minority composition inevitably raises the question of whether racial/ethnic minority groups are proportionately “represented.” We address this issue in the next several sections, using three comparison groups: active duty male population, source populations from which the SOF primarily recruit, and eligible popu-

²The “S” designation indicates SOF-specific aircraft.

lations adjusted for proportion of nonswimmers and those receiving NJPs.

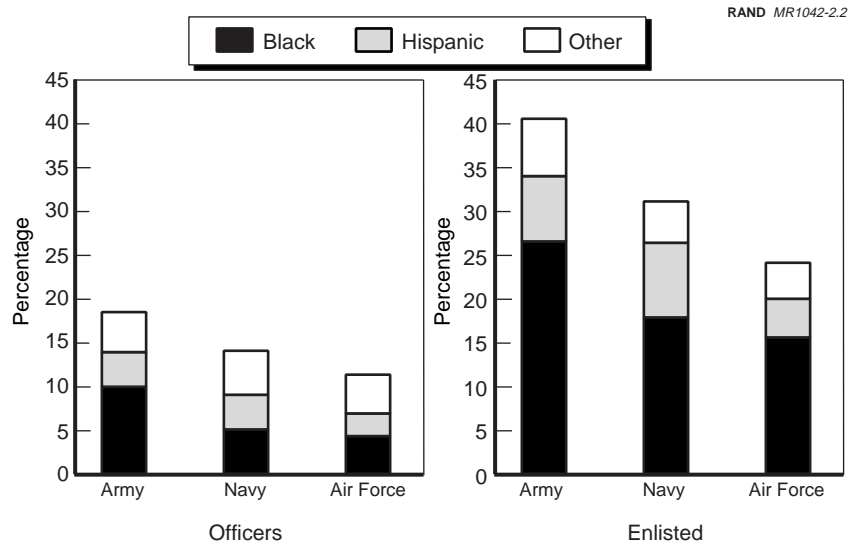
COMPARING SOF TO THE ACTIVE-DUTY MALE POPULATION IN THE ASSOCIATED SERVICES

The most frequent comparisons used in discussions of minority underrepresentation in particular military occupations or units are service-based. Do Army SF units have much lower representation than the greater Army? What about Navy SEALs compared with the Navy as a whole? Even these comparisons are not as straightforward as they might appear because the answers differ depending on which military groups we are talking about. For example, are we concerned about the service as a whole or about the cohorts of new recruits entering the service? There are differences by service, by officer/enlisted, and within that, by paygrade.

Here we use the overall representation in the service as a benchmark against which to judge the extent of minority underrepresentation in SOF. Figure 2.2 presents the minority representation in the services for male officers and enlisted personnel for FY97. The representation of specific minority groups varies across the services. The Army has the largest percentage of minority officers, a little over 18 percent, including the largest proportion of blacks. The Air Force has the lowest representation of minorities: under 12 percent. The Navy is in the middle, with about 14 percent minority officers. About 5 percent of Navy and Air Force officers are black, compared with over 10 percent in the Army.

Among the enlisted force as a whole, again, the representation of minorities varies considerably by service. For example, about 40 percent of Army male enlisted personnel are minorities, but the corresponding number for the Air Force is much lower: 24 percent.

Almost a third of Navy male enlisted personnel are minorities. The representation of specific minority groups also varies by service: The Army is relatively more successful in recruiting and retaining blacks (27 percent) than the Navy and Air Force (18 and 16 percent,

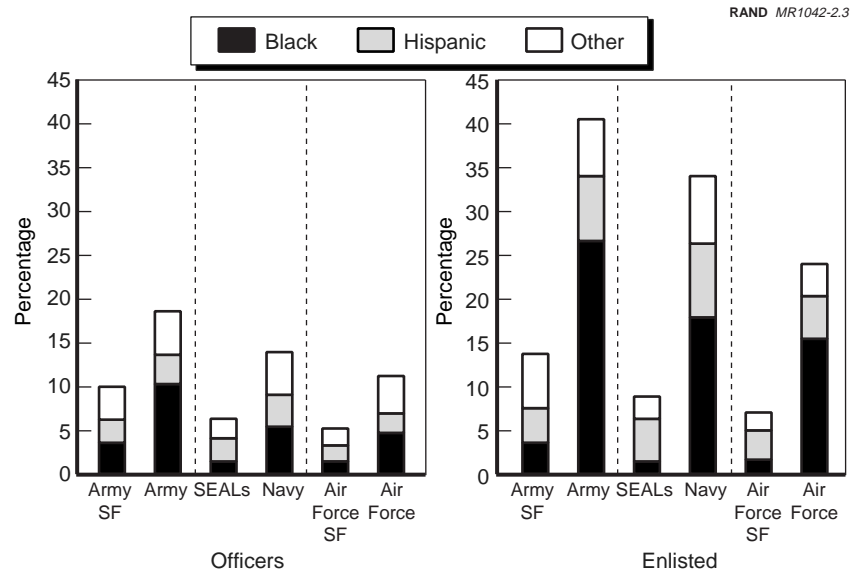


SOURCE: DMDC.

Figure 2.2—Racial/Ethnic Minority Composition of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, Officers and Enlisted Personnel, FY97

respectively), whereas the Navy is relatively more successful in recruiting and retaining Hispanics (a little over 8 percent).

Figure 2.3 compares minority representation in the SOF communities with their associated service for both officers and enlisted personnel. To make the graph more readable, we have omitted Army Rangers, using the Army SF data as a benchmark for the Army SOF instead. It is clear that compared with the associated service, SOF units suffer from low minority representation among both officers and enlisted. For example, among officers, about 10 percent of Army SF officers are minorities compared with 18 percent in the Army. The Navy particularly suffers from this comparison: A little over 6 percent of Navy SEAL officers are minorities compared with 14 percent of Navy officers.



SOURCE: USSOCOM and DMDC.

Figure 2.3—Racial/Ethnic Minority Composition in SOF and Associated Services, Officers and Enlisted Personnel, FY97

Among enlisted personnel, the discrepancies are even more marked. About two-fifths of Army male enlisted personnel are minorities compared with only 14 percent of Army SF enlisted; 9 percent of Navy SEALs and 7 percent of Air Force SF are minorities compared with one-third of Navy and one-fourth of Air Force enlisted personnel.

Figure 2.3 also makes clear that blacks are severely underrepresented in SOF compared with their overall representation in the three services, and this is true for both officers and enlisted personnel. Presumably, it is comparisons such as this that gave rise to Congressional concerns about minority representation in SOF.

It should be emphasized, however, that not all members serving in the military are eligible to join SOF. A better comparison would be between SOF and their source populations, defined as their primary recruiting pools. One possible reason for low minority representa-

tion in SOF then would be low representation in the source populations. We turn now to defining SOF source populations.

DEFINING SOURCE POPULATIONS

Officers

SOF tends to recruit primarily from junior officers, grades O-1 to O-3. The Army SF draws from current officers in grades O-2 and O-3. In addition, Rangers further restrict eligibility to combat arms branches only (Infantry, Armor, Cavalry, Battalion and Company Fire Support, Short Range Air Defense, Special Forces, Combat Engineer). Figure 2.4 compares the minority composition of officers in SOF with that of the source population, defined as officers in ranks O-1 to O-3 and for Rangers, junior officers serving in the combat arms branches. As found in the previous comparison with the associated service as a

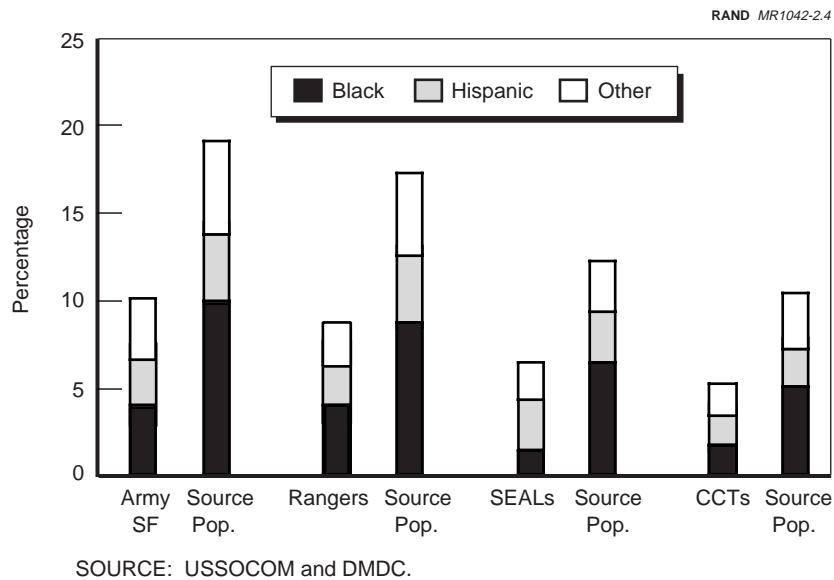


Figure 2.4—Racial/Ethnic Minority Composition of SOF Officers and Their Source Population, FY97

whole, minority officers are underrepresented in SOF compared with their representation in the source populations from which SOF recruit. However, the extent of underrepresentation varies considerably by racial/ethnic group.

For example, in Army SF, blacks constitute 3.8 percent of officers compared with 9.8 percent in the source population, whereas Hispanics constitute 2.7 percent of SOF compared with 3.9 percent in the source population. Hispanics account for 2.4 percent of Ranger officers compared with 3.7 percent in the source population. However, 3.9 percent of Ranger officers are black compared with 8.7 percent of the source population. Among the SEALs, Hispanics and other minorities appear to be equally or fairly well represented (2.8 and 2.2 percent, respectively, compared with 2.8 and 2.9 percent in the source population) but blacks are severely underrepresented (1.2 percent compared with 6.4 percent in the source population). Among the CCTs, Hispanics are well represented compared with the source population: 1.7 versus 2.1 percent, although the small number of CCT officers (60) should be taken into account here.

Enlisted Personnel

Age, Grade, and MOS Restrictions: SOF draw from very different pools depending on the service. Army SF draw candidates from experienced Army personnel. Enlisted members from E-4 to E-7 with less than 14 years of service and less than 12 months time in service at E-7 are eligible to apply.

Rangers do not have specific paygrade restrictions but draw from the following MOS: Infantryman (11B), Indirect Fire Infantryman (11C), Heavy Anti-Armor Weapons Infantryman (11H), Fighting Vehicle Infantryman (11M), Combat Engineer (12B), Fire Support Sergeant (13F), Avenger Crewman (14S), Special Forces Weapons Sergeant (18B) and Special Forces Engineer Sergeant (18C), Cavalry Scout (19D), and Armor Crewman (19K). All of these are considered combat arms career management fields (CMFs).

Navy SEALs require no prior service experience and one can be recruited for the SEALs training course (Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL or BUD/S course) straight out of basic training. Individuals currently serving in the Navy are also eligible to take the

physical test and apply for BUD/S. Potential recruits can enter the Navy on the “Dive Fare” program with a contract to become a SEAL. During basic training, new recruits receive a briefing about the SEAL (and SWCC) programs and can receive special physical conditioning training while in basic training to help prepare them for the physical test. There is also an age limit (less than 28 years); however, this can be waived on occasion.

Air Force CCTs and PJs do not require prior Air Force experience and new recruits in the Air Force receive a briefing on the CCT/PJ programs. They also recruit from current Service members.

ASVAB Score Cutoffs: All enlisted SOF candidates must meet certain test score cutoffs. Each SOF community uses different composites or subtests of the ASVAB to determine eligibility for SOF candidacy. The Army SF uses a cutoff score of 100 on the General Technical (GT) composite; this was changed two years ago from a cutoff score of 110. The Rangers use either the same cutoff as the Army SF or a score of 90 or higher on the Combat Arms (CO) composite. The Navy uses a combination of the Verbal (VE) composite and the Arithmetic Reasoning (AR) and Mechanical Comprehension (MC) subtests: $VE + AR \geq 104$ and $MC \geq 50$, although on occasion, these can be waived if the candidate scores high on other criteria. The Air Force uses a general cutoff score of 43 on the ASVAB (43rd percentile).

Clean Discipline Record: The Army requires that SOF candidates have a clean discipline record, although this can be waived in rare instances. Navy SEALs also require that the candidate have a clean discipline record for the past 12 months.

Physical Standards: In addition, all SOF candidates are expected to pass a relatively strenuous physical test whose standards differ across the services. The test primarily consists of timed swimming, running, sit-ups, push-ups, and pull-ups. The severity of the test differs considerably across the services, as does the order of the events, the amount of rest time provided, and the required attire.

The prerequisites discussed above are summarized in Table 2.2, which shows the eligibility criteria for SOF in the three services. These define the source populations for each service. In addition, we show the requirements for the swim and run portions of the test to highlight the service differences. The swim requirements for the

Table 2.2
**SOF Entry Prerequisites and Selected Physical Aptitude Standards,
 by Service for Enlisted Personnel**

	Army SF	Army Rangers	Navy SEALs	Air Force CCT/PJs
Entry Prerequisites				
ASVAB score cutoffs	GT ≥ 100	GT ≥ 100 or CO ≥ 90	VE + AR ≥ 104 MC ≥ 50	General ≥ 43
Grade/MOS	E-4 to E-7	CA CMFs	N/A	N/A
Clean discipline record	Yes	Implicit	N/A	N/A
Selected Physical Aptitude Standards				
Swim	50 m in boots and BDUs ^a	50 m in boots and BDUs	500 yd in 12:30 min	25 m underwater; 1,000 m in 26:00 min
Run	2 miles in 14:54 min	2 miles in 14:54 min	1.5 miles in 11:30 min	1.5 miles in 10:30 min

SOURCE: Recruiting materials provided by component commands.

^aBattle dress uniform.

SEALs and SWCC are known for their difficulty, but note that the Air Force entry test for CCTs and PJs is also extremely arduous. In fact, CCT and PJ candidates must swim twice the distance, at a similar pace, as that required of SEAL and SWCC candidates. These differences in entry standards are likely related to differences in mission or working conditions of the various SOF communities but there appeared to be no clearly articulated justification for the differences.³

As we show below, minorities are disproportionately affected by the ASVAB score requirement, the swim test (particularly blacks), and to a much smaller degree, the discipline record.

We used data from the FY97 active duty personnel master file to define the source populations first for each service SOF, using the ASVAB, grade, and MOS cutoffs. We compare the source population with the associated service to show the effect of these entry prerequisites on the minority composition of the source populations. The next subsection then compares SOF with the source populations.

³We return to this point below.

Army SF: The only criterion that was used to define the source population was a GT score ≥ 100 . This substantially reduces the minority content of the source population, compared with that of the service.⁴ For example, where minorities constitute close to 40 percent of the male enlisted population, they constitute between 24 and 29 percent of the source population in the various paygrades eligible to apply for Army SF (see Appendix C, Figure C.1). Blacks and Hispanics are both affected by the GT score requirement. Among the Army male enlisted population as a whole, blacks accounted for 26.7 percent and Hispanics for 7.2 percent. The GT cutoff reduces the percent of blacks in the source population to 16 and the percent of Hispanics to 4.6.

To estimate the proportion of the population rendered ineligible by the GT score requirement, we examined the distribution of GT scores for the different racial/ethnic groups in the male enlisted population (see Appendix C, Figure C.2). Overall, about 60 percent of all Army male enlisted have GT scores ≥ 100 . However, the percentage varies markedly across the different racial/ethnic groups. For example, although 75 percent of non-Hispanic whites have scores of 100 or higher, only a third of the blacks, 43 percent of the Hispanics, and 49 percent of other minorities do so. This explains the significant decrease in the minority composition of the Army SF eligible source population compared with the overall Army.

Army Rangers: The two main entry prerequisites are (a) CO score of 90 or higher and (b) Combat Arms CMF. (Appendix C, Figure C.3, shows the distribution of CO scores for the four racial/ethnic groups.) The CO score cutoff does not pose as big a hurdle for minorities as does the GT score cutoff. Ninety percent of whites pass this screen as do two-thirds of blacks, and close to 80 percent of Hispanics and other minorities.

However, the combination of this test score requirement and the restriction on career management fields (11, 12, 13, 18, 19) reduces the minority composition of the source population substantially. Minorities are underrepresented in combat arms or general military

⁴This GT score was changed from 110 to 100 in FY97 to increase the size of the source population. It also had the effect of substantially increasing the numbers of minorities who were eligible to apply for Army SF. See Chapter Three for more details.

occupations (see Appendix C, Figure C.4). The percentage of minorities, in particular blacks, in support and administration, for example, is more than double the percentage in general military occupations.

As a result, the racial/ethnic minority composition of the source population—particularly the percentage of blacks—for Rangers is substantially lower than that of the overall Army (see Appendix C, Figure C.5). Overall, minorities constitute between 22 and 25 percent of the source population for Rangers compared with 40 percent in the Army and the difference is largely attributable to the much lower percentage of blacks who meet the Ranger criteria—11.7 percent compared with 26.7 percent Army-wide.

Navy: Similar results hold for the Navy, where applying the score cutoffs and age requirement lowers the percentage of minorities in the source population by a third compared with the Navy overall (see Appendix C, Figure C.6). Overall, the minority source population for the SEALs consists of 8.3 percent black, 9.3 percent Hispanic, and 4.7 percent other minority. Again, the decline is particularly marked in the percentage of blacks in the source population compared with the overall Navy.

Air Force: The Air Force uses a general score on the ASVAB of 43 or higher. This score cutoff does not have much effect on the minority composition of the source population for the Air Force SOF because the Air Force primarily recruits from high-quality youth (see Appendix C, Figure C.7).

DEFINING ELIGIBLE POPULATIONS

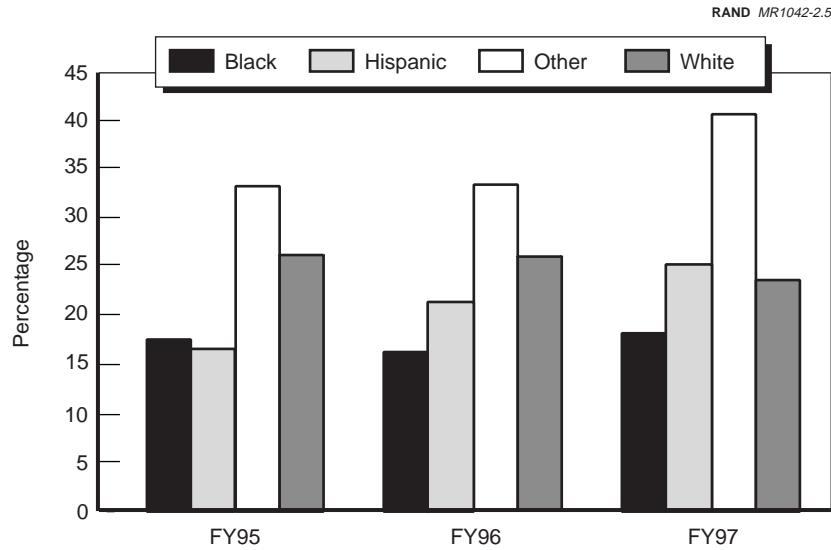
Swimming Requirement

One further prerequisite measure needs to be applied before we can fully define the eligible source population. The swimming requirement is a particularly difficult one for minorities to meet, especially blacks (Brooks and Zazanis, 1997). The Army has made its swimming test largely diagnostic in the sense that failure to pass it at this stage does not disqualify someone from attending the Army Special Forces Assessment and Selection (SFAS) course. However, the swimming requirement is still a hurdle. It is important to note that the Army

swimming requirement is considerably less demanding than that of the other services. In addition, as we pointed out, the entry physical requirements for Navy SEALs and the Air Force CCT/PJs are renowned for their difficulty. To pass the swimming portion of the test for SEALs or CCT/PJs requires better-than-average swimming ability and comfort in the water.

In the entrance tests for the Army SF, failure rates for blacks for the swim test were almost six times higher than those for whites, according to Army Research Institute reports (Brooks and Zazanis, 1997). The success rates in passing the BUDS/S selection test given at Great Lakes Training Center show clear differences in the pass rates for blacks and Hispanics (Figure 2.5) compared with that for whites, and again, the swim requirements appeared to be the major hurdle.

As a result, using the score, grade, age, and occupation restrictions to define the source populations is useful but could be misleading in the sense that some proportion of the source population will not



SOURCE: Data provided by SEAL Dive Motivators, Great Lakes Training Center.

Figure 2.5—Pass Rates for Enlistees Taking the BUD/S Selection Test, by Race/Ethnicity, FY95–FY97

apply for SOF because of the swimming requirement. Thus, they should be excluded from the source populations, to identify the *eligible* source population most likely to be willing and able to apply. Undoubtedly some nonswimmers or weak swimmers can learn or improve enough to pass the test, but a much larger portion will self-select out of the candidate pool because of this requirement, and this is especially true for the Navy SEAL and Air Force CCT/PJ programs.

A simple notional exercise will help show the effect of the swimming and clean discipline record requirements on the minority composition of the source populations. Lacking data on how many minorities cannot swim or are comfortable in the water, let us assume that about one-third of minorities in the Army source population and one-half of the Navy and Air Force source populations drop out because of the swimming requirement. The higher proportion of nonswimmers in the Navy and Air Force source populations is dictated by the more demanding swimming requirement in these two services' entrance tests. However, this is not the only adjustment that is needed to transform the source population into the eligible population.

Clean Discipline Record

In addition, some small proportion of minorities will fail to meet the Army SOF and Navy SEALs entry prerequisite for a clean discipline record. For example, data from the Army on NJPs in FY91 show that the NJP rate was 8.8 percent for blacks, 8.3 percent for Hispanics, and 2.9 percent for other minorities. For the Navy, the corresponding NJP rates were 9.1 percent for blacks, 6.7 percent for Hispanics, and 3.1 percent for other minorities (Walker, 1992).

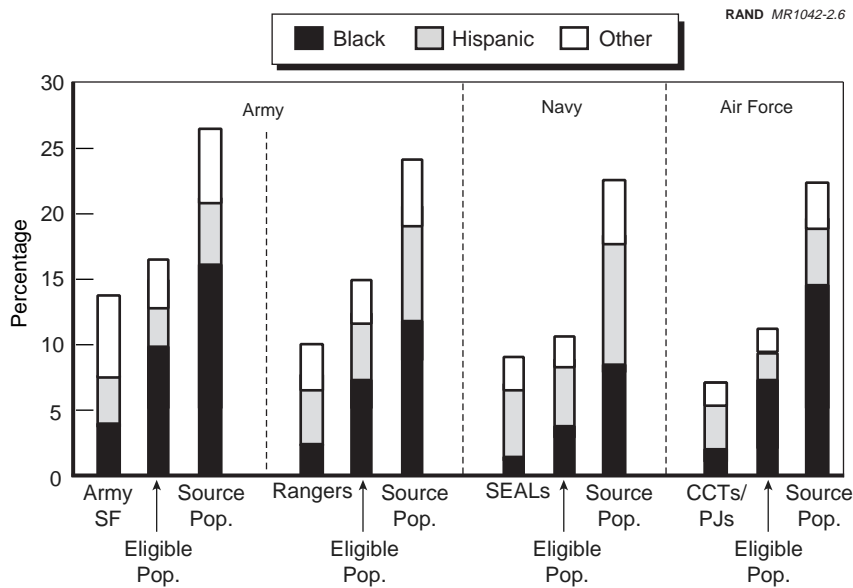
One can argue whether the likelihood of receiving an NJP is the same among the "swimmers" as among the "nonswimmers." Lacking any real data, we assume that the probability of receiving an NJP is the same across the two. Thus, to estimate the eligible population, we would need to adjust the source population by the percentage of nonswimmers and by the percentage ineligible because of having received NJPs. The minority composition of the source populations and eligible populations is shown in the next section, where these populations are compared with SOF.

COMPARING SOF AND SOURCE/ELIGIBLE MINORITY REPRESENTATION

The final comparison of SOF minority representation with that of the source and eligible populations is summarized in Figure 2.6. To reiterate, source populations are defined using the ASVAB, grade, MOS, and age restrictions; eligible populations are defined by adjusting for proportions of nonswimmers and those with NJPs.

There are two basic lessons to be learned from this comparison:

- Overall, minorities are underrepresented in SOF compared with their presence in the source populations.



Source population: based on ASVAB, grade, age, and CMF restrictions, where appropriate. Eligible population: source population adjusted by estimated proportion of nonswimmers and proportion with NJPs.

SOURCES: USSOCOM and DMDC.

Figure 2.6—Racial/Ethnic Minority Composition of SOF, Source Populations, and Eligible Populations, by Service, FY97

- The underrepresentation seems to be limited largely to blacks, who seem to participate in SOF in disproportionately lower numbers compared with their representation in the source and eligible populations.

Comparing the minority composition of SOF to that of the eligible populations reveals that the differences between the two are considerably smaller than other comparisons would suggest: 14 percent in Army SF compared with 16 percent in the eligible population; 10 percent in Rangers compared with 15 percent; 9 percent in SEALs compared with 11 percent; and 7 percent in CCTs/PJs compared with 11 percent in the eligible population. Again, these numbers are clearly notional in the sense that we do not have firm data on the kinds of adjustments we made, but they are useful in highlighting the limited recruiting pool for SOF.

Figure 2.6 also shows that underrepresentation among the enlisted SOF appears to be clearly limited to the black population. The services do relatively well in terms of recruiting from the eligible populations of both Hispanics and other minorities.

REPRESENTATION INDEX

It is useful to summarize the information we presented above by means of a representation index (RI). This measures the degree to which the actual representation of a specific group varies from what would be expected given that group's proportion in the population at large (Nordlie et al., 1979). The RI is computed as follows:

$$RI = ((\text{actual number}/\text{expected number}) * 100) - 100$$

where

actual number = proportion of the specific minority group in SOF, and

expected number = proportion of that group in the source population.

Thus, $RI = 0$ when the actual and expected numbers are the same, i.e., the group is proportionately represented in SOF, given its proportion in the source/eligible population. An $RI = -50$ would imply

that the group in question is 50 percent underrepresented compared with what one would expect, given its representation in the source population. The representation index for SOF personnel is shown in Table 2.3.

Minorities—particularly blacks—are clearly underrepresented in SOF when we compare SOF to the source populations, although the extent of underrepresentation varies by group and by SOF community. Using the adjustments made above to refine the enlisted source population into the eligible population and comparing enlisted

Table 2.3
Representation Index for SOF Officers and
Enlisted Personnel, FY97

	Black	Hispanic	Other Minority
Officers: Comparing SOF to Source Population			
Army			
Special Forces	-61.2	-30.8	-35.2
Rangers	-55.2	-35.1	-50.0
Navy			
SEALs	-78.1	0.0	-24.1
Air Force			
CCT	-66.0	-19.1	-46.9
Enlisted Personnel: Comparing SOF to Source Population			
Army			
Special Forces	-75.6	-21.7	6.9
Rangers	-79.5	-44.4	-31.4
Navy			
SEALs	-83.1	-46.2	-46.8
Air Force			
CCT/PJs	-86.8	-23.3	-51.4
Enlisted Personnel: Comparing SOF to Eligible Population			
Army			
Special Forces	-60.2	28.6	63.2
Rangers	-66.2	-9.1	6.1
Navy			
SEALs	-63.1	13.6	8.7
Air Force			
CCT/PJs	-73.6	50.0	-5.6

SOURCE: Calculated from data provided by USSOCOM and DMDC.

SOF to the eligible population reduces the extent of the underrepresentation and shows that it is largely confined to blacks. In some instances, Hispanics and other minorities are proportionately represented or overrepresented.

The answer, then, to whether minorities are underrepresented in SOF depends on the comparison group and differs between officers and enlisted personnel. For officers, minorities are underrepresented in SOF regardless of whether the comparison is with the active duty population or source population (with one exception: Hispanics in SEAL communities are proportionately represented compared with the source population). Other than this one exception, blacks, Hispanics, and other minorities are all underrepresented compared with their source populations. For enlisted personnel, minorities are underrepresented compared with either the active duty population or the source population (with one exception: "others" are slightly overrepresented in Army Special Forces). However, when compared with the eligible source population, only blacks remain clearly underrepresented. Hispanics and other minority group are typically overrepresented (see Table 2.3).