In Defense of Diversity: Immigrant Inclusion in the US Military as a Strategic Imperative

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Research Question

What is the value in making it harder for non-citizen soldiers to serve in the American military? Aren't we losing precious capabilities when barriers to their service are created?

Threats to Diversity

Discriminatory policies

- **March 2017:** American embassies directed to increase scrutiny on visa applications.
- **October 2017:** New mandate for LPRs to complete background check before entrance into military.
- **July 2018:** Discharge of recruits who entered through MAVNI program.
- **August 2019:** Policy rescinded that allows soldiers to transmit citizenship to children born abroad.
- **October 2019:** Cease blocking deportations for active-duty troops and family.

AP NewsBreak: US Army quietly discharging immigrant recruits

By MARTHA MENDOZA and GARANCE BURKE July 5, 2018

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SAN ANTONIO (AP) — Some immigrant U.S. Army reservists and recruits who enlisted in the military with a promised path to citizenship are being abruptly discharged, the Associated Press has learned.

The AP was unable to quantify how many men and women who enlisted through the special recruitment program have been booted from the Army, but immigration attorneys say they know of more than 40 who have been discharged or whose status has become questionable, jeopardizing their futures.

Research Claims

- Diversity is a strategic asset in every context from ecosystems to corporate productivity

- Stripping any military of its diversity is to fundamentally misunderstand today's missions and associated operational realities.

- Three diversity categories – gender, generational status, and citizenship status – intersect and work synergistically to strengthen force readiness.

Important Terms & Theoretical Approach

- **Diversity**
  - "The variation of traits within groups of two or more people and may include both visible (e.g., sex, age, race) and invisible (e.g., knowledge, culture, values) traits" (Kamarck 2019, 2).

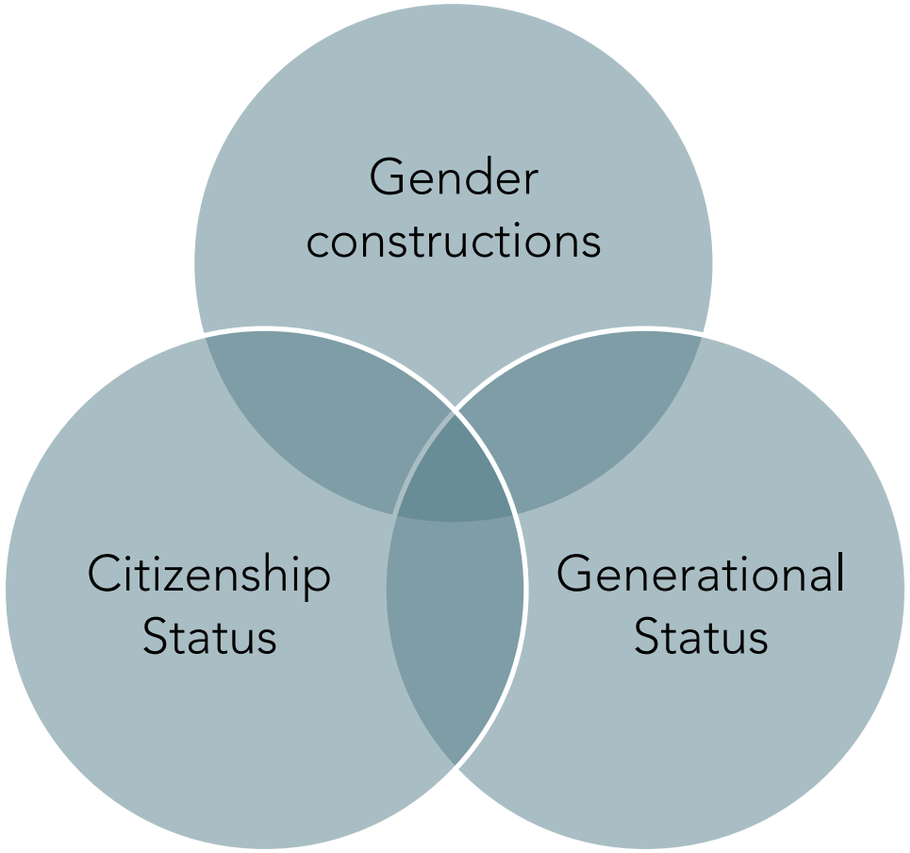
- **Immigrant soldier**
  - Foreign-born persons serving in the military who presently reside and intend to permanently live in the US.
  - A citizen raised in an American immigrant community

- **21st Century Military engagements**
  - Engagement typology ranges from coalition-lead operations oriented around humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and peacekeeping to containing great powers.

- **Cognitive Diversity Theory**
  - Physical (visible) diversity characteristics (e.g., race, gender, age) positively impact performance and organizational outcomes because each member contributes unique cognitive abilities (e.g., personality styles) that are a result of their experiences and are contingent on the visible characteristics (Horwitz and Horwitz 2007).

Immigrant Soldiers

The intersection of visible and invisible traits



- **Intersectionality**
  - How race, socio-economic status, gender, and other individual attributes intersect with one another and overlap to create modes of discrimination and privilege (Crenshaw 1989).

- **Imagine the competencies of:**
  - Latinx immigrants who are American citizens and have experienced "otherness" in the US who are operating abroad in an Arab context
  - Iraqi-born female non-citizen soldiers operating as interpreters in Baghdad
  - Second generation Nepali-American soldier deployed in Nepal earthquake effort.

Existing Programming

Capitalizing on Non-Citizen Soldiers

US Army 09L

Translators/Interpreters

US Army MAVNI

Military Accessions Vital to National Interest program

Intersecting Identities at Work

CASE STUDY 1

Interpreters in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars

CASE STUDY 2

Immigrant soldiers with expert medical knowledge

Interpreters in the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars

- Intersecting identities: gender and citizenship status.

- Female, Iraqi Interpreter – Aseel Salman
  - Met and spoke with village women on various raids during the Iraq war.
    - Able to gain intelligence
    - Better assessment of threats due to cultural fluency
    - Salman's unique background allowed for nuanced understanding of gendered nature of Iraqi culture

The value of these non-citizen interpreters stem from the cognitive characteristics that emanate from their physical markers of diversity (e.g., gender, citizenship).

Non-Citizen Soldiers with Expert Medical Knowledge

- Intersecting identities: gender, generational status, and citizenship status.

- **Comd. Kirti Tiwari**
  - Confluence of linguistic ability, specific cultural knowledge, and medical expertise makes him valuable for specific engagements.
  - 2015 Operation Sahayogi Haat (Nepal Earthquake relief)

- **Imagined second-generation Nepali US soldier**
  - Makes a significant difference in the efficacy of the mission and the inclusive image we project around the globe.
  - Establishment of mutual trust between groups

The value of these non-citizen soldiers stem from the cognitive characteristics (linguistic ability, specific cultural knowledge, and medical expertise) that emanate from their unique background and experience.

Cognitive Diversity Provides the Frame

- Cognitive Diversity, or the utilization of the unique perspectives and experiences that are contingent upon the physical makers of difference among soldiers, created a more agile, responsive, and ready force.

- This chapter offers examples of what this looks like, but there are many more that are undocumented.

Conclusions & Recommedations

- New military capabilities and competencies are borne from the interplay of particular identities – specifically, gender, generational status, and citizenship status – that immigrant soldiers inhabit.
  - The case studies show that *because of* a immigrant soldier's expertise and difference, the US military and coalition forces are in a more advantageous position.

- Recommendations:
  - Reevaluation of the MAVNI program
  - Congressional immigration reform
  - Congressional oversight on DoD policies that endanger non-citizen soldiers
  - More research

Thank you!

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