
American High School Seniors View the Military: 1976-1982

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Even before the inception of the all-volunteer military force in 1973, there was much debate about its viability, and that debate has continued through the seventies and into the eighties. Although the debate about AVF viability goes on, there is no argument that the sheer number of young men available for recruitment is declining now that the baby boom generation is into its 20s. (However, a good deal of discussion and argument revolves around the extent to which the increased recruitment of women can fill the gap.) In any event, so long as the AVF continues, it seems clear that views about the military—particularly, the views of youth—will have a critical impact on the staffing of the armed forces.

That young people's views about the military should be related to actual rates of volunteering would seem self-evident; we can also note some empirical support for that relationship. First, at the individual level of analysis, high school seniors' attitudes about job opportunities and fair treatment in the armed forces, as well as a broader range of attitudes about the military as an institution and military policy, have all been found to correlate positively with their

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plans and preferences for enlistment—particularly among males.¹ Moreover, it has been demonstrated that such enlistment plans bear a substantial relationship to actual enlistment.² Second, at the aggregate level, the data reported in this article demonstrate that increases in the overall proportions of high school seniors expecting to enlist are predictive of actual increases in enlistment rates.

These relationships, of course, do not operate in a vacuum. Civilian employment opportunities have a great deal to do with actual enlistment rates, and they may also have an impact on more general perceptions about the attractiveness of military work roles. In times of severe youth unemployment, enlistment rates go up; a recent report by Gilroy and Dale suggests that military accessions among male high school graduates track very closely the levels of unemployment for males in the 16–19 age range.³ While the economy in 1982 proved very favorable for military enlistments, Gilroy and Dale took pains to point out that any significant decline in youth unemployment would likely make recruiting more difficult. In other words, factors such as military pay, educational benefits, and general perceptions of working conditions in the armed forces are all likely to increase in importance once the economy recovers and fewer young people enter the military because of “economic conscription.”

This article provides an overview of high school seniors' views of the military, and the ways in which these views have been changing during the late seventies and early eighties. Measures include dimensions that are quite directly related to military recruiting: plans and preferences for military service, and views about the kinds of work opportunities provided in the military. Also included are more general views about the military as an institution, nuclear risk, and the needs and uses for military power. Further, recent survey data are reported concerning a proposed educational incentive for military service.

Methodology

The data were obtained from the Monitoring the Future (MTF) project, an ongoing study of high school seniors conducted by the Institute for Social Research. The study design, which has been described extensively elsewhere,⁴ involves nationally representative surveys of each high school senior class, beginning in 1975, plus follow-up surveys mailed each year to a subset of each senior-class sample.

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This report focuses primarily on the surveys of seniors in the seven graduating classes of 1976 through 1982, each surveyed in the spring. (Although many survey items reported here were included in the 1975 survey, changes in questionnaire format and response rates reduce comparability—thus the decision to exclude 1975 data from most tables.)

A three-stage probability sampling approach⁵ was used each year to select approximately 130 public and private high schools representative of the 48 coterminous states. The questionnaires were administered by professional interviewers from the Institute for Social Research during school hours, usually in a regularly scheduled class period. Special procedures which ensured confidentiality were carefully explained in the questionnaire instructions and reviewed orally by the interviewers.

Student response rates ranged from 77 percent to 83 percent across the seven surveys, and obtained sample sizes ranged from 16,662 to 18,924. The numbers of cases are much smaller, however, for data tables presented here. This occurs in part because each annual survey includes five different questionnaires, with many items appearing in one form only. Moreover, because of the substantial sex differences in most of the topics, data are presented separately for males and females, further reducing the numbers of cases underlying any particular statistic.

Plans and Preferences for Military Service

Table 1 presents trends from 1976 through 1982 in high school seniors' views about their own possible service in the armed forces. The items are taken from a larger set of questions inquiring about post-high school educational expectations, as well as service. The initial item, which dealt with likelihood of military service, shows that the proportions of males who expected to serve declined steadily from 1976 through 1979; however, the proportions rose in 1980 and again in 1981, and showed a slight further increase in 1982. The data for females reveal much lower proportions who expected to serve; those proportions declined somewhat from 1976 through 1978, remained essentially constant from 1978 through 1981, then in 1982 returned to the 1976 level.

The second question asked each respondent to indicate what he or she would do, assuming "...you could do just what you'd like and nothing stood in your way." Among males, the percentages tracked fairly closely the proportions who indicated in the first

Table 1
Plans and Preferences for Military Service (In Percentages)

	Males ¹								Females ¹							
	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982		
How likely is it that you will do each of the following things after high school?																
Percent who checked "Probably" or "definitely" will serve in the armed forces	22.0	19.0	18.7	17.6	21.0	23.4	24.1	7.0	6.3	5.5	5.4	5.4	5.5	7.0		
Suppose you could do just what you'd like and nothing stood in your way. How many of the following things would you want to do?																
Percent who checked "serve in armed forces"	19.7	17.9	18.3	15.5	16.6	19.2	19.7	11.4	11.1	9.8	9.0	7.2	7.8	9.5		

¹Weighted N for males ranged from 6824 to 8270; weighted Ns for females ranged from 7470 to 8885.

question that they “probably” or “definitely” would serve, although in 1976–1979 the percentages for the “preference” item ran 1 or 2 percent lower than for the “expectation” item. The 1980 data for males show only a slight rise in the proportion who preferred to serve, in contrast to the larger shift in expectations. Thus it appears that much of the 1980 increase in expectations of military service involved those who did not necessarily view service as preferable. In 1981 and 1982 the proportions of males preferring to serve rose just as much as the proportions expecting to serve. Nevertheless, a “gap” of about 4 percent remained.

Among female seniors the preferences for military service declined each year from 1976 through 1980, then rose in 1981 and 1982. Each year the proportions “preferring” to serve were higher than the proportions “expecting” to serve, but the differences in recent years were smaller than in 1976–1978.

The rise in proportions of male high school seniors expecting to serve, beginning with the class of 1980, was quickly followed by substantial increases in the numbers and proportions of graduates actually entering the Army. Particularly dramatic was the rise in proportions of graduates making up new accessions in combat arms: 41 percent in fiscal year 1980, 72 percent in fiscal 1981, and 85 percent for fiscal 1982 (data not complete).⁶ Overall DoD enlistment statistics show a related trend: the proportion of accessions in mental category IV (lowest) was about 32 percent for fiscal years 1979 and 1980, but dropped to 18 percent for fiscal 1981; at the same time,

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proportions in the top two categories rose from 27 percent to 34 percent.⁷ Thus it seems that seniors' expectations about military service during recent years have shown a clear relationship to actual enlistment behavior.

In sum, the dominant trend in personal plans and preferences for military service was a decline during the late seventies, followed by a shift upward in the early eighties. Following are some of the factors which may be contributing to these trends.

The Military as a Work Setting

Another set of questions asked respondents for their views about working conditions in the armed forces (see Table 2). The first item indicates that between 1976 and 1980 the military decreased in attractiveness more or less steadily for both males and females. Among females this trend continued through 1981, but then reversed somewhat in 1982; among males the 1981 ratings showed a modest upswing with no further change in 1982. In 1982 about three in ten males, and two in ten females, rated military service as an "acceptable" or "desirable" work setting.

All of the remaining items in Table 2 are based on earlier research and correlate with enlistment expectations.⁸ Ratings of various opportunities in the military work role, and ratings of fair treatment or discrimination in the services, almost all showed some erosion from 1976 through 1980, and then a partial recovery in 1981 and 1982 (with both of these trends clearer among males than females). One exception is that perceptions of discrimination against blacks did not shift appreciably. On the other hand, perceptions of discrimination against women in the services rose fairly gradually from 1976 through 1979; showed a further, sharper increase in 1980; and remained high in 1981. In 1982 the percentage dropped among male respondents, but not among females.

It is tempting to conclude that the somewhat improved ratings of military work roles in 1981 and 1982 were among the causes of the recent rise in enlistment expectations. One problem with that interpretation is that the enlistment expectations (among males) began rising in 1980; in other words, they led rather than lagged the rise in ratings of military work roles. It thus seems quite possible that some of the improvement in ratings of military work roles reflected a degree of "wishful thinking" among those who expected they would have to serve because they would not find acceptable civilian employment.

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Table 2

Views About the Military as a Work Setting (In Percentages)

	Males ¹							Females ¹						
	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982
Apart from the particular kind of work you want to do, how would you rate each of the following settings as a place to work?														
Percent who rated military service as "acceptable" or "desirable"	33.4	28.4	28.0	26.1	24.6	30.5	29.7	29.6	24.6	24.1	21.0	19.2	16.5	19.3
To what extent do you think the following opportunities are available to people who work in the military service?														
A chance to get ahead	30.1	28.5	28.4	25.1	25.9	30.9	30.4	42.1	39.9	37.9	35.1	33.6	36.7	39.1
A chance to get more education	54.6	51.5	51.9	50.2	46.7	51.5	49.4	66.6	65.1	61.4	62.5	58.9	59.8	60.9
A chance to advance to a more responsible position	50.1	46.8	49.0	46.7	45.1	49.3	48.1	59.5	63.0	61.2	58.7	56.4	59.7	60.4
A chance to have a personally more fulfilling job	39.8	34.7	39.1	35.9	33.6	38.6	37.9	48.1	49.6	47.4	46.3	41.7	45.4	46.9
A chance to get their ideas heard	23.2	19.3	22.0	22.6	18.2	20.2	20.9	26.8	30.0	27.7	27.1	24.8	26.9	26.0
To what extent is it likely that a person in the military can get things changed and set right if he is being treated unjustly by a superior?														
Percent checking "great" or "very great" extent	16.9	14.7	13.8	13.4	13.8	14.8	11.3	13.6	14.5	13.0	12.1	9.6	13.5	9.4
Do you personally feel that you would receive more just and fair treatment as a civilian or as a member of the military service?														
Percent who checked "more fair" or "much more fair" as a civilian	29.6	32.4	30.3	34.0	36.9	34.1	32.1	17.4	17.0	18.2	19.5	21.2	20.6	19.0
Percent who checked "more fair" or "much more fair" in the military service	20.1	16.6	19.1	16.0	14.7	16.8	18.4	16.5	17.7	16.8	15.8	14.3	13.4	15.0
To what extent do you think there is any discrimination against women who are in the armed services?														
Percent checking "great" or "very great" extent	13.7	14.7	14.9	15.5	22.0	22.0	16.9	15.0	21.5	17.9	18.8	25.9	23.1	24.7
To what extent do you think there is any discrimination against black people who are in the armed services?														
Percent checking "great" or "very great" extent	11.3	11.2	9.8	9.5	11.7	11.3	10.1	9.9	12.5	11.3	9.7	9.6	11.0	11.2

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¹Weighted N for males ranged from 1276 to 1832. Weighted N for females ranged from 1385 to 1740.

High school senior

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Perhaps the more important information contained in Table 2 consists of the overall ratings of military work roles, rather than trends, since the changes are actually rather modest in size. On the whole, the military has consistently been viewed in fairly positive terms when it comes to educational opportunities and chances to assume responsibilities; however, the ratings have been rather negative in terms of getting ideas heard or receiving fair treatment. Surveys conducted during the early and mid seventies revealed similar overall perceptions of the military, not only by a civilian cross section but also by representative samples of soldiers and sailors.⁹ Blair and Phillips, based on recent data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth Labor Market Experience, also concluded that the military work role is not seen as particularly attractive by those actually experiencing it.¹⁰ And Bowers, based on his own program of research plus other studies, concluded that people in general—military as well as civilian, officers as well as enlisted personnel—prefer to be supervised in collaborative and participative ways, rather than autocratically. But the same research also indicates that military work roles often frustrate these needs for participation.¹¹ It thus appears that the perceptions of high school seniors reported here are fairly realistic, since they correspond rather well with ratings by those actually serving in the armed forces.

The Military as an Institution

The MTF study includes several sets of items dealing with the effectiveness and influence of a variety of institutions, including large corporations, labor unions, the news media, the three branches of the federal government, the U.S. military, and higher education.

The first item in Table 3 shows that ratings on whether the military has done a good job for the country declined from 1978 to 1980, but improved by 1982. Among male seniors the proportion who rated the military as “good” or “very good” dropped from 58 percent in 1978 to 38 percent in 1980, and then rose to 53 percent in 1982. Among females both the drop and the recovery were more moderate.

Comparing data across institutions reveals that seniors in 1982 rated the military higher than public schools, and substantially higher than large corporations and labor unions. The ratings of the military, however, were lower than those of the national news media, and

Table 3
Views About the Military as an Institution (In Percentages)

	Males ¹								Females ¹							
	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982		
Percent who responded that the U.S. military is doing a "good" or "very good" job for the country as a whole:	58.4	53.5	58.1	45.5	38.2	43.3	52.5	50.3	52.4	49.2	46.0	42.5	42.6	48.9		
Percent who responded that the armed services' "influence on the way this country is run" is . . . :																
"too little" or "far too little"	23.3	21.1	23.4	29.1	42.2	36.1	25.3	21.1	21.6	21.2	23.9	34.3	34.5	24.3		
"about right"	62.1	65.6	64.7	57.8	46.5	51.3	55.1	65.3	68.9	69.4	65.3	56.6	54.0	59.3		
"too much" or "far too much"	14.6	13.3	11.9	13.0	11.4	12.6	19.6	13.7	9.5	9.4	10.8	9.2	11.4	16.4		
Percent who responded that what the U.S. is spending on the armed services is . . . :																
"too little" or "far too little"	34.5	34.1	38.3	40.6	56.9	58.7	37.5	19.8	22.5	22.9	25.8	39.3	42.9	24.8		
"about right"	40.2	40.7	39.7	37.5	26.7	26.0	28.5	52.1	52.5	51.5	50.6	43.9	37.4	39.3		
"too much" or "far too much"	25.2	25.2	21.8	21.8	16.3	15.3	34.1	28.1	25.0	25.5	23.5	16.9	19.6	35.9		

¹Weighted N for males ranged from 1424 to 1719. Weighted N for females ranged from 1455 to 1897.

still lower than ratings of colleges and universities. Ratings of most other institutions did not show substantial changes during the late seventies and early eighties; the noteworthy exceptions are the president and his administration, and the Congress, both of which rose in the 1977 ratings (the start of the Carter administration), declined each year thereafter, rose again in the 1981 ratings (the start of the Reagan administration), and declined again in 1982.¹²

The remaining two questions in Table 3 deal with military influence and spending. Throughout the period 1976–1982, half or more of the seniors felt that military influence was “about right.” Among the remainder, the more dominant view has been that the services have too little “influence on the way this country is run.” The proportions holding this view rose substantially in 1980 and 1981, then dropped a full 10 percent in 1982. A similar, but more dramatic, finding relates to military spending. The class of 1976 was about evenly divided on the issue of military spending, with males a bit more likely to favor an increase versus a decrease, the opposite true for females, and the modal response for both groups “about right.” The next three classes showed gradual increases in

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support for higher military spending; there was a sharp further increase in 1980 which was sustained in 1981; and then the class of 1982 showed an even sharper *drop* for more military spending. Another more subtle shift was a decrease in the proportion satisfied that military spending is “about right”—thus the class of 1982, compared with the class of 1976, shows higher percentages of both those preferring increased military spending and those favoring a decrease.

These three items reveal an interesting complementarity in trends. The ratings on how good a job the military was doing reached the lowest point in 1980 and 1981, and at the same time support for greater military spending and influence was highest. Both trends reversed with the class of 1982, thus suggesting that a considerable number of seniors felt that the military was doing better and, therefore, did not need more influence and certainly did not need further increases in spending. A slightly different interpretation would be that the widely publicized increases in military spending led some seniors to conclude that the military must—as a result of the increases—be doing a better job.

Nuclear Risk, Needs and Uses for Military Power

All of the seniors in our surveys have grown up during the nuclear age—the possibility of nuclear war has existed throughout their lifetime. A series of questions in each of the MTF annual surveys asked, “Of all the problems facing the nation today, how often do you worry about each of the following?” The first problem shown in the list was “the chance of nuclear war.” The percentages of seniors reporting that they worry “often” about this possibility quadrupled since 1975 (see Table 4). (Higher percentages of seniors reported worrying “often” about some of the other problems listed, such as crime and violence, or economic concerns; however, no other dimension has shown such a large shift in percentages, either upward or downward.)

Two other items in Table 4 also deal with the risk of war. The proportions of seniors expecting “. . . that this country will be caught up in a major world upheaval in the next 10 years” peaked sharply in 1980 (when Iran was holding U.S. hostages), and then declined somewhat. The final item is the most striking: it indicates the percentages of seniors who feel that global annihilation is likely during their lifetime. In 1975 just over 20 percent agreed with the premise, about twice that number disagreed, and the rest

Table 4
Concern About the Risk of War: 1975-1982¹ (In Percentages)

	Males ²								Females ²							
	'75	'76	'77	'78	'79	'80	'81	'82	'75	'76	'77	'78	'79	'80	'81	'82
Of all the problems facing the nation today, how often do you worry about . . . the chance of nuclear war? ³																
Never	19.9	16.2	14.3	12.7	9.0	6.1	8.4	4.6	25.4	25.3	23.4	24.7	15.9	11.2	11.7	8.0
Often	7.2	12.8	18.1	19.2	22.8	30.1	27.2	31.2	7.8	7.9	11.7	10.8	17.5	24.0	19.7	29.6
My guess is that this country will be caught up in a major world upheaval in the next 10 years: ⁴																
Disagree (or Mostly Disagree)	31.1	34.3	34.5	34.8	28.5	21.7	26.3	28.8	23.3	27.2	28.3	27.7	22.4	14.1	21.4	21.4
Agree (or Mostly Agree)	35.0	37.1	36.8	32.6	43.4	50.7	46.2	43.0	37.1	35.2	34.4	35.0	39.8	56.7	44.8	46.2
Nuclear or biological annihilation will probably be the fate of all mankind, within my lifetime: ⁴																
Disagree (or Mostly Disagree)	46.9	46.1	46.8	42.9	40.7	42.8	38.1	39.3	38.6	37.8	37.4	35.6	32.0	28.1	28.6	27.9
Agree (or Mostly Agree)	23.1	26.2	26.0	29.1	33.8	30.7	32.4	35.3	20.2	20.7	22.8	27.0	28.3	32.9	30.8	36.0

¹Trend data from 1975 are included in this table because response rates and item contexts were judged comparable to those for 1976 through 1982.

²Weighted N for males ranged from 1187 to 1836; weighted N for females ranged from 1345 to 1747.

³The response scale consisted of four categories: Never, Seldom, Sometimes, Often.

⁴The response scale consisted of five categories: Disagree, Mostly Disagree, Neither, Mostly Agree, Agree.

responded “neither.” By 1982 more than one-third agreed, slightly outnumbering those who disagreed. This substantial rise tends to parallel the rising proportions worrying about the chance of nuclear war (although the two items appeared on different questionnaires and thus were not answered by the same respondents). But more dramatic than the shift over time is simply that so many high school seniors seem so pessimistic about the prospects for survival.¹³

At least some of the growing concern about the risk of nuclear war may have been translated into support for U.S. arms superiority. A majority of seniors disagreed with the assertion that “the U.S. does not need to have greater military power than the Soviet Union.” The somewhat stronger statement that the United States should have “much more” military power than any other nation prompted more agreement than disagreement. The support for U.S. superiority rose from 1977 through 1981, but dropped somewhat in 1982—a shift

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quite consistent with the 1982 decline in support for increased military spending.

Seniors' views about the possible *uses* of U.S. military power present a somewhat mixed picture. More than 70 percent in 1976–1982 agreed (or agreed mostly) that “the only good reason for the U.S. to go to war is to defend against an attack on our own country.” Nevertheless, about 60 percent concurred that “the U.S. should be willing to go to war to protect its own economic interests,” and substantial minorities conceded that “there may be times when the U.S. should go to war to protect the rights of other countries.” The statement that “our present foreign policy is based on our own narrow economic and power interests” prompted more than twice as much agreement as disagreement, although large proportions of seniors elected the “neither” response.

Service Preferences Versus Expectations

As noted earlier, both expectations and preferences for serving in the armed forces had been declining throughout the late seventies; but beginning in 1980 the data for males showed a rise in expectations and a somewhat smaller rise in preferences. The data for the class of 1982 (see Table 5) show that most respondents' expectations were consistent with their preferences. For example, the great majority of those who did not prefer to serve in the armed forces also did not expect to do so. Similarly, but not nearly so strongly, most of those who preferred to serve expected that they would. However, substantial minorities of seniors' preferences and expectations did not match. (The practice of examining data separately for males and females is continued, in addition to distinguishing between those who do and do not plan to complete college, since inclinations toward military service are substantially lower among the college bound.)

One sort of mismatch involves those who preferred to serve but did not expect to do so. Among college-bound males, nearly one-third of those who preferred to serve considered it unlikely that they actually would. Among the noncollege-bound males, the comparable proportion was less than one-fifth. In each case this represents about 5 percent of the total—subgroups large and important enough to warrant further exploration. Among females, nearly half of those who said they would prefer to serve did not expect to do so—just over half of the college bound and somewhat

Table 5

**Military Service Preferences Versus Expectations,
Shown Separately for College Bound and Noncollege Bound,
Class of 1982' (In Percentages)**

Expect to complete 4 yrs. of college?	Would you prefer to serve in military	How likely is it you will serve in armed forces?									
		Males					Females				
		Def. won't	Prob. won't	Prob. will	Def. will	Total	Def. won't	Prob. won't	Prob. will	Def. will	Total
Yes	Yes	0.9	4.2	6.3	4.9	16.3	1.2	3.1	2.4	1.3	8.0
	No	46.9	31.2	4.5	1.1	83.7	74.2	16.2	1.2	0.3	92.0
	Total	47.8	35.3	10.8	6.1	100.0	75.5	19.3	3.6	1.6	100.0
		N = 4230					N = 4341				
No	Yes	0.6	4.1	10.5	10.5	25.7	1.6	3.1	4.2	2.7	11.5
	No	32.2	31.0	9.2	1.9	74.3	72.7	13.7	2.0	0.1	88.5
	Total	32.8	35.1	19.7	12.4	100.0	74.2	16.8	6.2	2.8	100.0
		N = 3348					N = 3591				

¹Data are presented separately for four subgroups defined according to sex and college plans. Cell entries are percentages of the total subgroup; thus, the upper left-hand entry indicates that 0.9% of all college-bound males in the class of 1982 preferred military service but expected that they definitely would not serve. (See Table 1 for item wordings.)

less than half of the others. Since this represents more than 4 percent of all female seniors, it is another subgroup worthy of further exploration.

The opposite kind of mismatch, likely to be more worrisome to those concerned with military recruiting, involves individuals who preferred not to serve (if they could do just what they would like and nothing stood in the way) but nevertheless expected that they would serve. This type of mismatch appeared infrequently among females (less than 2 percent), but more often among college-bound males (nearly 6 percent) and still more often among noncollege-bound males (11 percent). Putting it another way: among the small number of males who “definitely” expected to serve, five out of six also stated a preference for military service; however, among the much larger group of males who expected “probably” to serve, about 45 percent failed to list military service among the things they would *want* to do. This latter category is likely to include those young men who expect they will have to resort to military service because of difficulties in obtaining a satisfactory civilian job; it may also include some who think the nation will return to conscription.

Paid Education in Return for Military Service

A new set of items first introduced in the 1981 survey dealt with the reactions to a proposal for paid education in return for military service (see Table 6 for data from the class of 1982; the class of 1981 data were very similar). The idea of offering paid college tuition and living expenses in return for three years of service in the armed forces was endorsed overwhelmingly; three-quarters considered it “probably” or “definitely” a good idea, with only about one in twenty opposed. Of much more practical importance are the responses to the second question; more than one-third of the males and nearly one-quarter of the females indicated that they “probably” or “definitely” would sign up for such a plan if it were available.

Table 6
Views About a Paid Education Incentive for
Military Service, Class of 1982
(In Percentages)

	Males ¹	Females ¹
One idea for getting more high school graduates to serve in the military is to offer them a paid college education after three years of service in the armed forces. During the three years of military duty their pay would be fairly low. But afterward the government would pay their tuition plus \$300 a month living expenses for up to four academic years.		
Do you think it would be a good idea for the U.S. to have such a program of paid college in return for military service?		
Definitely not	2.4	2.3
Probably not	3.0	3.4
No opinion or uncertain	16.3	21.6
Yes, probably	30.0	32.0
Yes, definitely	48.4	40.7
If paid college in return for military service were available now, how likely is it that you would sign up for such a plan?		
Definitely would not	23.7	36.5
Probably would not	38.9	39.7
Probably would	29.0	19.3
Definitely would	8.4	4.5

¹Weighted N for males completing the items was 1512; for females, 1550.

This second question is, of course, hypothetical; seniors were asked to imagine an incentive program, and then try to estimate their own response to it. But the question does deal with matters which most seniors have thought about—military service, higher education, and finances—and thus we may suppose that responding was not especially difficult. Nevertheless, it bears repeating that this question is hypothetical and thus should be interpreted with caution.

Table 7
Military Service Expectations Versus Personal Reaction to Paid College Incentive, Shown Separately for College Bound and Non-College Bound, Class of 1982¹ (In Percentages)

Do you expect to complete 4 yrs. of college?		Would you sign up for paid college in return for military service?		How likely is it you will serve in armed forces?										
				Males					Females					
				Def. won't	Prob. won't	Prob. will	Def. will	Total	Def. won't	Prob. won't	Prob. will	Def. will	Total	
Yes	Def. not	19.3	2.1	0.6	0.3	22.3	32.9	2.2	0.5	0.1	35.7			
	Prob. not	19.4	19.3	1.9	0.8	41.4	31.3	10.6	0.8	0.0	42.7			
	Prob. would	6.0	12.7	6.5	2.6	27.8	8.8	6.2	1.4	0.0	16.3			
	Def. would	1.2	1.0	2.2	4.0	8.5	1.3	1.3	1.7	0.9	5.2			
	Total	46.0	35.2	11.2	7.6	100.0	74.3	20.3	4.4	1.0	100.0			
N = 774						N = 818								
No	Def. not	14.5	5.4	2.1	2.0	24.0	35.6	2.0	0.4	0.1	38.1			
	Prob. not	9.3	19.8	3.4	2.9	35.4	25.5	10.0	1.3	0.5	37.3			
	Prob. would	5.3	10.3	10.6	5.2	31.5	10.2	6.0	3.2	1.4	20.7			
	Def. would	1.5	1.0	3.1	3.6	9.2	2.2	0.6	0.4	0.7	3.9			
	Total	30.6	36.6	19.2	13.7	100.0	73.4	18.6	5.3	2.7	100.0			
N = 607						N = 638								

¹See Table 6 for complete wording. N's do not match those in Table 6 due to missing data case exclusions.

Of particular interest is the extent to which the educational incentive appears to modify self-reported likelihood of enlisting. It should be noted that the items about an educational incentive appeared near the end of one questionnaire, whereas the item about likelihood of serving (under present conditions) appeared a good deal earlier (and in all five questionnaires). The cross-tabulations for these two items about likelihood of serving are shown separately in Table 7 for males and females who do and do not expect to complete four years of college. While there is additional information in the table, discussion will center on whether an educational incentive might generate significant proportions of new recruits—individuals who had not already indicated a high likelihood of ser-

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ving, but who said they “probably” or “definitely” would respond to the educational incentive. Such “potential converts” are designated by boxes. Among all males who already indicated they expected to complete four years of college, 21 percent could be characterized as “potential converts,” and the figure is nearly as high for all other males (18 percent). Among all college-bound females the “potential convert” figure is 18 percent, and among those not currently expecting to complete college the figure is about the same (19 percent).

One question arising is whether many of those who had already indicated a likelihood of military service also would sign up for an educational incentive program if one were offered. As indicated in Table 7, that does seem to be the case for a clear majority, but by no means all. Among males expecting to serve under present conditions and not anticipating college completion, about two-thirds indicated they “probably” or “definitely” would sign up for the incentive program, if available. Among the much smaller number of college-bound males who already expected to serve, about four-fifths would also choose the college incentive plan. The proportions for females are fairly similar, although the small numbers involved make such estimates unreliable.

In sum, large majorities of high school seniors in 1982 felt that generous educational benefits in return for military service “would be a good idea for the United States.” Many already expecting to serve indicated they would be attracted to such a plan. Most important, substantial minorities of both males and females, college bound and others, indicated they were *not* expecting to serve under present conditions but probably or definitely *would* serve in return for such benefits. These individuals may turn out to be very important to the armed forces, particularly when prospects for civilian employment grow brighter and there are fewer economic conscripts.

Summary and Conclusions

The period from 1976 through 1982 was marked by increased tensions in the Middle East, Soviet military action in Afghanistan, extensive discussion about the nuclear arms race and the SALT II treaty, and more than a year in which we were nightly reminded about “the U.S. held hostage.” There was also much national debate about the success or failure of the AVF, the problems with military pay scales failing to keep pace with inflation, shortfalls in quality

as well as quantity in military recruiting, and the possibility that the nation would be better served by a return to conscription. And if all that were not enough, women were admitted to the service academies for the first time; and their successes and failures and feelings of discrimination were the subjects of frequent news reports, documentaries, and dramas. In short, a good deal has been happening which might reasonably be expected to have a variety of different impacts on views about the military.

It thus comes as no surprise that youth views about the military are complex, multidimensional, and capable of trending in several different directions. Expectations about enlistment declined during the late seventies, but then more recently rose—perhaps in direct response to shrinking civilian job opportunities. Views about working conditions in the military have shown some parallel shifts; however, it is not clear to what extent the recent improvements in ratings are among the causes, rather than the consequences, of shifts in enlistment plans. Support for increased military spending dropped sharply in 1982, probably because of a perception that such an increase had just occurred; nevertheless, there was much enthusiasm for a program of educational benefits which would require significant increases in the personnel portion of the military budget. Finally, and apparently somewhat independent from these other trends, concern about nuclear war has risen steadily, so that now substantial proportions of high school seniors expect their own lives to be ended by nuclear or biological disaster. In sum, our findings do not support any sweeping generalizations about whether young people seem to be growing either “promilitary” or “antimilitary.”

Of course, a more practical and immediate reason for examining youth views about the military concerns their implications for AVF viability. From this perspective, one of the most troublesome findings is the 1976–1980 erosion in high school seniors’ perceptions of the opportunities provided by military service. It seems likely that this shift reflected some underlying realities; Segal has summarized evidence that during the mid and late seventies job satisfaction declined in the armed services.¹⁴ Obviously, if military service is disappointing to substantial numbers of new recruits, this information will quickly be fed back to their younger siblings and friends; this, plus media attention to difficulties in the AVF, may underlie some of the seniors’ negative views about military job opportunities. This is really part of the “market test” aspect of the AVF, and it represents much more than salary levels. It has often been

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acknowledged that making the AVF work will require satisfying working conditions—including a sense of dignity and mission, as well as decent pay. Indeed, one could argue that a fundamental advantage of the all-volunteer approach is that it requires military and civilian leaders to confront such problems—at least in the long run.

In the shorter run, however, it appears that if problems in the civilian economy are severe enough, the all-volunteer system can be managed without very extensive reforms. As Segal pointed out several years ago, “It is a sobering indictment to have the health of one major social institution, the military, dependent upon the malaise of another, the economy, but the 1970s might have been the only time in recent history when the all-volunteer force had a chance of working.”¹⁵ Segal went on to observe that in the late seventies the economy improved, while the fortunes of service recruiters declined. At this writing, employment problems for young adults are again quite severe, while things are looking up for recruiters. Accompanying that has been the partial “recovery” in ratings of military opportunities, as reflected in our 1981 and 1982 surveys of high school seniors. But it remains to be seen whether such ratings can be sustained or even further improved if civilian employment opportunities improve and fewer young people enlist via economic conscription.

During the more difficult recruiting period of the late seventies, considerable interest centered on whether increasing the number of women would help to solve the problems of staffing the all-volunteer military. It is interesting to note that our findings show female seniors’ views of the military work role, on average, are a bit more positive than male seniors’ views. Given that such views are positively correlated with enlistment expectations, it is perhaps surprising that relatively few females expect to serve. One possible explanation is that many females treat military work largely at an abstract level rather than considering it as a role that they themselves might enter. Indeed, it turns out that female seniors’ views about the military work role are less strongly correlated with their preferences and expectations about enlistment than is the case for males.¹⁶ Although the proportion has been declining during the past few years, it still remains true that there are some female seniors who *want*, but do not *expect*, to serve. One of the things which may stand in their way is the perception—among both males and females—that women in the services are discriminated against to a considerable extent.

One further policy issue is to what extent the AVF appeals to those expecting to complete college, not just to those who complete high school. For a number of years it has been argued that increased reliance on educational incentives (rather than the reduction which has occurred in recent years) would bring in more of the college bound, and thus help to deal with AVF problems of demographic balance as well as the needs for higher levels of ability and motivation.¹⁷ More recently, specific proposals have been offered to provide college tuition plus living expenses in return for a tour of duty in the armed forces.¹⁸ It seems quite likely that significant improvements in educational benefits in return for military service would appeal to many who now plan on college, but not military service. Moskos and Janowitz have argued that present federal policies, in effect, subsidize young people to attend college rather than serve in the armed forces.¹⁹ Responses to the survey questions suggest that a potentially large and representative cross section of high school seniors would be receptive to programs offering a chance to earn their way through college by serving a tour. It might be well to move toward such a program now, rather than wait until improved civilian employment conditions precipitate a new "crisis" in recruiting under the all-volunteer system.

Notes

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3. C.L. Gilroy and C. Dale, "The Effects of the Business Cycle on Military Enlistment Rates," *Armed Forces and Society*, forthcoming.
4. J.G. Bachman and L.D. Johnston, *The Monitoring the Future Project: Design and Procedures*, Monitoring the Future Occasional Paper 1 (Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, 1978); J.G. Bachman, L.D. Johnston, and P.M. O'Malley, *Monitoring the Future: Questionnaire Responses from the Nation's High School Seniors* (hereafter cited as *MTF: Questionnaire Responses*), 1980 (Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, 1981); and L.D. Johnston, J.G. Bachman, and P.M. O'Malley, *Highlights from Student Drug Use in America, 1975-1981*, National Institute on Drug Abuse (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1981).
5. L. Kish, *Survey Sampling* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1965).

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7. Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (MRA&L), *Profile of American Youth* (Washington, D.C., 1982).
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10. J.D. Blair and R.L. Philips, "Job Satisfaction among Youth in Military and Civilian Work Settings," *Armed Forces and Society*, forthcoming; D.R. Segal, "Worker Representation in Military Organization," ed. F.D. Margiotta, *The Changing World of the American Military* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1978), pp. 223-246; and Y.H. Yoon, "Job Satisfaction in Military and Civilian Work Settings," *Armed Forces and Society*, forthcoming.
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13. The *Newsweek* "On Campus Poll" (1982), conducted by the Gallup Organization, showed similar attitudes on the part of a nationwide sample of college students. For example, 21 percent report that they frequently think and worry about chances of nuclear war, 49 percent say, "While concerned about the chances of nuclear war, I try to put it out of my mind," and only 29 percent say they don't think nuclear war is too likely so they don't worry about it. Very few think their chances are good for surviving even (what starts out as) a limited nuclear war.
14. D.R. Segal, "Military Service in the Nineteen-Seventies: Attitudes of Soldiers and Civilians," ed. A.R. Miller and A.F. Trupp, *Manning the American Armed Forces: Problems and Prospects* (Columbus: Mershon Center of Ohio State University, 1981).
15. Segal, "Military Service," p. 54.
16. Bachman, *High School Seniors' Plans*.
17. Bachman, Blair, and Segal, *All-Volunteer Force*.
18. See, for example, C.C. Moskos, "How to Save the All-Volunteer Force," *The Public Interest* (Fall 1980): pp. 74-89; C.C. Moskos and M. Janowitz, "Making the All-Volunteer Force Work," *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (June 1980): pp. 6-7; M. Janowitz, "Making the All-Volunteer Military Work?" *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (February 1981): pp. 7-9; and C.C. Moskos, "Making the All-Volunteer Force Work: A National Service Approach," *Foreign Affairs* (Fall 1981): pp. 17-34.
19. *Ibid.*