



MILITARIZING AMERICAN SCHOOLS

Post Pandemic 2023

ABSTRACT

The U.S. Department of Defense is struggling to meet its recruitment quotas for all branches of the military in 2022 -2023. In response to this “national security” crisis, there has been the emergence of lower standards for recruits as well as new strategies for military recruitment commands to appeal to and recruit the next digital generation of youth. The following document contains articles that cover the Department of Defense’s strategies in both expanded and new locations for military recruitment currently impacting youth both inside and outside their public schools. For those activists that are confronting increased military recruiting inside their communities, the following articles will offer information about programs of the military they are likely to confront in their efforts to demilitarize youth. Also provided are basic resources to counter military recruitment with youth targeted by military recruiters from the counter-recruitment community of activists.

[NNOMY Demilitarization](#)

School Militarization 3.0

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Figure 1: Cadet First Sergeant Ivan Pegjo, Seaside, California JROTC program

INTRODUCTION

“The costs of funneling kids into military careers are profound. International human rights law defines the minimum age for recruiting children into armed conflict as 18 and the International Criminal Court goes further, designating the recruitment of kids aged 14 or younger a war crime. At such an age, the connections between the parts of the brain that feel and think have yet to fully develop, making it more likely that they’ll act on fear, excitement, or some other overpowering emotion rather than rationally facing such decisions. (Though if kids learn to acknowledge those very emotions, that can at least help them somewhat in controlling their impulsive reactions.) In turn, trauma, which people who enter the military are more likely to experience than civilians, further stunts the ability to think critically.

Teenagers are also still forming a sense of identity vis-à-vis their peers and adult figures who (ideally) reflect their strengths and preferences back to them via praise, constructive criticism, and encouragement. A militarized curriculum runs counter to such an expansive view of human development. “ *Andrea Mazzarino*

Source: <https://truthout.org/articles/our-children-are-experiencing-militarization-of-the-us-up-close-and-personally/>



Figure 2: Wyandanch Army JROTC Cadets dine with Brigadier General Amanda Azubuike – U.S. Army JROTC

In Public Schools, the N.R.A. Gets a Boost from Junior R.O.T.C.

Instructors in military sponsored J.R.O.T.C. classes have offered to promote the N.R.A. in high schools in exchange for money for their marksmanship programs.



Figure 3: The Junior R.O.T.C. Florida State Marksmanship Championship in Cape Coral, Fla. this April. At a time when many schools are going to great lengths to keep guns out of schools, the J.R.O.T.C. program has become one of the few places on campuses that promotes weapons training. Credit...Zack Wittman for The New York Times

Dec. 20, 2022 / [Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs](#) and [Mike Baker](#) / *New York Times* - CAPE CORAL, Fla. — Beneath the fluorescent lights of a high school gym, dozens of teenagers took turns firing air rifles at a series of bull's-eye targets, part of a marksmanship competition that drew students from schools all along the Florida Gulf Coast.

The event was better outfitted than many high school competitions, with lights that illuminated the targets, scopes for spotting downrange and a heavy curtain to keep pellets from going astray, thanks to the help of a key sponsor: the charitable arm of the National Rifle Association.



Figure 4: Students learn to handle and fire guns as part of a program in leadership and civic values sponsored by the military at some 3,500 high school campuses across the country. Credit...Zack Wittman for The New York Times

“A lot of the equipment that you see behind me comes from N.R.A. grants,” Bryan Williams, a retired Army major who teaches in the Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps program at Mariner High School in Cape Coral, told the contestants.

That tip of the hat was no casual remark. In order to win N.R.A. sponsorships, records show, military instructors who lead J.R.O.T.C. marksmanship teams at public high schools have repeatedly promised to promote the organization at competitions and in newsletters, post N.R.A. banners at their schools or add the N.R.A. logo to apparel worn by students.

In his pitch, Mr. Williams also offered to provide student testimonials to the organization “to include supporting photographs and storyboards showcasing the equipment and the happy cadets.”



Figure 5: “A lot of the equipment that you see behind me comes from N.R.A. grants,” Bryan Williams, a retired Army major who teaches in the Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps program at Mariner High School in Florida, told shooting contestants. Credit: Zack Wittman for *The New York Times*

At a time when many districts are going to great lengths to keep guns out of schools, J.R.O.T.C. has become one of the few programs on campuses that promote weapons training.

The N.R.A. has donated more than \$5 million in money and equipment since 2015 to support competitive shooting programs at schools, as one of several outside organizations that have provided funding to J.R.O.T.C. programs, according to tax records and other documents. Some of the districts that have received N.R.A. funding, such as the one in Lee County, Fla., include schools that [automatically enroll students](#) in J.R.O.T.C. classes in some grades, or otherwise push students to take them, though participation on the marksmanship teams is most often voluntary.

The organization has supported J.R.O.T.C. programs by hosting shooting competitions, highlighting teams in its trade magazine and providing special badges to J.R.O.T.C. shooting competitors.

The programs, which utilize air rifles rather than live-fire weapons, are prevalent in many communities where marksmanship and hunting are popular sporting activities, and parents have credited the instruction with teaching young people to handle guns safely. But schools largely prohibit guns on campus, and the marksmanship teams have at times alarmed teachers and students concerned about school shootings and a rise in gun violence. Some districts have dismantled their J.R.O.T.C. marksmanship programs or had heated debates about how to incorporate them into school life.

For the National Rifle Association, which has faced rising legal and financial troubles along with declining revenues and membership, the promotional promises offered through J.R.O.T.C. programs provide an entree to a new generation of potential members in a uniquely trusted venue — the public school.

In a statement, a spokesman for the N.R.A. said that the group was proud to fund the shooting teams and that the J.R.O.T.C. instructors’ promotion of the N.R.A. was their choice, not a requirement for funding.

“The N.R.A. Foundation proudly supports firearms education and training for a variety of deserving organizations,” said the spokesman, Andrew Arulanandam. “Grant recipients sometimes voluntarily promote our efforts to bring awareness to the importance of firearms training, gun safety and shooting sports. We are proud of these activities and the way they positively impact students, schools and communities across the country.”



Figure 6 In order to win N.R.A. sponsorships, military instructors who lead J.R.O.T.C. marksmanship teams at public high schools, have repeatedly promised to promote the organization at competitions and in newsletters. Credit...Zack Wittman for The New York Times

In their bids to obtain N.R.A. grants to fund marksmanship training and competition on campus, J.R.O.T.C. instructors have said the funding will expand the number of teenagers trained in the safe use of firearms and advance the Second Amendment, according to school district documents obtained by The New York Times in response to more than 100 records requests. Some instructors have promised to encourage cadets to join the N.R.A. and have volunteered students to participate in N.R.A. fund-raising events.

“Through this grant, we have the opportunity to engage a set of at-risk students to shooting sports,” an instructor in Kentucky wrote in one application. “The N.R.A. is a widely known and recognized entity in our community, and we look forward to furthering that reputation with our display of commitment and excellence,” another one wrote in California.



Figure 7: The N.R.A. has donated more than \$5 million since 2015 to support competitive shooting programs at schools, according to tax records and other documents. Credit...Zack Wittman for The New York Times

A J.R.O.T.C. instructor in Texas wrote that gaining exposure to firearms at school “fosters positive attitudes toward Second Amendment rights for these future voters and their families.”

The promotional payback offered by J.R.O.T.C. instructors in exchange for funding has often been transactional. One instructor said N.R.A. banners at competitions and other J.R.O.T.C. facilities would constitute “ad space” that would be smaller or larger depending on the amount of the N.R.A. contribution. Others promised to recognize the organization online, on the radio or in local newspapers.

At the competition in Florida in April, students and their parents spoke highly of the marksmanship program and

J.R.O.T.C. in general, describing how they improved the teenagers’ confidence and focus in school.

Elizabeth Vazquez, who was watching her daughter Eryka from the bleachers, said she loved seeing her daughter blossom in the program.

“She’s enjoying it, she’s happy, so, as a parent, I’m going to support her,” Ms. Vazquez said. “You know, I thought I was going to have a cheerleader or a dancer, but my baby shoots — that’s what she likes — so, OK, I’ll support her.”

The N.R.A. has donated more than \$150,000 in money and equipment since 2015 to support competitive shooting programs at Mariner High and other schools in Lee County, on Florida’s west coast, part of \$144 million it said it had spent to promote youth shooting sports — in J.R.O.T.C. and other programs — over the last two decades.

Several of the spectators who showed up at the J.R.O.T.C. event in Cape Coral wore shirts with pro-gun logos, including a variation on the “Don’t Tread on Me” flag that read, “Don’t Tread, N.R.A.”

Military recruiters stood by throughout the day and pitched students on the benefits of joining the armed forces, a key point of contention for parents and students who have objected when schools [make J.R.O.T.C. enrollment mandatory or automatic](#) for some students.



Credit...Zack Wittman for The New York Times



Figure 8: The N.R.A. has donated more than \$150,000 since 2015 to support competitive shooting programs at Mariner High and other schools in Lee County, on Florida's west coast. Credit...Zack Wittman for The New York Times

Michael Sloan, a senior vice commander for a local Veterans of Foreign Wars post, said he was proud to see the teenagers learning how to effectively and safely handle weapons.

“A lot of people say a lot of things about American youth, but seeing you all out here today exercising your Second Amendment rights is something that we’re very, very proud of,” he said, addressing the students as the second day of the competition kicked off. “We love your patriotism. And you hang in there. America’s great, and you’re part of what makes it great.”

But the presence of weapons on campus via J.R.O.T.C. programs has sometimes caused problems.

A high school in Durham, N.C., went into lockdown after someone reported a person on campus with a gun, only for school officials to identify the person as a J.R.O.T.C. cadet doing drills.



Figure 9: At the competition in Florida in April, students and their parents spoke highly of both the marksmanship program and J.R.O.T.C. Credit...Zack Wittman for The New York Times

In Dover, Del., a J.R.O.T.C. program that wanted to add a marksmanship team ran into a problem: The team’s shooting would violate the city’s strict gun-control code. The program managed to win changes to city code that allowed the cadets to train. The next year, the team won a grant of more than \$10,000 from the N.R.A. Foundation.

Some students in Nashua, N.H., objected when a J.R.O.T.C. program applied to add a marksmanship program on campus in 2019. Paula Durant, who was then a senior, said she and some of her classmates had argued that the school was supposed to be a gun-free zone and that the air rifles used by the J.R.O.T.C. program looked genuine. She said students had been on edge after the massacre the year before in Parkland, Fla., where a former student and J.R.O.T.C. cadet wore the J.R.O.T.C. program’s shirt while killing 17 people in a shooting spree.

“There was a lot of anxiety about school shootings,” Ms. Durant said.



Figure 10: Target cards being scored by judges at the competition. Credit...Zack Wittman for The New York Times

She asked school officials at a public meeting to move the marksmanship training off campus, an idea the district ultimately embraced. Afterward, she said, she faced an intense backlash online from people who accused her of being a coward; some made such threatening remarks, she said, that local police officers came to the campus and assured her they were there to support her.

The school board in Broward County, Fla., where the Parkland shooting occurred, decided after the 2018 massacre that it would no longer accept money from the N.R.A.

Some teachers have also expressed reservations over the shooting competitions and weapons training.



Figure 11: The issue of public schools receiving direct funding from the N.R.A. Foundation has at times left districts struggling to navigate the optics. Credit... Zack Wittman for The New York Times

Deborah Teal, a longtime instructor at Santa Ana High School in Orange County, Calif., said that she had seen the program provide valuable help to students who were not otherwise involved in school activities, but that she was alarmed by the emphasis on guns at a time when students were dealing with so much gun violence.

“The militarization of the kids, especially vulnerable kids, is what bothered me,” said Ms. Teal, who added that some students at her former school had started an unsuccessful petition to end the marksmanship program.

The program remains at nearby Santiago High School, in Garden

Grove, where it has enjoyed support.

Michael H. Manney, a J.R.O.T.C. instructor at Santiago, wrote to the N.R.A. Foundation this year to say that the marksmanship program had helped draw more students into J.R.O.T.C. and made weapons training available to disadvantaged students who might otherwise have had no one to show them how to handle weapons safely.

“Ultimately, we wish to foster esprit de corps among cadets and the community by providing foundational training of firearms handling and use, which prepares young men and women for careers in law enforcement, department of corrections and military,” he wrote in an N.R.A. funding application.



Figure 12: The Mariner High School team with their trophies. The N.R.A. has donated more than \$150,000 since 2015 to support competitive shooting programs at Mariner High and other schools in Lee CountyCredit...Zack Wittman for The New York Times

The issue of public schools' receiving direct funding from the N.R.A. Foundation has at times left districts struggling to navigate the optics.

Emails show the J.R.O.T.C. program at East River High School in Orlando, Fla., dealing with headaches in 2020 over how to receive and process N.R.A. money through the school district without attracting controversy. The school's J.R.O.T.C. instructor, Steven Celeste, proposed a solution to his colleagues that is often used in other districts: sending money through an entity that is not formally part of the school.

“We just have to ensure their grant money goes to the Booster Club Fund and not the School Fund ... too much political backlash involved for us and the school,” he wrote.

Mr. Williams, the J.R.O.T.C. instructor in Cape Coral, said the school was more than willing to openly promote the N.R.A. at its competitions in exchange for the funding it received.

“The N.R.A. Foundation, specifically, is probably the most important resource we have in J.R.O.T.C. for our equipment,” he said.

The lack of objection from parents, students and educators over the program is a reflection of how many lessons students take away from marksmanship training that go far beyond shooting, Mr. Williams said.

“What we tell these kids all the time is, ‘Hey, it’s really great if you improved your score, but what we really want you to do is take away some values. We want you to take away some traits that you can apply to real life,’” he said. “Focus, concentration, self-discipline and self-control. That’s what a shooter takes away from marksmanship.”

Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/20/us/jrotc-nra-schools.html>

Thousands of Teens Are Being Pushed Into Military's Junior R.O.T.C.

In high schools across the country, students are being placed in military classes without electing them on their own. “The only word I can think of is ‘indoctrination,’” one parent said.

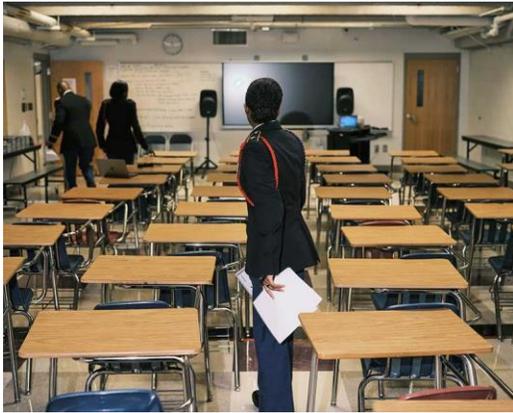


Figure 13: Some schools have made Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps programs a requirement. Credit...Zack Wittman for The New York Times

Dec. 11, 2022 Updated Dec. 20, 2022 / Mike Baker, Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs, Ilana Marcus / [New York Times](#) - DETROIT — On her first day of high school, Andrey Thomas looked over her schedule and found that she was enrolled in a class with an unfamiliar name: J.R.O.T.C.

She and other freshmen at Pershing High School in Detroit soon learned that they had been placed into the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps, a program funded by the U.S. military designed to teach leadership skills, discipline and civic values — and open students' eyes to the idea of a military career. In the class, students had to wear military uniforms and obey orders from an instructor who was often yelling, Ms. Thomas said, but when several of them pleaded to be allowed to drop the class, school administrators refused.

“They told us it was mandatory,” Ms. Thomas said.

J.R.O.T.C. programs, taught by military veterans at some 3,500 high schools across the country, are supposed to be elective, and the Pentagon has said that requiring students to take them goes against its guidelines. But The New York Times found that thousands of public school students were being funneled into the classes without ever having chosen them, either as an explicit requirement or by being automatically enrolled.

A review of J.R.O.T.C. enrollment data collected from more than 200 public records requests showed that dozens of schools have made the program mandatory or steered more than 75 percent of students in a single grade into the classes, including schools in Detroit, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Oklahoma City and Mobile, Ala. A vast majority of the schools with those high enrollment numbers were attended by a large proportion of nonwhite students and those from low-income households, The Times found.



Figure 14: Andrey Thomas, 18, a college student, said that, as a high school freshman, she was required to join the J.R.O.T.C. program at Pershing High School in Detroit. Credit...Emily Elkonin for The New York Times

The role of J.R.O.T.C. in U.S. high schools has been a point of debate since the program was founded more than a century ago. During the antiwar battles of the 1970s, protests over what was seen as an attempt to recruit high schoolers to serve in Vietnam prompted some school districts to restrict the program. Most schools gradually phased out any enrollment requirements.

But 50 years later, new conflicts are emerging as parents in some cities say their children are being forced to put on military uniforms, obey a chain of command and recite patriotic declarations in classes they never wanted to take.

In Chicago, concerns raised by activists, news coverage and an inspector general’s report led the school district to backtrack this year on automatic J.R.O.T.C. enrollments at several high schools that serve primarily lower-income neighborhoods on the city’s South and West sides. In other places, *The Times* found, the practice continues, with students and parents sometimes rebuffed when they fight compulsory enrollment.

“If she wanted to do it, I would have no problem with it,” said Julio Mejia, a parent in Fort Myers, Fla., who said his daughter had tried to get out of a required J.R.O.T.C. class in 2019, when she was a freshman, and was initially refused. “She has no interest in a military career. She has no interest in doing any of that stuff. The only word I can think of is ‘indoctrination.’”

J.R.O.T.C. classes, which offer instruction in a wide range of topics, including leadership, civic values, weapons handling and financial literacy, have provided the military with a valuable way to interact with teenagers at a time when it is facing its most serious recruiting challenge since the end of the Vietnam War.

While Pentagon officials have long insisted that J.R.O.T.C. is not a recruiting tool, they have openly discussed expanding the \$400 million-a-year program, whose size has already tripled since the 1970s, as a way of drawing more young people into military service. The Army says 44 percent of all soldiers who entered its ranks in recent years came from a school that offered J.R.O.T.C.

High school principals who have embraced the program say it motivates students who are struggling, teaches self-discipline to disruptive students and provides those who may feel isolated with a sense of camaraderie. It has found a welcome home in rural areas where the military has deep roots but also in urban centers where educators want to divert students away from drugs or violence and toward what for many can be a promising career or a college scholarship.

And military officials point to research indicating that J.R.O.T.C. students have better attendance and graduation rates, and fewer discipline problems at school.



Name tags of students who have been part of the J.R.O.T.C. program at South Atlanta High School in Georgia. Military officials have said their research shows that J.R.O.T.C. students have better attendance and graduation rates, and fewer discipline problems at school. Credit... Zack Wittman for The New York Times

But critics have long contended that the program’s militaristic discipline emphasizes obedience over independence and critical thinking. The program’s textbooks, *The Times* found, at times falsify or downplay the failings of the U.S. government. And the program’s heavy concentration in schools with low-income and nonwhite students, some opponents said, helps propel such students into the military instead of encouraging other routes to college or jobs in the civilian economy.

“It’s hugely problematic,” said Jesús Palafox, who worked with the campaign against automatic enrollment in Chicago. Now 33, he said he had become concerned that the program was “brainwashing” students after a J.R.O.T.C. instructor at his high school approached him and urged him to join the classes and enlist in the military.

“A lot of recruitment for these programs are happening in heavy communities of color,” he said.

Schools also have a financial incentive to push students into the program. The military subsidizes instructors’ salaries while requiring schools to maintain a certain level of enrollment in order to keep the program. In states that have allowed J.R.O.T.C. to be used as an alternative graduation

credit, some schools appear to have saved money by using the course as an alternative to hiring more teachers in subjects such as physical education or wellness.

Cmdr. Nicole Schwegman, a spokeswoman for the Pentagon and a former J.R.O.T.C. student herself, said that, while the program helped the armed forces by introducing teenagers to the prospect of military service, it operated under the educational branch of the military, not the recruiting arm, and aimed to help teenagers become more effective students and more responsible adults.

“It’s really about teaching kids about service, teaching them about teamwork,” Commander Schwegman said.

But she expressed concern about The Times’s findings on enrollment policies, saying that the military does not ask high schools to make J.R.O.T.C. mandatory and that schools should not be requiring students to take it.

“Just like we are an all-volunteer military, this should be a volunteer program,” she said.

Across the Country



Figure 15: At South Atlanta High School, the principal decided several years ago to start all freshmen in J.R.O.T.C. Credit...Zack Wittman for The New York Times

With their uniforms in pristine condition — not a name tag out of place — a group of cadets rose in their classroom at South Atlanta High School on a recent morning to bellow a creed that vowed their commitment to family, patriotism, truth, leadership and accountability.

“I am the future of the United States of America,” the cadets said in unison.

In a school where every student qualifies for free lunch and the allure of drugs and gangs is a constant concern, South Atlanta’s longtime principal, Patricia Ford, decided several years ago to have all freshmen start in J.R.O.T.C. It was a change inspired by her brother, she said. J.R.O.T.C. had shaped him into a leader and set him on a pathway to a successful career in the U.S. Navy.

The school is less strict about enrollment than others around the country, allowing students to drop the class after they have taken some time to try it. Several cadets said they had initially resisted their placement in the program, wary of the uniforms or the intensity of the instructors, but had grown to love it. One freshman said she attempted to drop the class this year, got yelled at for trying and now says she is glad she stayed.

Several of the cadets spoke about how instructors had helped them mature into better people and pressed them to get better grades in all of their classes. Half of the students gathered on a recent morning indicated that they were considering a future in the military.

Parents, Dr. Ford said, have welcomed the class with little objection.

But in some cases, parents who discovered that their children had been enrolled in military-sponsored training have struggled to pull them out of the classes.

Mr. Mejia, whose daughter was put against her will into a class in Fort Myers, met with a series of school officials while trying to get his daughter out. He said he supported the military — his sister is in the Navy — but was outraged that his daughter was being forced into the program.

The school let his daughter out of the class, he said, only after he complained that an instructor had grabbed her by the shoulders during an exercise, an incident school officials did not dispute when they noted in a response to *The Times* that they had ultimately allowed the girl to drop the class.

A school district spokesman said that seven high schools in Lee County automatically enrolled students in J.R.O.T.C. but that those who objected could change their schedules.



Figure 16: “If she wanted to do it, I would have no problem with it,” said Julio Mejia, a parent in Fort Myers, Fla. His daughter, he said, tried to get out of a required J.R.O.T.C. class in 2019, when she was a freshman, and was initially refused. Credit...Zack W

The program has always been heavily represented in regions like Texas and the Southeast, where the military has deeper roots and military families often proudly span generations. But, even there, data released in response to federal, state and local public records requests showed that some schools had relatively small enrollments in J.R.O.T.C.

Hillsborough County, Fla., for example, has made a major commitment to J.R.O.T.C., with a program at every one of its high schools. But without enrollment mandates, the district averaged about 8 percent of freshmen enrolled last year.

On the other hand, *The Times*’s review found a number of high schools where at least three-quarters of a grade’s students were enrolled in J.R.O.T.C., including in Baton Rouge, La.; Cape Coral, Fla.; Charlotte, N.C.; Memphis; Port Gibson, Miss.; San Diego; Spring, Texas; and Vincent, Ala.

Many other schools have more than half of all students in some grades enrolled in the program, including some in Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Dallas, Houston, Miami, St. Louis and Washington, D.C.

In analyzing data released by the Army, The Times found that among schools where at least three-quarters of freshmen were enrolled in J.R.O.T.C., over 80 percent of them had a student body composed primarily of Black or Hispanic students. That was a higher rate than other J.R.O.T.C. schools (over 50 percent of them had such a makeup) and U.S. high schools without J.R.O.T.C. programs (about 30 percent).

For some districts examined by The Times, it was difficult to discern whether a school required J.R.O.T.C. or if some other reason had led a large percentage of its freshmen to enroll in the program.

In Detroit, where Ms. Thomas said she had been forced to take the class, the district said in a statement that administrators did not require students to take J.R.O.T.C. although they “do encourage students in ninth grade to take the course to spark their interest.” But two recent students at Pershing, in addition to Ms. Thomas, said in interviews that they had been required to take the class. District data showed that 90 percent of freshmen were enrolled in J.R.O.T.C. during the 2021-22 school year.



Figure 17: District data showed that 90 percent of freshmen were enrolled in J.R.O.T.C. during the 2021-22 school year at Pershing High School in Detroit. Credit...Emily Elconin for The New York Times

Three other Detroit high schools also enrolled more than 75 percent of their freshmen in the class, according to district data.

School district officials gave various explanations for why they were putting a large proportion of their students into J.R.O.T.C.

In Pike County, Ala., which automatically enrolls all freshmen in J.R.O.T.C., administrators said the program’s focus on character and leadership had helped students improve their study habits and increase their involvement in other school programs.

“All in all, it seems to be a very positive thing that we’ve got right now,” said Jeremy Knox, who leads the district’s career education programs.

In Philadelphia, a district spokeswoman said that one school in the district, Martin Luther King High School, automatically enrolled all freshmen into J.R.O.T.C. to expose them to possible military careers and “to create a culture of teamwork, collaboration and discipline.” Star Spencer High School in Oklahoma City said it placed all freshmen in J.R.O.T.C. at the start of the school year in part because of a shortage of physical education teachers.



Figure 18: Forcing students into J.R.O.T.C. has at times created problems with discipline and morale. Credit... Zack Wittman for The New York Times

The principal of McKinley Technology High School in Washington, D.C., said students were automatically enrolled in the class so that they could learn leadership and discipline, though some did not take the course because of religious beliefs or opposition to the military.

Nearby, at Surrattsville High School in Clinton, Md., about 50 percent of freshmen were in J.R.O.T.C. last year. Katrina Lamont, the principal, said the school had been placing students in the program when they had not chosen other electives or needed to fill out their schedules. But doing so created a problem, she said, when students who had dreadlocks or other longer hairstyles ran up against the program’s strict grooming requirements. She said the

school was seeking to be more accommodating this year.

Conflicts in Classrooms

Forcing students into J.R.O.T.C. has at times created problems with discipline and morale.

William White, a retired Army major who taught for years as a J.R.O.T.C. instructor in three states, said he found during his time in Florida that there was a constant emphasis on keeping enrollment elevated, with students required to take the class even when they were so opposed to it that they refused to do the work.

Mr. White recalled two students who had religious objections complaining to him about having to take the class.

“Kids were forced into the program,” he said, adding that he faced blowback after trying to get students removed who did not want to be there.

Marvin Anderson, a retired lieutenant colonel in the Army who is the senior J.R.O.T.C. instructor at Green Oaks Performing Arts Academy, a public high school in Shreveport, La., said students were required to take the program in their freshman year to fulfill a physical education credit, and in their sophomore year to fulfill a health credit. He said the program provided valuable training in leadership, community service and discipline. But that many students do not want to be in the class makes it difficult to maintain those values, he said.

“I have issues with behavior, and issues with grooming requirements and other things,” Colonel Anderson said. He said he struggled constantly to maintain a structured class “for teenagers who don’t want to be in the program.”

The program has also led to pushback from civilian teachers, some of whom have been uncomfortable with military posters and recruiters on campus and the curriculum taught in J.R.O.T.C. classes.

What was your experience with J.R.O.T.C.?*

Of the textbooks obtained and examined by The Times, one from the Navy states that a U.S. military victory in Vietnam was hindered by the restrictions political leaders had placed on the tactics the military could use. That hawkish interpretation of the war fails to account for the fundamental problem that many civilian textbooks point out: the lack of popular support among South Vietnamese for their government, which was America’s chief ally in the war.

A Marine Corps textbook describing the “Trail of Tears” during the 1830s fails to mention that thousands of people died when Native Americans were forced from their lands in the southeastern United States.



“The version of history that I was hearing from my J.R.O.T.C. kids was quite different from the versions of history that I tried to teach in my classroom,” said Sylvia McGauley, a retired history teacher in Troutdale, Ore. Credit...Kristina Barker for The New York Times

Sylvia McGauley, a former high school history teacher in Troutdale, Ore., said she was troubled when she found that the J.R.O.T.C. textbooks being used at her school were teaching “militarism, not critical thinking.”

“The version of history that I was hearing from my J.R.O.T.C. kids was quite different from the versions of history that I tried to teach in my classroom,” she said.

Community Debate

Schools that have faced questions over mandatory or automatic enrollments have often responded by backing away from the requirements, as Chicago did last year.

In that case, which came to light after an [article from the education news website Chalkbeat](#), an investigation by the school district's inspector general found that 100 percent of freshmen had been enrolled in J.R.O.T.C. at four high schools that served primarily low-income students on the city's South and West sides.

It was "a clear sign the program was not voluntary," the report said.

At many schools, it said, freshman enrollment in J.R.O.T.C. "often operated like a prechecked box: students were automatically placed in J.R.O.T.C. and they had to get themselves removed from it if they did not want it. Sometimes this was possible; sometimes it was not."

The district said in response that it was updating its parental consent process and making sure students had a choice between enrolling in J.R.O.T.C. or other, nonmilitary physical education classes.

The Buffalo school district agreed in 2005 to ensure that the program was optional after the New York Civil Liberties Union had raised questions.

In 2008, parents and other residents in San Diego confronted school district officials over concerns about forced enrollment, and won what they believed was a promise by the district to ensure that the program would be strictly optional. They also worked to eliminate J.R.O.T.C. air rifle programs in the schools.

But The Times's review of data provided by the school district found that there continued to be schools with high J.R.O.T.C. numbers, with 77 percent of freshmen enrolled in the program at Kearny School of Biomedical Science and Technology last year. A district spokeswoman said that the data the district had provided had "some inaccuracies" but over the past several weeks did not provide new enrollment numbers and would not comment further.

"It's almost like trying to kill a vampire," said Rick Jahnkow, who has worked for three decades to oppose military recruitment in San Diego's schools. "You think that you dispensed with it, and it keeps coming back."



Azaria Terrell, a schoolmate of Ms. Thomas's in Detroit, said she had changed her mind about staying in J.R.O.T.C. as she had begun to bond with her classmates and to heed some of her instructor's lessons on leadership and honesty. Credit...Emily Elconin for The New York Times

In some cases, students who at first balked at being forced to enroll in the program said they had ended up embracing it.

Azaria Terrell, a schoolmate of Ms. Thomas's in Detroit, said she had changed her mind as she had begun to bond with her classmates and to heed some of her instructor's lessons on leadership and honesty. After her required stint during her freshman year, she stayed in the program for three more years — by choice — and earned a position as the unit's battalion commander.

"I found myself becoming a better person," said Ms. Terrell, who ended up going to college instead of joining the military.

Ms. Thomas, on the other hand, said she had never learned to like the class and had often skipped it. When she received a failing grade, she was put back in the class for her sophomore year.

Ms. Thomas said she and other students who had been forced into J.R.O.T.C. often heard from recruiters who pitched the idea of signing up for the military in order to get help paying for college. One of Ms. Thomas's classmates joined the military, and Ms. Thomas filled out initial recruiting paperwork one day, lured by the promises of the recruiters who had visited the school. But she was never serious, she said, and ultimately stuck with her plan to pursue a civilian career in health care.

Ms. Thomas, now a freshman in college, said she no longer responded to the recruiter, though she still heard from him.

“He still texts me to this day,” she said.

Schools With J.R.O.T.C. Enrollment of at Least 75% in Certain Grades

Alabama

Lanett City School District: Lanett High School; Mobile County Public Schools: Blount High School, LeFlore Magnet High School, Rain High School, Vigor High School, Williamson High School; Pike County Schools: Goshen High School, Pike County High School; Shelby County Schools: Vincent Middle High School

California

Los Angeles Unified: Los Angeles Senior High; San Diego Unified School District: Kearny Biomedical Science and Technology

Florida

Lee County Schools: Ida S. Baker High, Lehigh Senior High, Mariner High, Riverdale High; Polk County Schools: Ridge Community High

Georgia

Atlanta: B.E.S.T. Academy

Illinois

Chicago Public Schools: Bowen High School, Clark High School, Fenger High School, Harlan High School, Manley High School, Spry High School

Louisiana

Caddo Parish: Green Oaks, Woodlawn; East Baton Rouge: Belaire High School, Northeast High School

Michigan

Detroit Public Schools: Communication and Media Arts High School, Denby High School, Detroit Collegiate Preparatory High School at Northwestern, Pershing High School

North Carolina

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools: Hawthorne Academy

Oklahoma

Oklahoma City: Star Spencer High School

Pennsylvania

Philadelphia: Martin Luther King High School

Tennessee

Memphis-Shelby County Schools: Hamilton High

Texas

Fort Worth Independent School District: Young Mens Leadership Academy; Spring Independent School District: Spring High School 9th Grade Center

Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/11/us/jrotc-schools-mandatory-automatic-enrollment.html>

J.R.O.T.C. Textbooks Offer an Alternative View of the World

Descriptions of civic life and some key historical events differ from the way they are taught in typical public school textbooks.



Figure 19: Credit...Zack Wittman for The New York Times

Dec. 11, 2022 / Mike Baker, Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs, Dana Goldstein / [New York Times](#) - One textbook for high school military cadets says girls should wear lipstick when in uniform. Another offers what a history professor described as a “frightening” interpretation of how the Vietnam War was lost. Another blames the death of Kurt Cobain, the Nirvana frontman who fatally shot himself in 1994, on heroin addiction.

A majority of public school textbooks receive extensive professional and government vetting, undergoing revision, rejection and public debate. But the Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps, in courses taught at thousands of high schools around the country, uses textbooks that have bypassed those standard public reviews.

The J.R.O.T.C. curriculum materials cover a wide range of subjects, with lessons on financial literacy and public speaking, on healthy eating and first aid, on preparing for college and life in the military. Most of them offer a presentation similar to what might be found in any public high school study materials.

But a New York Times review of thousands of pages of the program’s textbooks found that some of the books also included outdated gender messages, a conservative shading of political issues and accounts of historical events that falsify or downplay the failings of the U.S. government.

Here is a closer look at 10 issues covered in the texts:

Gulf of Tonkin

In 1964 things really heated up. North Vietnamese patrol boats attacked the USS *Maddox*. The American destroyer was off the North Vietnamese coast in international waters. **International waters** are areas of the seas where ships from any nation have the right to travel. The North Vietnamese thought the destroyer was involved in secret US raids along their coast.

Congress quickly passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. It allowed President Lyndon Johnson to order the military to strike back at North Vietnam. This was not a declaration of war. But it led to a huge land- and air-based campaign that lasted until 1973. At the war's peak, the United States had more than 500,000 troops in Vietnam. Military forces from other countries, notably Australia and South Korea, joined them.

A textbook produced by the U.S. Air Force informs students that the United States entered the Vietnam War after the North Vietnamese attacked a U.S. destroyer in the Gulf of Tonkin in August 1964.

But the authors never mention a key part of the story: It was the report of a second, full-on attack two days later that led Congress to approve America's escalated involvement in Vietnam — and that attack, history eventually revealed, never happened.

A review of that history published by the U.S. Naval Institute concluded that the second incident did not happen and that U.S. officials, including the nation's defense secretary, “distorted facts and deceived the American public about events that led to full U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.”

A textbook that the Navy distributes to J.R.O.T.C. students is more forthcoming than the Air Force book but says only that “evidence gathered later seemed to indicate the alleged attack may never have occurred.”

Drugs

Implications of Possession of Marijuana in States That Have Legalized It

You may have heard that in some places marijuana use is legal. As of 2013, 18 states and the District of Columbia had passed laws allowing the sale and use of marijuana as “medicine” for certain conditions. Among these, Colorado and Washington have made recreational (general, non-medical) use legal for people over 21. These new laws may make it *seem* as if it’s safe or “okay” to use marijuana. However, it’s not okay! The associated physical and mental health issues have not gone away.

Even though some states are allowing some people to use marijuana, it is not legal for minors (under 21). In addition, *marijuana use is still illegal under federal law*. You could be charged with a misdemeanor for simply having marijuana in your possession—even if you haven’t used it! A **misdemeanor** is a *crime less serious than a felony that results in a less severe punishment*. If you have sold or helped sell it, the crime and the punishment are now considered a felony. A **felony** is a *more serious crime than a misdemeanor that violates federal laws and can lead to severe punishments, such as being sentenced to prison*.

It is true that the cannabis plant contains some chemicals that can temporarily ease pain, as some medicines do; however, there are more efficient, less harmful ways to get those same effects. And whether or not it is legal in your state, *marijuana is extremely dangerous, especially for young people*.

The textbooks give students an overview of the dangers of alcohol and drugs, warning especially about marijuana. One textbook from the Navy falsely claims that marijuana is more likely to cause lung cancer than cigarettes.

An Air Force textbook published during a time when states were approving both medicinal marijuana and broader legalization measures offers a critical take of those trends, saying that voters who approved such measures “do not necessarily understand how harmful a substance like marijuana is.”

“These new laws may make it seem as if it’s safe or ‘OK’ to use marijuana,” the textbook says. “However, it’s not OK!”

Air Force officials, in response to a query from The Times, said they would be reviewing that section for possible revision.

Heroin use is a serious problem in the U.S. Heroin deaths nearly quadrupled in the decade between 2002 and 2013. Like many street drugs, deadly overdoses are possible because users don't really know how potent a particular batch of heroin is.



Content Enhancement: HEROIN DEATHS

The famous people listed below have died from heroin use. Their age at the time of death is shown next to their name.

- *Cory Monteith (31)* – TV actor from “Glee”
- *Kurt Cobain (27)* – Lead singer of the band Nirvana
- *Jim Morrison (27)* – Lead singer of the band The Doors
- *Janis Joplin (27)* – One of the greatest female blues-rock singers
- *John Belushi (33)* – Saturday Night Live comedian and movie star
- *Chris Kelley (34)* – Member of rap duo Kris Kross
- *Bradley Nowell (28)* – Lead singer of the band Sublime
- *Sid Vicious (21)* – Bassist for the punk band The Sex Pistols

One textbook implies that Kurt Cobain died because of a heroin addiction, omitting the fact that it was a gun that ended his life.

Grooming and Etiquette

U.S. MARINE CORPS MCJROTC
 Category 5 – General Military Subjects
 Skill 3 – Uniforms, Clothing, and Equipment

Fourth, male personnel are prohibited from utilizing umbrellas when in uniform.

Female Personnel

Female personnel shall be well groomed at all times and shall meet the following minimum standards.

First, the hair shall be neatly shaped and arranged in an attractive feminine style. Eccentric hairstyles are prohibited. Hair will be styled in such a manner so as not to interfere with the proper wear of the uniform headgear. All headgear shall fit snugly and comfortably around the largest part of the head. Hairstyles which do not allow headgear to be worn in this manner are considered elaborate and are prohibited. Appropriateness of a hairstyle should be judged on basis of its appearance when headgear is being worn. Hair may touch the collar but may not fall below the collar's lower edge. Conspicuous pins shall not be worn in the hair when the uniform is worn. Hairnets shall not be worn unless authorized for a specific type of duty. If dyes, tints, or bleaches are used on the hair, the artificial color must harmonize with the person's complexion tone and eye color. Conspicuous color changes are prohibited. Wigs, if worn in uniform, must look natural and conform to all of the above listed regulations.

Second, cosmetics shall be applied conservatively. Exaggerated or faddish cosmetic styles are inappropriate with the uniform and shall not be worn. The aim is to achieve a natural, yet finished look through the proper application of cosmetics. Lipstick will be worn with all service and dress uniforms and the maternity uniform and shall harmonize with the scarlet shade used in various service and dress uniform items (i.e., scarlet cord on green service cap, scarlet trim on blue dress uniform, and scarlet background on enlisted insignia of Rank.) When the utility

uniform is worn, red or pink shades of lipstick shall be worn. Extreme shades such as lavender, purple, white, or flesh color shall not be worn. Nail polish, if worn with the utility uniform, shall be colorless.

Third, adequate undergarments to include support garments (i.e., slips, bras, and girdles) shall be worn to ensure the proper fit, appearance, and opaqueness of the uniform. The conservative appearance of the uniform shall be maintained and undergarments shall not be conspicuously visible.

Fourth, women cadets may carry an all black, standard or collapsible umbrella, during inclement weather. The umbrella will be carried in the left hand so that the hand salute can be properly rendered. The utilizing of umbrellas in formations is prohibited.

Fifth, the wearing of earrings in uniform is authorized in accordance with the following regulations.

Small white pearl or pearl-like earrings (post or screw-on type), not to exceed six millimeters (approximately one-fourth of an inch) in diameter, are authorized for optional wear with all dress uniforms on social occasions.

When worn, earrings will fit tight against the ear and will not extend below the earlobe. Only one earring may be worn on or in each earlobe.

Earrings are not authorized for wear with the service or utility uniforms, nor will they be worn with the blue dress uniforms when it is worn as a duty uniform.

All Personnel

All personnel are prohibited from the following unless otherwise authorized by the Commandant of the Marine Corps or higher authority. There should be no articles, such as

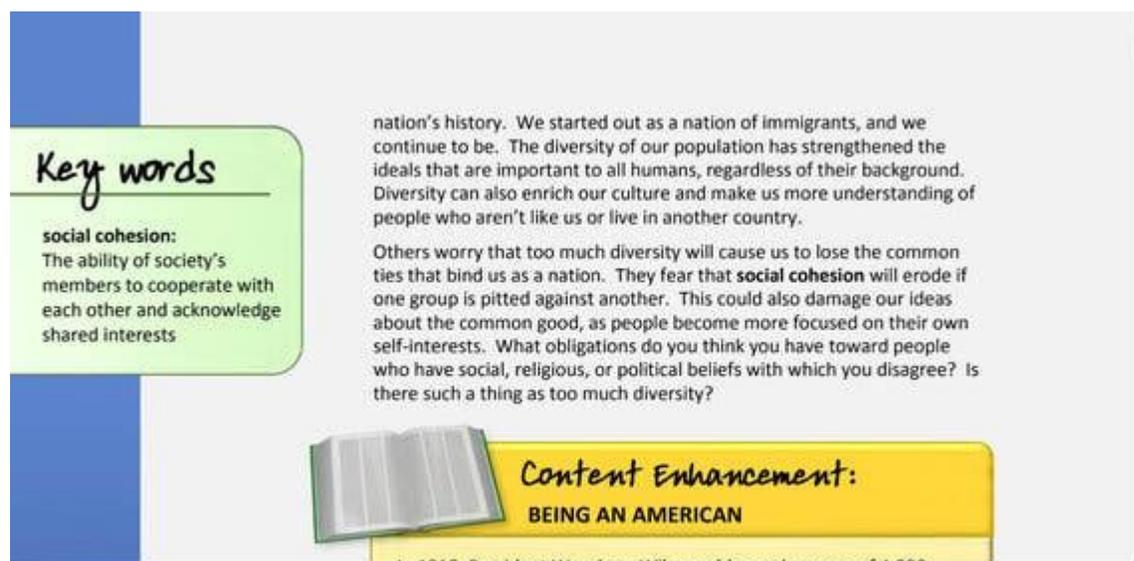
A Marine Corps textbook tells female cadets that, in uniform, they should wear lipstick and shape their hair in an “attractive feminine style.”

In an era when women are fully integrated into combat jobs, an Army textbook details how men should not sit “until all the ladies at his table are seated.” It recommends that men help women sit down.

“If a lady leaves the table at any time, the gentleman who seated her rises and assists with the lady’s chair,” the book says.

Army officials said in a statement that their pages were designed to “teach cadets about customs, courtesies and etiquette referring to military balls and other formal events.”

Diversity



An Army textbook begins by laying out the case for diversity, saying it can enrich culture and make people more understanding of others. The text then notes that some people fear that diversity could erode “social cohesion.”

“This could also damage our ideas about the common good, as people become more focused on their own self-interests,” the text says. The section ends by asking students: “Is there such a thing as too much diversity?”

The Army said in a statement that the lesson was intended not as a statement on multiculturalism but as a critical thinking exercise.

Libya Bombing

Attack on Libya

A number of the more significant terrorist attacks that took place in the in the early 1980s were shown to have been sponsored by the erratic Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Qaddafi, who had established several terrorist training bases within Libya. In the mid-1980s Qaddafi began to threaten freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Sidra in the Mediterranean off Libya's northern shore. In March 1986 U.S. naval air and surface forces shot down Libyan fighters and sank Libyan patrol boats operating in the gulf.

Finally, on 15 April 1986, in reprisal for continuing threats and the bombing of a nightclub in West Berlin that had killed two American servicemen and a Turkish woman, and injured more than 220 others, and with the agreement of most of its European allies, the United States launched a major attack against Qaddafi. Air Force F-111s based in England struck Libyan army barracks, an airport near Tripoli, and the port of Sidi Bilal. Carrier-based A-6s, A-7s, and F/A-18s attacked other barracks at Benghazi, an airfield at Benina, and Libyan air defense networks. Qaddafi himself narrowly missed being killed during the course of these raids, in which only two U.S. Air Force F-111 crewmen were lost.

A Navy textbook describes the U.S. bombing of Libya in 1986, carried out in response to an attack at a dance club in Germany. The U.S. conducted the bombing “with the agreement of most of its European allies,” it says.

But Stephen Zunes, a professor at the University of San Francisco who specializes in Middle East politics and who reviewed excerpts from the J.R.O.T.C. textbooks, noted that Spain and France were so opposed to the bombing that U.S. flights had to go around their airspace.

Iran Air Flight 655

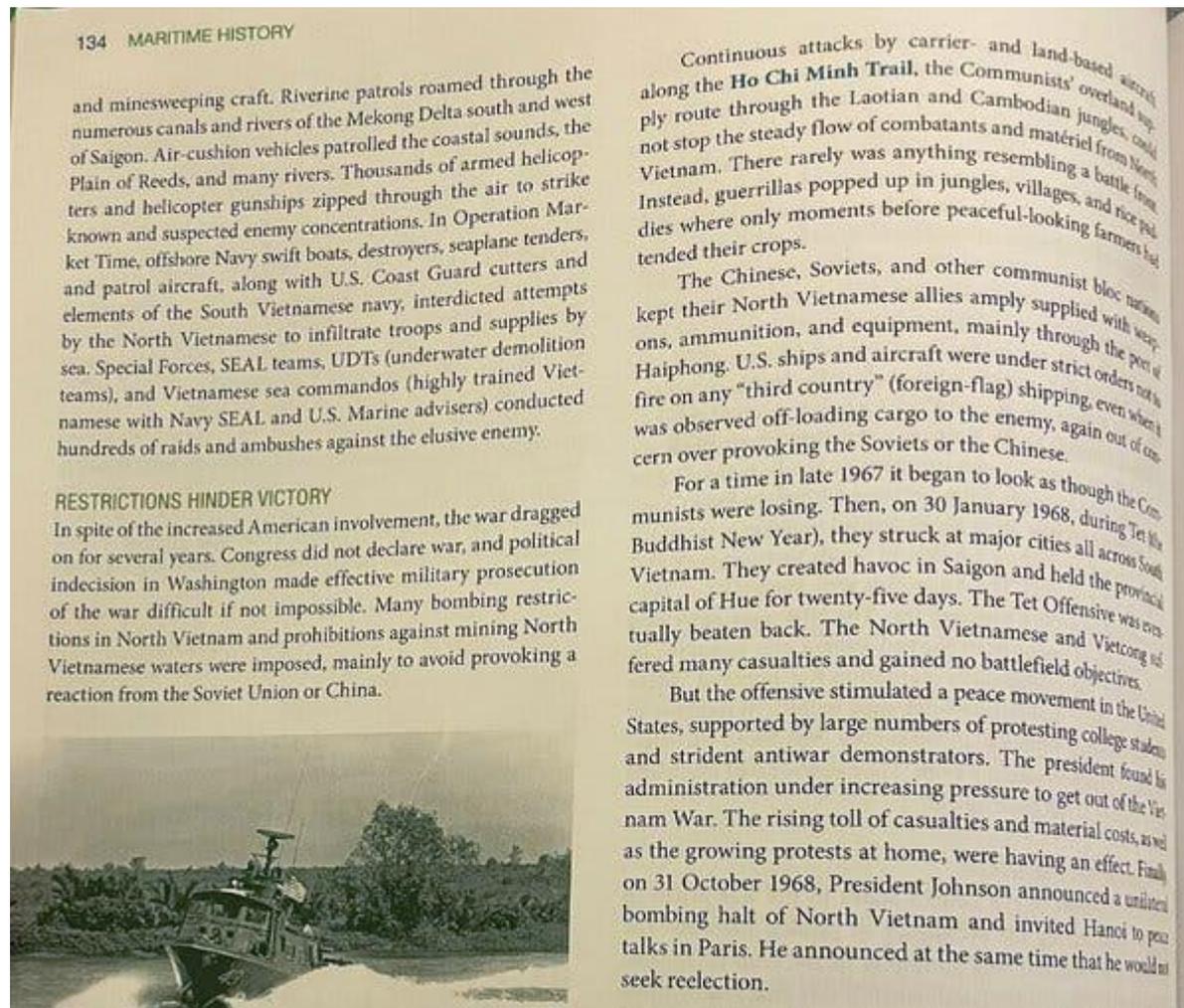
A Navy textbook puts a defensive spin on a disastrous 1988 incident in the Persian Gulf, when a U.S. Navy missile cruiser shot down an Iranian passenger jet inside Iranian airspace. All 290 people aboard Iran Air Flight 655 were killed.

Mr. Zunes noted that the textbook called it an “unfortunate incident” and downplayed the culpability of the U.S. military, saying the airliner had approached the Navy vessel “in what seemed to be a threatening manner.” But a Navy investigation found that the aircraft had been “on a normal climb” out of Iran and “within the established air route” toward Dubai.



Figure 20: Bodies of the Iran Air Flight 655 shot down by the U.S. Navy were recovered from the water and were taken to a morgue in Bandar Abbas, Iran, where relatives looked for family members.

The U.S. Military in Vietnam



Two of the Navy's textbooks examine why the U.S. military did not succeed in Vietnam, a failure that continues to be scrutinized and debated to this day. One section is titled "Restrictions Hinder Victory" and describes how political leaders limited who and where the military could bomb.

"According to many analysts, America lost the Vietnam War largely because of these limitations," the other textbook says. (That text goes on to question recent limitations placed by political leaders on the military in conducting an air campaign against Islamic State militants in the Middle East.)

That assessment is far from universal, especially among the many historians who have studied the Vietnam conflict. They have largely concluded that many factors — including, perhaps most

important, the messy political dynamics in the region — meant that a U.S. military victory was not achievable within any reasonable cost.

Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, a history professor at Columbia University who specializes in the Vietnam War, said the text gave a false interpretation of the war.

“It’s one of those hawkish, conservative military history interpretations of the war that says if the military had not had to fight with one arm behind its back, it would have won. That’s wrong,” said Ms. Nguyen. “It’s frightening what’s being written.”

Second Amendment

The Second Amendment: the Right to Bear Arms

A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

This amendment prevents the government from forbidding citizens to own weapons.

One [typical civilian classroom textbook in California](#), dealing with the Second Amendment, informs students that the courts have allowed the government to regulate firearms. A Texas textbook in a similar section on constitutional amendments does not include information about how the courts have interpreted the amendment.

But a textbook used in the Navy’s J.R.O.T.C. program offers a different analysis than either one of them, saying: “This amendment prevents the government from forbidding citizens to own weapons.”

Robert E. Lee

U.S. MARINE CORPS JROTC
 Category 1 – Leadership
 Skill 3 – Leadership Traits

Military Leadership Traits

PURPOSE

This lesson explains and provides examples of the fourteen military leadership traits used in the Marine Corps.

Introduction

Many traits allow you to become a good leader. The list is probably endless. The following fourteen military leadership traits will help you to be a good leader in the MCJROTC.

Your personal development of these traits will take time and effort. First, evaluate yourself and see what traits you have or want to develop. Then, determine what you need to do to improve the traits you have or will develop. Ask yourself, am I living up to the standards of a leader? Ask yourself, “Would I be willing to follow the same kind of person that I am?”

1. Bearing

You should always attempt to create a favorable impression by your appearance. You should carry yourself well, and always act in a manner becoming to an officer.

This means that you should always look, act, and speak like a leader – whether you feel like it or not. There will be times when you will wish that someone else could take the responsibility for a while. To feel this is one thing to let it show in your actions and appearance is quite another. If people see that you are discouraged, then they, too, will be discouraged. Remember, you lead by

example and to hang your head, to be out of uniform, or to speak in pessimistic tones implies a sense of fear and a lack of desire. Your job is to lead where you lead, is up to you. If you have a positive attitude, so will your team members. Your appearance and carriage will express your attitude and feelings.

There are many examples of **bearing** in American history. An outstanding example is George Washington, whose great bearing and stature were displayed at Valley Forge and at Trenton. Robert E. Lee showed, in his attitude and appearance at Appomattox, that he was an officer and a gentleman. Nathan Hale exhibited great bearing and courage at the makeshift gallows that took his life. Of course, you may never be asked to exhibit your own bearing and courage to this degree, but you must understand the significance of this trait.

2. Courage

The **courage** that allows one to perform effectively, in spite of hardships, takes many forms. Courage is the mental quality that allows you to face fear and to overcome it. This means both the fear of physical harm and the fear of criticism.

Courage is a quality or trait that all people must have in order to face danger. The courage of men in the Marine Corps like Smedley Butler, Dan Daly, and “Chesty” Puller are examples to us all. These men showed us how to lead during difficult times. They did so with little regard for their own welfare and with nearly complete disregard for the possibility of physical harm. They showed great physical and moral courage. Their moral courage was shown in the fact that they could not have

In introducing freshmen students to the idea of leadership, a Marine Corps textbook offers the Confederate general Robert E. Lee as an example to emulate. Lee, the textbook says, “showed, in his attitude and appearance at Appomattox, that he was an officer and a gentleman.”

Trail of Tears



In discussing the history of how Native Americans were forced from their lands in the southeastern United States during the 1830s, a Marine Corps textbook describes what is widely known as the “Trail of Tears” as a “march” and a “trek” to lands west of the Mississippi River that spanned several months and thousands of miles. But the text omits any mention of the brutal reality of that mass removal: Thousands of Native Americans died along the way.

What the Military Says

Military officials said they sought to regularly review, and update textbooks used in J.R.O.T.C. training, relying in part on instructors and consultants to shape the curriculum. Some of the textbooks highlighted were published years ago, they said, and are coming due for the periodic reviews that are conducted “to ensure the information is updated, relevant and accurate.”

In response to inquiries from The Times, some of the service branches said they planned to take a closer look at some of the highlighted passages. The Marine Corps said it was “grateful for the attention highlighting these necessary modifications.” - *Dana Goldstein contributed reporting.*

Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/11/us/jrotc-textbooks.html>

Lawmakers to Investigate Sexual Abuse in Junior R.O.T.C. Programs

The House oversight committee wants the Pentagon to report on sexual misconduct in the high school programs and how it holds instructors accountable.



Figure 21: Credit...Mary F. Calvert for The New York Times

Aug. 15, 2022 / Mike Baker / [New York Times](#) - Congressional investigators have opened a review of sexual misconduct in the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps program of the U.S. military in the wake of reports that dozens of teenage girls had been abused at the hands of their instructors.

[In a letter sent on Monday](#) to military leaders, including Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III, the lawmakers said they were seeking information on how many misconduct reports had been received, how they had been investigated and how often the military inspected school J.R.O.T.C.

programs.

They said that instructors in the J.R.O.T.C. program, which provides training in leadership, marksmanship and civic responsibility in about 3,500 high schools around the country, served as trusted representatives of the military in their local communities.

“Every incident of sexual abuse or harassment committed by a J.R.O.T.C. instructor is a betrayal of that trust,” wrote Representative Carolyn Maloney, the chairwoman of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform, and Representative Stephen Lynch, who chairs the panel’s subcommittee on national security.

[The New York Times reported last month](#) that J.R.O.T.C. programs had repeatedly become a place where decorated veterans — retired as officers or noncommissioned officers — preyed on teenage students. The Times identified, over a five-year period, at least 33 J.R.O.T.C. instructors who had been criminally charged with sexual misconduct involving students, along with many others who were accused of misconduct but never charged.

Many victims said they had turned to J.R.O.T.C. in high school for stability in their lives or as a pathway to military service, only to find that instructors exploited their position to take advantage of the students.

Founded more than a century ago, J.R.O.T.C. has expanded to enroll hundreds of thousands of students each year. Cadets are provided instruction in military ranks and procedures, as well as in more general topics such as public speaking and financial planning.

J.R.O.T.C. leaders point to research indicating that the program has had a positive effect on school attendance and graduation rates, and many cadets praise the program for providing vital lessons and experiences during formative years.

But The Times found that the instructors operated with weak oversight. While they were certified by individual branches of the military to take the jobs in schools, the military overseers did little to investigate problems or monitor the conduct of instructors, leaving that to the schools. The program often operates on the fringes of school campuses, with extracurricular activities after school hours or away from campus that are difficult for school administrators to monitor.

In several cases identified by The Times, instructors who were criminally charged with misconduct had already been the subject of prior complaints.

Along with requests for data and information, the lawmakers asked that the Department of Defense provide a briefing to the committee's staff by the end of this month.

“While all J.R.O.T.C. instructors are required to complete a D.O.D. background investigation and be certified by state or local education authorities, we remain concerned that D.O.D. and the military services lack an effective means to monitor the actions of J.R.O.T.C. instructors and ensure the safety and well-being of cadets,” the lawmakers wrote. “Without sufficient oversight mechanisms in place, inappropriate behavior may continue undetected.”

Military branches have been [struggling to meet their recruiting goals](#), and Pentagon leaders have seen value in the high school program as a pipeline to enlistment. The U.S. Army Cadet Command found that students from high schools with J.R.O.T.C. programs were more than twice as likely to enlist after graduation.

As the military works to attract qualified recruits, the lawmakers said, the services must “redouble their efforts to promote the safety, well-being and academic and personal growth of our country's next generation of leaders.”

Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/15/us/sexual-abuse-jrotc-congress.html>

Georgia National Guard Will Use Phone Location Tracking to Recruit High School Children



April 16 2023 / Sam Biddle / The Intercept_ - The Georgia Army National Guard plans to combine two deeply controversial practices — military recruiting at schools and location-based phone surveillance — to persuade teens to enlist, according to contract documents reviewed by The Intercept.

The federal contract materials outline plans by the Georgia Army National Guard to geofence 67 different public high schools throughout the state, targeting phones found within a one-mile boundary of their campuses with recruiting advertisements “with the intent of generating qualified leads of potential applicants for enlistment while

also raising awareness of the Georgia Army National Guard.” Geofencing refers generally to the practice of drawing a virtual border around a real-world area and is often used in the context of surveillance-based advertising as well as more traditional law enforcement and intelligence surveillance. The Department of Defense expects interested vendors to deliver a minimum of 3.5 million ad views and 250,000 clicks, according to the contract paperwork.

While the deadline for vendors attempting to win the contract was the end of this past February, no public winner has been announced.

The ad campaign will make use of a variety of surveillance advertising techniques, including capturing the unique device IDs of student phones, tracking pixels, and IP address tracking. It will also plaster recruiting solicitations across Instagram, Snapchat, streaming television, and music apps. The documents note that “TikTok is banned for official DOD use (to include advertising),” owing to allegations that the app is a manipulative, dangerous conduit for hypothetical Chinese government propaganda.

The Georgia Army National Guard did not respond to a request for comment.

While the planned campaign appears primarily aimed at persuading high school students to sign up, the Guard is also asking potential vendors to also target “parents or centers of influence (i.e. coaches, school counselors, etc.)” with recruiting ads. The campaign plans not only call for broadcasting recruitment ads to kids at school, but also for pro-Guard ads to follow these students around as they continue using the internet and other apps, a practice known as retargeting. And while the digital campaign may begin within the confines of the classroom, it won’t remain there: One procurement document states the Guard is interested in “retargeting to

high school students after school hours when they are at home,” as well as “after school hours. ... This will allow us to capture potential leads while at after-school events.”

“Location based tracking is not legitimate. It’s largely based on the collecting of people’s location data that they’re not aware of and haven’t given meaningful permission for.”

Although it’s possible that children caught in the geofence might have encountered a recruiter anyway — the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act mandated providing military recruiters with students’ contact information — critics of the plan say the use of geolocational data is an inherently invasive act. “Location based tracking is not legitimate,” said Jay Stanley, a senior policy analyst with the American Civil Liberties Union. “It’s largely based on the collecting of people’s location data that they’re not aware of and haven’t given meaningful permission for.” The complex technology underpinning a practice like geofencing can obscure what it’s really accomplishing, argues Benjamin Lynde, an attorney with the ACLU of Georgia. “I think we have to start putting electronic surveillance in the context of what we would accept if it weren’t electronic,” Lynde told *The Intercept*. “If there were military recruiters taking pictures of students and trying to identify them that way, parents wouldn’t think that conduct is acceptable.” Lynde added that the ACLU of Georgia did not believe there were any state laws constraining geofence surveillance.

The sale and use of location data is largely uncontrolled in the United States, and the legal and regulatory vacuum has created an unscrupulous cottage industry of brokers and analytics firms that turn our phones’ GPS pings into a commodity. The practice has allowed for a variety of applications, including geofence warrants that compel companies like Google to give police a list of every device within a targeted area at a given time. Last year, *The Intercept* reported on a closed-door technology demo in which a private surveillance firm geofenced the National Security Agency and CIA headquarters to track who came and went.

Although critics of geofencing point to the practice’s invasiveness, they also argue that the inherent messiness of Wi-Fi and Bluetooth signals means that the results are prone to inaccuracy. “This creates the possibility of both false positives and false negatives,” the Electronic Frontier Foundation wrote earlier this year in a Supreme Court amicus brief opposing geofence warrants served to Google. “People could be implicated for a crime when they were nowhere near the

scene, or the actual perpetrator might not be included at all in the data Google provides to police.”

It’s doubtful that potential vendors for the Georgia Guard have data accurate enough to avoid targeting kids under 17, according to Zach Edwards, a cybersecurity researcher who closely tracks the surveillance advertising sector. “It would also sweep up plenty of families with young kids who gave them phones before they turned 16 and who were using networks that had location-targetable ads,” he explained in a message to *The Intercept*. “Very, very few advertising networks track the age of kids under 18. It’s one giant bucket.”

In-school recruiting been hotly debated for decades, both defended as a necessary means of maintaining an all-volunteer military and condemned as a coercive practice that exploits the immaturity of young students. While the state’s plan specifies targeting only high school juniors and seniors ages 17 and above, demographic ad targeting is known to be error prone, and experts told *The Intercept* it’s possible the recruiting messages could reach the phones of younger children. “Generally, commercial databases aren’t known for their high levels of accuracy,” explained the ACLU’s Stanley. “If you have some incorrect ages in there, it’s really not a big deal [to the broker].” The accuracy of demographic targeting aside, there’s also a problem of geographic reality: “There are middle schools within a mile of those high schools,” according to Lynde of the ACLU of Georgia. “There’s no way there can be a specific delineation of who they’re targeting in that geofence.”

Indeed, dozens of the schools pegged for geotargeting have middle schools, elementary schools, parks, churches, and other sites where children may congregate within a mile radius, according to Google Maps. A geofence containing Hillgrove High School in Powder Springs, Georgia, would also snare phone-toting students at Still Elementary School and Lovinggood Middle School, the latter a mere thousand feet away. A mile-radius around Collins Hill High School in Suwanee, Georgia, would also include the Walnut Grove Elementary School, along with the nearby Oak Meadow Montessori School, a community swim club, a public park, and an aquatic center. Lynde, who himself enlisted with the Georgia National Guard in 2005, added that he’s concerned beaming recruiting ads directly to kids’ phones “could be a means to bypass parental involvement in the recruiting process,” allowing the state to circumvent the scrutiny adults might bring to traditional military recruiting methods like brochures and phone calls to a child’s house. “Parents should be involved from the onset.”

Source: <https://theintercept.com/2023/04/16/georgia-army-national-guard-location-tracking-high-school/>

How E-girl influencers are trying to get Gen Z into the military



January 10, 2023 / Günseli Yalcinkaya / Dazed - “I’m not the American dream, I’m more like the American nightmare,” beams the influencer known as Haylujan in a video to her 363k TikTok followers. With full-face E-girl make-up, drawn-on freckles and a rosy nose, the 20-year-old is the face of an unsettling new breed of E-girl garnering millions of views online. She posts thirst traps inside choppers and pouty selfies with assault rifles, with hashtags like #pewpew and #militarycurves. She shares cutesy unboxing compilations and make-up tutorials, Get Ready With Me videos and lip syncs. She jokes about war bunkers and plays with remote control tanks, which she overlays with sparkly filters and heart emojis.

Known in esoteric meme circles as the psy-op girl, Haylujan, also known simply as Lujan, is a self-described “psychological operations specialist” for the US Army, whose online presence has led to countless memes speculating that she is a post-ironic psy-op meant to recruit people into the US army. Lujan, who’s actually employed by the US army psy-ops division, posts countless TikToks and memes that play into this (her official website is called [sikeops](#)). “My own taxes used to psy-op me,” says one commenter. “Definitely a fed (I’m signing up for the army now)” writes another.

But Haylujan isn’t the only E-girl using Sanrio sex appeal to lure the internet’s SIMPs into the armed forces. There’s [Bailey Crespo](#) and [Kayla Salinas](#), not to mention countless #[miltok](#) gunfluencers cropping up online. While she didn’t document her military career, influencer [Bella Porch](#) also served in the US Navy for four years before going viral on TikTok in 2020, and is arguably the blueprint for this kind of kawaii commodified fetishism in the military. An adjacent figure, Natalia Fadeev, also known as [Gun Waifu](#), is an Israeli influencer and IDF soldier who uses waifu aesthetics and catgirl cosplay to pedal pro-Israel propaganda to her 756k followers. She poses to camera, ahogao-style, with freshly manicured nails wrapped neatly around a glock, the [uWu](#)-ification of military functioning as a cutesy distraction from the shadowy colonial context: “when they try and destroy your nation,” she writes in one caption.

We’ve entered an era of military-funded E-girl warfare. In what would’ve felt unimaginable only a few years back, influencers are the hottest new weapon in the government’s arsenal. Here, cosplay commandos post nationalist thirst traps to mobilise the SIMPs, attracting the sort of impressionable reply guys and 4chan lostbois who message “OMG DM me 🔥” on every post. Sanitising the harsh realities of US imperialism with cute E-girl-isms, it promotes the sort of hypersexualised militarism that reframes violence as something cute, goofy and unthreatening – a subversion of the beefy special forces stereotype in the mainstream. Arguably far more

unsettling than any 20th-century CIA covert ops, there's no hush-hush to this operation. Rather it hides in plain sight, capitalising on online irony to lull you into a false sense of security with #relatable content and the sort of tapped-in memory that can only come from years of being terminally online (she's just like me, fr).

“Don't go to college, become a farmer or a soldier instead,” Lujan urges her audience in a [recent TikTok](#), before going on an anti-liberal rant about the metaverse and Impossible Burgers.

Realistically, it's not that the US army is actively funnelling trad ideology via a 20-year-old influencer – posting hot girl content as a soldier online benefits Lujan's personal brand too – but when you consider how enlistment rates among Gen Z have plummeted, unofficial pro-military content like Lujan's undeniably plays into the US army's motives. See: “[When the Army spends \\$100 million on advertisement each year just to get ratio'd by a 21-year-old girl with a Tiktok.](#)”

A logical next step in the [military entertainment complex](#) (the US army has long collaborated with Hollywood to provide equipment and funding to promote patriotic war cinema), the popularity of army influencers suggests new ways in which online culture can be manipulated to sway Gen Z. Last year it was [reported](#) that the US Army allocated millions of dollars to recruit Twitch influencers to “create original content videos showcasing the wide range of skill sets offered by the Army”, and to use influencers to “familiarise [their] fans on Army values and opportunities”. While this was mainly focused on eSports and Call of Duty, it's no far stretch to imagine this marketing drive aimed at E-girls too – a theory that becomes all the more convincing when you consider the US psy-ops [motto](#) to “persuade, change, influence”.

“The targeted attempt (by the US Army specifically) to recruit Gen Z has led to several online gaffes, but social media remains one of their most powerful recruitment tools,” says [David Noel](#), an internet researcher and former army vet. “The open-secret nature of these influencers is part of the intrigue. Other militaries use E-girl influencers who deny any official connection, whereas someone like Lunchbaglujan capitalises on the speculation. While people debate what's real and what's fake, the real psy-op is the normalisation of military recruitment through social media. E-girl army influencers undermine the reality and history of the US military while changing our conception of what it means to be a soldier.”

An example of non-linear warfare, these influencers play into our notion of what's real. They provide the illusion of debate while remaining in total control of the narrative. “There is this wider doubt of reality, and a communal sense of chaos and unreality, so it follows that internet culture would play into that and discuss it, and perpetuate it,” agrees Dr Christiana Spens, author of [The Fear](#) and [Shooting Hipsters](#). “By making people doubt what is real – are these girls actually in the army? Are the stunts real? Are their faces real? Is the war real? They just add to an overall confusion and disassociation and can lead to desensitisation, ultimately.” This confusion allows the government further scope to exercise control over its subjects. As internet researcher Jak Ritger writes in an extensive [report](#) on the subject: “Under Psy-Op Realism: Everything is a Psy-Op and Everyone is a FED.”

Beyond the social media promo and fear tactics, however, the surging popularity of influencers like Lujan is a symptom of post-capitalism. As the cost of living rises and living conditions plummet, an increasing number of young people are turning to vocational jobs for stability: as

Ritger points out, even McDonald's will send you to college after a couple of years of enlistment. "Move bodies, make memories, do work," grins Haylujan in a recent [video](#). She might be dressed in head-to-toe camo, but the sentiment is no different to the same-24-hours-in-a-day [girlbossery](#) preached by the Kardashians, or [sigma males](#) flexing their grindset.

The epitome of what *Succession*'s Roman Roy meant when he dreamed of a future with "E-girls with guns and Juul pods", military-funded E-girl warfare is the latest symptom of a society run threadbare by neoliberalism, and it's no far stretch to imagine more weird crossovers like this as conditions worsen. So, what's next? NASA E-girl ambassadors? A McDonald's waifu? The resulting content may be funny and kind of surreal, but don't lose sight of why we're in this position to begin with.

Source: <https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/57878/1/the-era-of-military-funded-e-girl-warfare-a>

<https://www.thenation.com/article/culture/military-recruitment-twitch/> Gamers with the Army, Navy, and Air Force are spending hours on Twitch with children as young as 13.

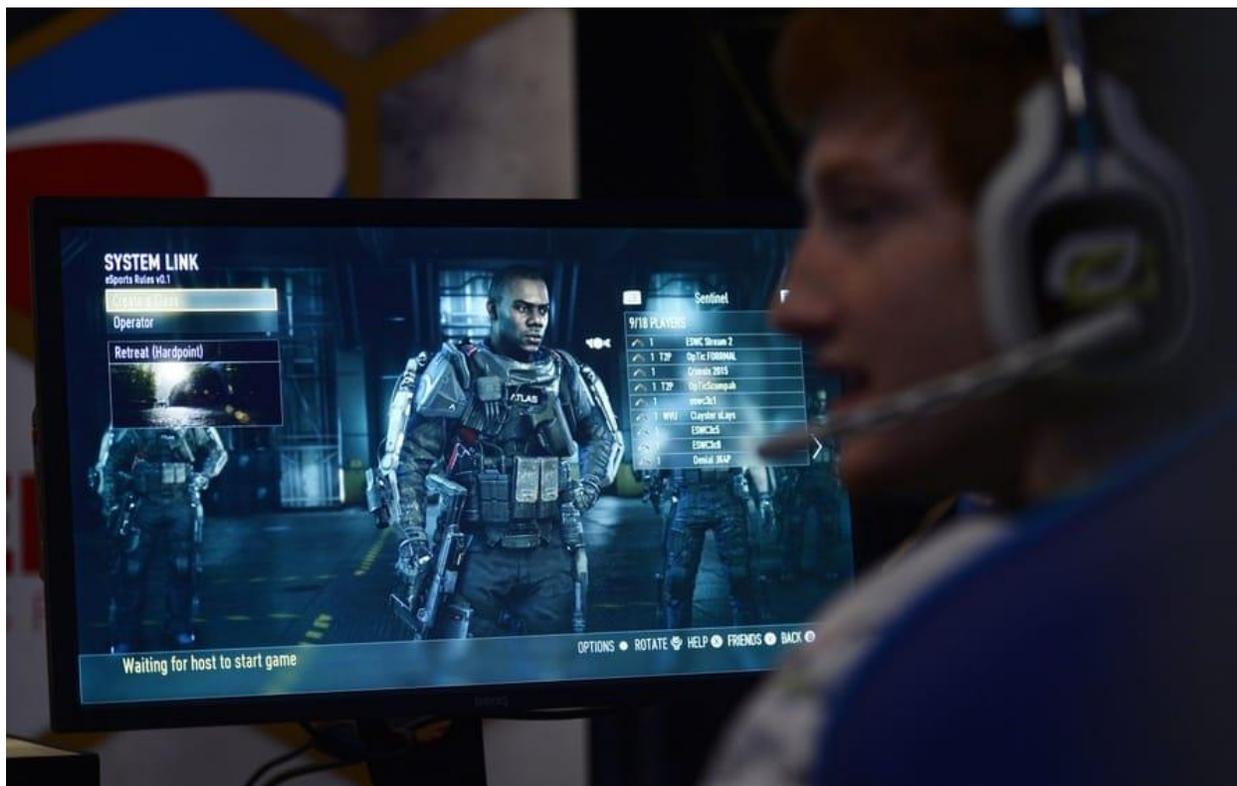


Figure 22: A competitor plays *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare* during the Electronic Sports World Cup in Paris. (Alain Jocard / AFP via Getty Images)

July 15, 2020 / *Jordan Uhl / The Nation* - “Have a nice time getting banned, my dude,” Army recruiter and gamer Joshua “Strotrnium” David told me right before he booted me from the US Army’s Twitch channel. I had just reminded viewers of the United States’ history of atrocities and helpfully provided a link to the Wikipedia page for US war crimes.

Was I undiplomatic? Sure. But if the military is going to use one of the world’s most popular platforms to recruit kids, then it shouldn’t be able to do so without some pushback. Right now, with the support of Twitch, gamers with the US military are spending hours with children as young as 13, trying to convince them to enlist.

The Army, Navy, and Air Force all stream on Twitch using dedicated e-sports teams. These teams are comprised of skilled gamers who compete in tournaments for cash prizes. While members of military e-sports teams offer the regular gaming skill set, they’re also on-screen talent and recruiters. Instead of approaching a recruiter behind a table in a school cafeteria, kids can hang out with one who is playing their favorite video games and replying to their chat messages for hours on end.

Twitch, a livestreaming platform owned by Amazon, boasted more than 5 billion hours watched from April through June. (For comparison, Netflix claims that during quarantine people have been viewing around 6 billion hours of its shows and movies a month.) A typical military stream looks something like this: A recruiter, usually a man in his 30s, sits comfortably in his gamer chair inside a dimly lit room illuminated by a monitor and the colorful LED lights of his computer tower. An American flag hangs on the wall behind his right shoulder, an oversized stuffed animal sits to his left. He's playing Call of Duty or Valorant. He's friendly, and talks about how much he loves being in the Army. Despite being older than most of his young viewers, he speaks like them. "It do be like that sometimes. We do have some great comms," said a recruiter in one recent session.

The practices employed on Twitch by military e-sports teams are part of a system by which recruiters target children in unstable and/or disadvantaged situations. Recruiters take advantage of the poor seeking steady income, the vulnerable longing for stability, and the undocumented living in fear because of their citizenship status. Now, at a time when all those factors are magnified by a pandemic that has left half the country out of work and over 30 percent unable to afford their housing payments, conditions are ripe for recruiters to prey on anxious youth.

"I see you guys are upgrading from recruiting out of low-income schools, nice," Twitch user xCanyon916 said in a Navy stream on Tuesday while the recruiter was fielding questions about life in the military from chatters expressing desire to join the Navy e-sports team. The recruiter warned xCanyon916 that if they said something again about the Navy's recruiting practices, they'd be banned.

Hasan Piker, a popular Twitch streamer with a dedicated following of over 430,000 users, recoiled at the thought of recruiters' building relationships with young, impressionable viewers.

"Twitch is unlike anything I've ever experienced in my career, and it's because you're live for hours on end, talking to these people in the chat. You develop a community and know your individual chatters. There is an ecosystem in every Twitch channel," Piker said. "Recruiting in this predatory way is a violation of [the users'] safety."

While an 18-year-old might watch a piece of propaganda like *American Sniper* once in movie theaters and go on with their lives, here military members themselves are streaming hawkish agitprop day after day. In some cases, such as Call of Duty, these are games that the military or ex-military figures have consulted on and helped shape. In these Twitch channels, recruiters are using these games to solicit young viewers to share personal information. Branches that use e-sports and Twitch streams to reach and recruit younger viewers rely on sleight-of-hand tactics, false promises, and deceptive messaging to trick them into filling out recruiting forms.

The Twitter account for the US Army e-sports team links to a sparsely populated page with register to win! at the top, no details on what one could even win, and a sign-up form that, according to a tiny disclosure at the bottom of the page, welcomes an eventual harangue by an Army recruiter. It allows people as young as 12 to submit the form, but adds a notice on the post-submission page that recruiters are not permitted to contact a child under the age of 16.

Twitch's advertising pitch boasts that it can reach 80 percent of teen males in the United States. The minimum age requirement for Twitch is 13.

“All parents are concerned about screen time and what it's doing to their children,” Justin Hendrix, the executive director of the NYC Media Lab, told me. “As a parent, I reckon a lot of us are unaware that our children are encountering marketing messages, influencers, and sales people in a variety of contexts online when we think they're just playing games.”

Twitch viewers in the Army's channel are repeatedly presented with an automated chat prompt that says they could win a Xbox Elite Series 2 controller—an enhanced controller with customizable options and extra paddles for advanced play that costs upward of \$200—and a link where they can enter the “giveaway.” It, too, directs them to a recruiting form with no additional mention of a contest, odds, total number of winners, or when a drawing will occur.

The Army declined to comment.

There are over 325,000 current active-duty Navy servicemen and women. The inaugural Navy e-sports team commissioned earlier this year consists of 10 people. To qualify for the e-sports team, you must be at least an E-4, petty officer third class, a rank that takes on average two to three years to reach. One cannot join the Navy and immediately be on the e-sports team, but the Navy's Twitch channel features a bio that reads, “Other people will tell you not to stay up all night staring at a screen. We'll pay you to do it. Get a look at what life is like inside the uniform on the America's [sic] Navy.”

Lara Bollinger, a public affairs officer with the Navy Recruiting Command, said in an e-mail that the bio is “a nod to the fact that when standing watch in various capacities on a ship (on the bridge, in the combat information center, etc.) a Sailor will be looking at various screens, (radar, sonar, navigation, etc...).”

Twitch does not consider military e-sports streams mature programming, so it does not require people to enter their age before viewing. One need only click a button acknowledging that the stream is intended for older viewers. With screen time spiking because of the pandemic, this presents a troubling dynamic.

“You can say what you want about people who serve in the military and what that says about them. I'm not saying they shouldn't be able to play video games or e-sports, but I do think it's more insidious to have the military using it as a recruiting tool for young, impressionable people,” Rod Breslau, an e-sports industry consultant and insider, said.

Hart Vigas, a veteran, peace activist, and counter-recruiter in Austin, sets up information tables in schools and throughout his community to help kids understand that joining the military is not the only way to attain a more stable living situation or money for college. Recruitment rhetoric also ignores many of the risks of military life, especially the psychological complications of returning to the civilian world.

“They don’t talk about military sexual trauma. They don’t talk about the suicide rate. It’s mostly ‘We can pay for your school. You can serve your country,’” Vigas said. “When I ask kids why they want to join, it’s either ‘I want to serve my nation’ or ‘I want to pay for college.’ I imagine recruiters feed off those two motivations the most.”

The use of gamified war propaganda to play into that myth isn’t new for the US military. The Army developed its own game franchise, America’s Army, which it launched in 2002 at the height of the War on Terror and includes story lines and missions based on real-life skirmishes. Games like Call of Duty whitewash the horrors of war, sterilize the violence, and mask the trauma inflicted on everyone involved.

The e-sports industry has become overrun with military sponsorships and partnerships with different games, e-sports organizations, teams, and even some individual players. The Call of Duty League is sponsored by both the Army and the Air Force. The National Guard recently partnered with e-sports organization NRG.

Instead of running a Super Bowl ad, the Navy opted to redirect those funds toward boosting its e-sports presence. The Navy sponsors ESLGaming and Fandom, two of the largest e-sports organizations in the world, as well as the e-sports team Evil Geniuses, which on Monday announced a larger collaborative effort with its military funder.

The Air Force, NRG, and Evil Geniuses declined to comment.

The Navy also has a partnership with Twitch that grants it prominent placement in the homepage carousel.

“Through our partnership with Twitch, the most popular e-sports streaming site, the Navy has immediate access to millions of 17-to-24-year-old e-sports enthusiasts on the platform to showcase a side of Navy life that viewers may not expect,” Bollinger said. “Viewers are asking our gamers insightful questions, and our gamers are effectively communicating that there is a place for everyone in the Navy.”

None of the military branches or Twitch would comment on paid promotion or how branches might qualify for prominent placement on Twitch’s homepage, an incredibly valuable position thanks to Twitch’s 15 million daily active users. Users recently expressed dismay last month when the Army’s channel was featured in the “Stream With Pride” category despite the military’s history of discriminating against the LGBT community.

But beyond the recruiting mechanism, these nationalistic e-sports efforts disregard the violence that the US military inflicts around the world.

“When tech and gaming platforms think of safety, they likely aren’t thinking about the very real violence predominately Muslim communities will face around the world as their platforms aid in military recruitment,” said Iram Ali, the interim director of campaigns at Kairos, a fellowship program that supports more diverse and equitable leadership in tech. “It was interesting to see Call of Duty want to express support for Black Lives Matter. But what active steps will the

creators take to make sure the way the military preys on poor Black and brown kids in recruitment isn't also happening with the help of their video game?"

This sentiment is complicated by the evolving nature of war, which makes gamers especially valuable. The military has long employed video-game-based training and was expanding its use even before the pandemic. Military personnel operate unmanned drones thousands of miles away using controllers that would be familiar to a serious gamer. A recent study showed that gamers may make better drone operators than even experienced pilots. With the military's Twitch recruitment strategies, it's easy to see the beginnings of an e-sports to drone operator pipeline.

"As we think about how automation and media are changing the way we fight wars, it's concerning to think that children are being given the impression that the military is like a video game," Hendrix said. "Whether it's drones or killer robots, the last thing we need is less humanity in war."

Source: <https://www.thenation.com/article/culture/military-recruitment-twitch/>

Why Machine Learning is the Future of Recruitment and Retention in the Military



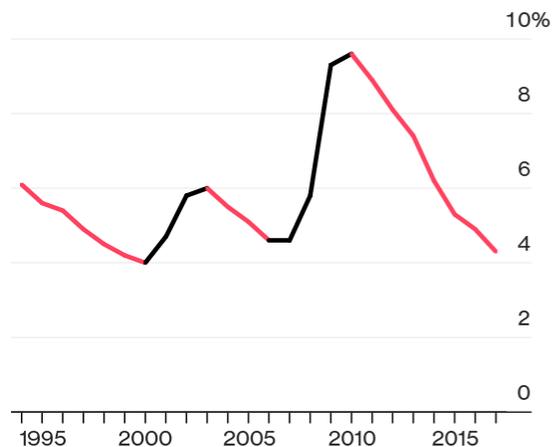
May 24, 2018 / Michael Taberski / Data Robot - The United States military currently has a huge recruiting problem. According to the latest [Heritage](#) report, 71% of Americans ages 17 – 24 cannot qualify for military service due to health problems, physical fitness, education, or criminality. All military branches are struggling to find enough recruits to maintain a fighting force.

Additionally, today’s low unemployment rates are continuing to exacerbate the problem. The graph below illustrates how unemployment is shrinking the recruit pool.

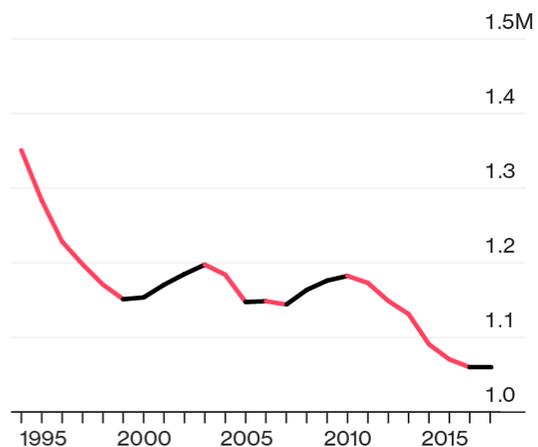
Unemployment and Enlistment

Military enlistment across services tends to **decline** when civilian job prospects improve.

Unemployment rate



Total enlistment of active-duty military personnel



Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Dept. of Defense

Bloomberg

So, why does this matter? If we think about the long-term impact of this recruiting problem, we can see how the security of the nation, as a whole, is at risk. We are essentially losing the ability to secure the country. And, above all else, we will also lose the ability to prevent war without a well-staffed and formidable military.

To compensate for the shortfalls in recruiting, the Army has begun to acknowledge that they may need to lower their standards and take in more recruits [who require waivers for marijuana use, low test scores, and medical problems](#). This does nothing to prevent the degradation of our

forces; if anything, it makes it more difficult to accomplish the mission because the soldiers to your right and left may not be up to the standards of a U.S. soldier, sailor, marine, or airman.

Instead, we need to start looking at the data and develop fact-based solutions to improve the efficiency in the recruitment process using an advanced technology called [machine learning](#).

To create a long-term solution for the military's recruiting challenges, we need to think strategically. Merely throwing taxpayer money at the problem doesn't solve the fundamental personnel issues, and with all things government, there needs to be checks and balances in place to ensure problems end in the most economical and ethical manner feasible. Instead, we need to start looking at the data and develop fact-based solutions to improve the efficiency in the recruitment process using an advanced technology called [machine learning](#).

Machine Learning for Military Recruiting

Machine learning — more specifically, [supervised machine learning](#) — is the process of taking historical data with a known outcome, training a model with that data, and then predicting future outcomes based on new data with that model. In our recruitment challenge, our historical data is all of the information describing past recruits including:

- Height
- Weight
- Physical fitness scores
- Military aptitude test scores
- Medical history
- Education
- Extra-curricular activities

What we are trying to predict from the known outcomes could be one of several things based on the most pressing need. If we are worried that recruits won't make it through Basic Training, then our outcome could be whether or not the recruit made it through basic training. If we are concerned that eligible recruits will enlist, then our outcome should be whether or not a prospect enlisted.

For the sake of simplicity, we will say that we are trying to develop a model that will predict whether a potential recruit is likely to enlist. The historical data indicates whether a recruit enlisted in any branch of the service. With machine learning, we have the flexibility to break this problem down by state, a branch of service, and many other subsets of the population to make better predictions. The end result of all this work will be a model that predicts whether or not any individual future prospect will enlist in the military.

Doing nothing about the recruiting issue continues to allow the degradation of our armed services and the security of the country. Let's look at some numbers.

Maybe you think that there should be more dramatic applications of machine learning and artificial intelligence in the military, but one should take a step back and consider the implications. Doing nothing about the recruiting issue continues to allow the degradation of our armed services and the security of the country. Let us look at some numbers.

The Army's [enlistment goal for 2018 is 80,000 soldiers](#) — 11,500 more than last year's target. However, they have already acknowledged that this goal is unobtainable. [To compensate for the increase in quota, the Army has employed 400 more recruiters](#), increasing the total of number recruiters to 9,400. Additionally, the military branches are budgeting hundreds of millions of dollars in bonuses for high-demand jobs such as cyber security, intelligence, and more.



As [of April 2018](#), Army Secretary Mark Esper acknowledged that 4% of the force are considered “Category 4” soldiers — soldiers with low test scores — and the goal is to reduce that number to 2%. If machine learning can provide a 1% lift in recruitment from last year's numbers without increasing work output from recruiters, that would mean an additional 685 qualified soldiers in 2018 with little additional effort, while also eliminating some of our dependence on “Category 4” soldiers by driving more high-quality recruits. Machine learning provides better insights for those most likely to enlist, giving recruiters the names of potential recruits to focus efforts to reach their objectives.

The Challenges in Military Recruiting

Military recruiters have a tough job. These men and women are entrusted with staffing the armed services with high-quality recruits to ensure the security of the nation. They need all of the help and support they can get. Some recruiters, [like Chapel Hill's Staff Sergeant Miller McGowan](#), are turning to new methods of engaging potential recruits, including the use of social media platforms like Facebook. However, Staff Sergeant McGowan has to manually comb through his list of prospects, relying on his experience and instinct to guess which recruits are likely to engage with him.

Wouldn't it be more efficient if Staff Sergeant McGowan was given the names of prospects ranked by their likelihood to enlist, along with the factors that contribute to this increased likelihood based on the data already collected? Utilizing machine learning will help every recruiter better prioritize their time and quickly turn the two recruits they need to enlist per month into three, high-quality recruits able to contribute to the overall defense and security of the nation in the process. Machine learning will help every recruiter be more like Staff Sergeant McGowan by creating highly-accurate models that all recruiters can use to gain critical insights.



We should also look at the recruiting issue as a marketing problem. One Army report noted that [50% of today's youth know nothing about the military](#) and cannot name all of the military branches. What would a 1% increase in awareness accomplish? Of all US [adults ages 17 to 24](#), [about 10 million of them are eligible to join the armed services](#), which means that roughly 5

million available recruits may know little to nothing about the military. A 1% increase in awareness would show 100,000 youths the benefits of military service and, at the very least, give them another option for their careers. Even if 1% of those 100,000 prospects enlisted, we would have 1,000 more qualified recruits in our ranks.

With machine learning, the military can effectively and efficiently overcome the obstacles of finding the best recruits to serve.

How can we accomplish this? By simply utilizing information the military has already collected. The data describing individuals that have expressed interest in the armed services would be plenty to begin training models. There is also data from social media sites which allow the integration of social trends into the AI and analytics efforts. Training our machine learning algorithms with all of this data will enable military recruiters to understand the best ways to interact with prospective, high-quality recruits.

Taking it a step further, we can dig deeper into our data to understand what jobs and interests each prospect may be interested in and put those options in front of them, increasing their propensity to engage and ultimately enlist.

With machine learning, the military can effectively and efficiently overcome the obstacles of finding the best recruits to serve.

Jordan Uhl is a progressive activist living in Washington, D.C.

Source: <https://www.datarobot.com/blog/why-machine-learning-is-the-future-of-recruitment-and-retention-in-the-military/>

Counter Military Recruitment Resources from the Counter-recruitment activist community

- **VIDEO: Before You Enlist!**

<http://beforeyouenlist.org/>

“Before You Enlist!” video provides a rational voice to counter the seductive and often deceptive recruiting practices of the U.S. military. The message is not “don’t enlist” but rather to provide young people and their families a more complete picture of the life-altering consequences of joining the military – especially in wartime. Latest version: 2018. Length: 16:34 | *"Before You Enlist!" (2018 version) | Spanish: "¡Antes de Alistarte!" (2020 version)*

- **Back-to-school Kit for Counter-recruitment and School Demilitarization Organizing**

<https://nnomy.org/backtoschoolkit/>

The Back-to-school Kit for Counter-recruitment and School Demilitarization Organizing is a catalog of basic material useful to educating young people and school personnel about the realities of military enlistment and war. The catalog also includes some information on alternatives to enlistment, as well as items written for organizers seeking to reach out to local schools. A task force of knowledgeable organizers did the research. It does not include all of the available literature on this topic because much of what exists is out of date or is no longer being produced by the original sources. All of the material in this catalog was carefully reviewed for relevancy and accuracy as of the January of 2021.

- **What Every young woman Should Know about the military**

<https://www.beforeenlisting.org/what-every-young-woman-should-know>

The military has a huge budget to spend each year on recruitment. Hundreds of millions of dollars in fact. They have all the money for advertising, for fancy recruitment buses, for games and entertainments and pay for recruiters everywhere. That all goes into telling one side of the story; why you should join the military. That is not the whole story. We believe you have the right to truthful information about military service that recruiters might not tell you. We are not here to tell you what to do, or not do. It is your life. You deserve to have all the information before you decide.



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