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The State of the Military's Nonpartisan Ethic
in the World of Social Media

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in the World of Social Media

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Center for Complex Operations Case Study



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Executive Summary

Past research contends that with the exception of voting in presidential elections, military officers' political participation is fairly muted. Moreover, most allegations of political outspokenness tend to be levied at retired officers, not those on active duty. Department of Defense directives provide guidelines on permissible but traditional forms of political expression for active duty members of the military, but largely neglect social media as a forum for political activity. Through a survey of more than 500 military elites attending the United States Military Academy and National Defense University, this project seeks to establish the nature and extent of political expression by members of the military throughout social media and whether or not such expression is in keeping with the norm of nonpartisanship.

Findings suggest that while most military elites continue to identify as conservative and Republican, fewer appear to do so today than at any other time over the past 30 years. Second, military elites actively use social media networking sites, although younger elites are more prolific in their use. Third, while respondents' nonmilitary friends were more politically active than

their military friends, both active duty and retired military actively participate in multiple forms of political and partisan expression, from posting comments on political issues to "friending" political figures. Fourth, party identification and political ideology elicit different responses and behavior about politics on social media. Military elites who identify as liberals and Democrats are more likely to have more politically diverse military friends on social media, but are also more likely to report feeling uncomfortable by their friends' politics. Finally, a striking percentage of those surveyed—50 percent in some cases—indicated their active duty military friends have engaged in insulting, rude, or disdainful comments directed at politicians, elected officials, and the President, with liberals and Democrats more likely to report they observed such normative violations. Together, these findings suggest Republican and conservative military elites may be more likely to see social media as their echo chamber and raise further questions about the politicization of the force. This study concludes by considering the implications these findings carry for the norms of an apolitical, nonpartisan military.



Technology and social media make it seductively easy for us to broadcast our private opinions far beyond the confines of our homes. The lines between the professional, personal—and virtual—are blurring. Now more than ever, we have to be exceptionally thoughtful about what we say and how we say it.¹

—*General Martin E. Dempsey, USA (Ret.)*

Introduction

This study seeks to establish the nature and extent of political expression by the military in the realm of social media and whether or not such expression is consistent with Department of Defense policy and the norms of an apolitical, nonpartisan military. Past research contends that with the exception of voting in presidential elections, military officers' political participation is fairly muted. Moreover, most allegations of political outspokenness tend to be levied at retired officers, not those on active duty. Department of Defense directives provide guidelines on permissible but traditional forms of political expression for active duty members of the military, but largely neglect social media as a forum for political activity. In this introduction, the author reviews the debate about charges of politicization within the military, examines past research into the political participation habits of members of the military, and evaluates current Department of Defense policies and guidance on political activity, social media, and the 2016 election.

The Ongoing Debate About Politicization

Since the late 1990s, a prevalent debate within the field of civil-military relations has been whether or not the military, namely its officer corps, has become politicized. Politicization is a broad term, though, and the discussion tends to crystallize around three main charges: that the officer corps is too partisan, too politically vocal, and too involved in political affairs. In recent times, journalist Tom Ricks may have been the first to lead the “too partisan” charge with his book, *Making the Corps*, where he found anecdotal indications of an increasingly con-

servative, Republican military that was out of step with the American public.² Around the same time, Ole Holsti provided richer empirical data from the Foreign Policy Leadership Project (FPLP), which charted a steadily increasing rate of affiliation with the Republican Party and growing conservative ideology among military officers from 1976 to 1996.³ And in 2001, Peter Feaver and Richard Kohn published the most comprehensive project aimed at exploring the civil-military gap in their Triangle Institute for Security Studies (TISS) study, confirming similar levels of ideological and partisan identification Holsti documented in the late 1990s.⁴ Both the FPLP and TISS studies concluded that by the late 1990s, well over 60 percent of military elites affiliated with the Republican Party and described themselves as politically conservative, and a significant gap emerged between the attitudes of these military elites and a comparable sample of civilian elites.

Central to the “too partisan” claim has been the concern that close and open affiliation with one party relegates the military to interest group status and reflects a gap between the military and civil society.⁵ However, a small chorus of civil-military observers has challenged this; they argue that voting, which is essentially a private act and right of citizenship, is the only real partisan activity those in the military undertake, and that charges that the officer corps had soundly abandoned partisan neutrality were overblown.⁶ Others have suggested that while partisan uniformity may characterize the officer corps, officers account for less than 20 percent of the military, and attitudes of enlisted members are more diverse and more representative of the general public.⁷

While enlisted views should not be overlooked or assumed to be in complete concert with those of officers, the attitudes of military elites and the ensuing interplay between senior military and civilian policymakers are more critical determinants of the state of civil-military relations. And while scholars like Joseph Collins may be right to argue that “a disproportionate number of Republicans . . . in the military, however, does not in and of itself mean anything,” recent research has found that partisanship does translate into moderate differences in substantive outcomes on certain issues.⁸ For example, Republican officers in the Army report slightly higher levels of distrust toward civilian leadership and are more apt to feel that in order to be respected as commander-in-chief, the President should have served in the military. Likewise, Democrats in the officer corps are more likely to report being uncomfortable expressing their political views with coworkers and more likely to report that others in the military have tried to influence them to vote a particular way. Finally, Republican officers are somewhat more likely to suggest the proper role of senior military leaders during certain scenarios in wartime is to be insistent with their civilian overseers, as opposed to being neutral, advising, or advocating.⁹ In other words, as Feaver has succinctly observed, some officers struggle with one of the basic principles of civilian control: that civilians have the right to be wrong.¹⁰

The charge that the military is “too vocal” refers to the perception that the military has abandoned its neutrality in the public sphere and actively participates in the political process beyond the act of voting. In recent times, the early years of the Clinton administration are often viewed as the nadir in civil-military relations, where some active duty members of the military were vocal and contemptuous toward their commander-in-chief. Kohn has recounted a litany of these sins, including the time when the “Air Force Chief of Staff had to issue an open demand to his service to respect the President and for proper behavior to be accorded to

him and still had to retire a two-star general for disparaging remarks made in public.”¹¹

While such outspokenness by some in the military during the Clinton administration may have been an aberration, a “revolt of the generals” where some have boldly waded into political waters has continued, but largely by those who have retired. The phrase, “revolt of the generals” has now come to refer to the specific instance in April 2006 when six retired generals called for then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s resignation due to his handling of the Iraq War.¹² This particular instance witnessed a resurfacing of the normative debate of whether or not retired generals should be publicly airing their grievances, especially since it occurred so soon after they had retired from active duty. On one end of the spectrum, Richard Swain offers a legal interpretation, insisting that retired officers, who still draw a military pension, never leave the military and are still bound to its norms and regulations.¹³ Kohn, too, has likened retired four-stars in particular to “princes of the church [who] represent the culture and the profession just as authoritatively as their counterparts on active duty.”¹⁴ At the very least, the public participation in political affairs by retired general and flag officers raises an important, but unanswered question—who speaks for the profession?¹⁵

Despite calls from some in the civil-military arena for retired officers, especially retired general and flag officers, to cease and desist from making public, partisan endorsements, they have only increased in magnitude on both sides of the aisle since former Marine Corps Commandant, General (Retired) P.X. Kelley, endorsed George H.W. Bush in 1988.¹⁶ In 2012, for example, 500 retired general and flag officers took out a full-page advertisement in the *Washington Times* to endorse former Governor Mitt Romney’s campaign for President.¹⁷ Additionally, James Golby has examined campaign contributions by retired four-star general and flag officers, which calls into question how private their politics truly were while they were on active duty.¹⁸

Notwithstanding these calls from civil-military relations scholars for retired officers to refrain from making political pronouncements, recent research into the attitudes of active duty Army officers found that most disagree with the notion that retired officers should keep their politics private. For example, 80 percent of active duty Army officers felt it was okay for retired officers to publicly criticize senior civilians in government and to be able to express their political views like any other citizen. And nearly 70 percent felt it was fine for retired generals to publicly express their political views. Moreover, a substantial minority even felt the restrictions on active duty members should be lessened, with 36 percent feeling active duty members should be able to express their political views like any other citizen.¹⁹ At the same time, actual levels of political participation by those on active duty beyond the act of voting remain fairly subdued. Approximately 20 percent of Army officers have admitted to having given monetary campaign contributions, 13 percent have put a campaign bumper sticker on their cars, and far fewer admitted to having ever joined a political club or attending a political rally or debate.²⁰ In all of these measures, the rates reported by Army officers were about on par with the general public as measured in the American National Election Studies surveys.

Finally, the allegation that the military is “too involved” in political matters tends to refer to interactions between senior military leaders and senior civilians at the highest levels of government, especially their perceived willingness to challenge or resist civilian authority. In some cases, scholars have taken issue with senior military leaders straying into political issues beyond their military expertise or have questioned the manner in which they have offered their military advice. In Feaver’s “principal-agent” theory of civil-military relations, the extent to which the military obeys its civilian overseers is dependent upon the manner and degree to which the civilian authority exercises its oversight. Based on their perceptions of how the civilian authority will act, the military decides whether it will “work” or

“shirk.”²¹ Shirking, as all good bureaucrats know, may not be outright refusal to comply, but could take the form of providing inflated estimates of a military operation’s costs, making “end runs” or leaks, or slow-rolling implementation of a policy.²² These are not simply theoretical conjectures, but are backed up with evidence. A famous example is General (Retired) Colin Powell’s public opposition to military intervention in Bosnia, evident by an on-the-record interview he did as sitting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs with *The New York Times* that was then followed up by an op-ed on the eve of the 1992 presidential election.²³ While some defend Powell’s actions as consistent with his authority and insist he never directly challenged the administration’s policy in Bosnia, others think he crossed the line or, at the very least, his actions typified shirking.²⁴

Eliot Cohen has documented the increasing and purposeful involvement by the military into the political sphere, from serving on congressional staffs to studying international politics at war colleges. In Cohen’s view, while building political awareness may be valuable for the officer corps, too often in practice these efforts result in placing value on the ability to manipulate the political process for the military’s own ends.²⁵ Feaver, likewise, has lamented the growing sense that military elites feel they must insist that civilian leaders adopt their recommendations, and these sentiments within the officer corps have been well documented in the TISS study’s survey research and subsequent research into Army officer attitudes.²⁶ Feaver has broadly termed this sentiment as “McMasterism,” arguing it rests on a wide misinterpretation of H.R. McMaster’s *Dereliction of Duty*.²⁷ While McMaster simply concludes that the Joint Chiefs failed to sufficiently advise President Johnson during the Vietnam War, the misinterpretation of McMasterism suggests that the Joint Chiefs should have more forcefully opposed Johnson’s Vietnam strategy to the point of their resignation.²⁸

As with the “too partisan” and “too vocal” charges, the “too involved” claim has its critics. They argue that

Samuel Huntington's theory is full of limitations, most notably the fallacy that a clear delineation between purely military and purely political spheres exists, especially at the highest levels of government.²⁹ Moreover, military officers who believe they can ignore all things political do so at their own peril, and ultimately limit their own effectiveness.³⁰ These arguments acknowledge one of Clausewitz's central principles, that "war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means."³¹ While Huntington devotees are quick to reference his oft-quoted line that "politics is beyond the scope of military competence, and the participation of military officers in politics undermines their professionalism," Huntington also conceded that "the top military leaders of the state inevitably operate in this intermingled world of strategy and policy."³²

A simplistic, but not-too-far-off-the-mark, summary of the three debates that form the larger discussion over whether or not the military is politicized tends to oscillate between two extreme positions: that the state of civil-military relations is in a constant, near state of crisis; or, that everything is overblown, and we are nowhere close to the sometimes-poisoned state of civil-military relations that our country has seen earlier in its history. The problem with the former assessment is that it becomes hard to distinguish magnitude, change, and emerging areas of friction when everything is assumed to be in constant crisis. The problem with the latter is that celebrating the fact that a military coup in the United States is nearly impossible or that none of the tensions between senior military leaders and their civilian bosses today approximates the MacArthur-Truman episode is equally unsatisfying and misses an important nuance.³³ This author assumes a middle ground, stopping well short of characterizing today's civil-military relations as in crisis, but suggesting there is some merit to each of the politicization charges, and acknowledging that fault lines in the military's adherence to civilian control have emerged that merit closer study. This paper explores those issues and the politiciza-

tion charge in greater depth, namely, the claims that the military is both "too partisan" and "too vocal," by examining the nature and extent of political expression by the military in social media.

Current Department of Defense Policy and Guidance

Department of Defense Directive (DoDD) 1344.10, *Political Activities by Members of the Armed Forces*, is the primary policy document that addresses political behavior for members of the military.³⁴ The directive's opening paragraph sets the tone of the overall policy, framing it as a challenge between "carry[ing] out the obligations of citizenship" and adhering to the "traditional concept" of the military refraining from partisan political activity.³⁵ Invoking the normative aspect vice a technical-legal framework is an important observation here, as the Department of Defense chose to nest its authority under the longstanding norm of nonpartisanship. And while the document closes with the reminder that it constitutes a lawful order and that violations are punishable under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, the Department of Defense arguably approaches the prosecution of such violations with unease, wary of being seen as abridging Servicemembers' basic rights of citizenship.³⁶

At the very least, the enforcement of DoDD 1344.10 is uneven. Because many such violations are largely addressed at the unit level through letters of reprimand, it is nearly impossible to track instances at the service level in which Servicemembers violated the principles of DoDD 1344.10. In one of the more public violations, where Army Reservist Specialist Jesse Thorsen appeared in uniform at a political rally to endorse then-Representative Ron Paul's bid for President in 2012, the Soldier's punishment was a relatively light letter of reprimand.³⁷ However, Marine Sergeant Gary Stein was discharged from the U.S. Marine Corps in 2012 with an other-than-honorable discharge for calling President Barack Obama a coward and an enemy on Facebook, for vowing that he would not salute the President or follow

his orders, and for creating an Armed Forces Tea Party website.³⁸ Both incidents are among the more-publicized deviations in recent memory, and because they made national-level news and were absolutely clear violations of Department of Defense policy, the decisions to hold the two offenders accountable were unambiguous ones for the U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps. It is less clear how uniformly other less-publicized and less-inflammatory deviations from DoDD 1344.10 are prosecuted across the Services.

While the enforcement mechanism rests at the unit level and therefore is left for unit leaders to weigh and interpret, the language of DoDD 1344.10 is fairly clear, listing traditional political activities that are allowable for Servicemembers and specifying those that are not. For example, Servicemembers can vote, encourage others to vote, and express their personal opinions on candidates and political issues; they can write letters to the editor expressing political opinions, as long as they make clear their views do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Defense; and they can put political bumper stickers on their cars.³⁹ Prohibitions include speaking before partisan political gatherings, performing work on the behalf of a political candidate or party, or displaying a political sign or banner in their front yard if they live on a military installation.⁴⁰

The directive also includes a noteworthy catch-all statement that “activities not expressly prohibited may be contrary to the spirit and intent” of DoDD 1344.10 and should still be avoided.⁴¹ Again, rather than relying on an overly legalistic interpretation, the directive attempts to appeal to the better judgment and prudence of members of the military. While certain activities may not be forbidden, the Department of Defense encourages Servicemembers to exercise an abundance of caution, lest their political activity imply official approval or endorsement. While the directive’s language is clear, and the examples provide even greater fidelity, the policy focuses on traditional forms of political activity—attending rallies, donating to campaigns, and marching

in parades—measures that may seem outdated or a bit alien to those serving in the military today. Meanwhile, the directive is noticeably silent on political behavior within the realm of social media and on the Internet more broadly. This is most likely due to the fact that the directive is nearly 8 years old and does not reflect recent changes in both technology and political behavior.

Prior to both the 2012 and 2016 presidential elections, the Department of Defense issued supplemental public affairs guidance regarding political campaigns and elections.⁴² Most of the guidance is devoted to regulating and restricting the use of military installations by political candidates during campaigns and elections. However, both documents issued in advance of the 2012 and 2016 elections also included a section regarding the use of social media for political purposes.⁴³ While the Department of Defense public affairs guidance invokes DoDD 1344.10, its language leaves a bit more open to interpretation. At the very least, it draws a line between *political* and *partisan* activity, between which most citizens, let alone members of the military, would be hard pressed to differentiate.

Nonetheless, words are important, and even if the regulations are ambiguous, a baseline of terminology for this paper is important. *Partisan* refers to support for a particular side, faction, or political party. *Political*, borrowing Harold Lasswell’s definition, relates to “who gets what, when, and how.”⁴⁴ But like *partisan*, the word *political* suggests there are positions to be taken and sides to be chosen—the haves and have nots, for example. Just as nonpartisan is to have no allegiance to a particular party, being apolitical is to have no stance on an issue. Even the Merriam-Webster dictionary struggles in separating political from partisan, defining political as “of, relating to, involving, or involved in politics, especially party politics.” Likewise, in a “Frequently Asked Questions” document about the Hatch Act and social media circulated to federal employees in late 2015, the Office of Special Counsel defined political activity as “any activity directed at the success or failure of a political party or

partisan political group or candidate in a partisan race.”⁴⁵ Regardless of the semantics, political and partisan are hardly two separate, clearly defined spheres, and there are few, if any, political issues in America that lack partisan implications.

The public affairs guidance aims to maximize a Servicemember’s right to free expression, but in doing so, presents a number of ambiguities and inconsistencies. First, it allows a Servicemember to “express his or her own personal views on public issues or political candidates via social media platforms . . . much the same as they would be permitted to write a letter to the editor of a newspaper”—but then provides two caveats.⁴⁶ If it is reasonably clear on the social media site that the individual is on active duty, Servicemembers are obligated to include the standard disclaimer that these represent their personal views and not those of the Department of Defense. The public affairs guidance also notes that active duty members must refrain from partisan political activity. This language is problematic for a few reasons. In seeking to apply a disclaimer, the public affairs guidance aims to hold Servicemembers’ social media activity to the standard of published, written work. Moreover, it is not clear how well this policy is understood, adhered to, or even heard of throughout the ranks or how practical it is. Should the disclaimer be used each time a Servicemember “likes” a political post on Facebook? Or should the disclaimer be used only when one comments on a thread or “retweets” on Twitter? It is unclear, but it reflects the view that political expressions on social media are more akin to a published article than to a spoken conversation—perhaps a reflection that the former leaves a lasting digital trail while the latter does not.

A second concern with this language is the cloudy distinction between political and partisan activity. In the allowable example, Servicemembers can express personal views on political issues and candidates, but cannot engage in partisan political activity. Yet it is difficult to envision a scenario in which political issues or candidates are devoid of partisan implications. The language also implies

that Servicemembers, or any citizens for that matter, can clearly distinguish between political and partisan activity. This also makes things even more difficult for unit leaders who have to enforce the policy as they, too, must be able to discern between political and partisan expression.

The public affairs guidance attempts to provide more clarity by acknowledging that Servicemembers may “become a friend of or like the Facebook page, or follow the Twitter account of a political party or partisan candidate, campaign, group, or cause,” but cannot encourage others to do the same, as that would constitute political activity as described in DoDD 1344.10.⁴⁷ Again, while the attempt to clarify and provide examples is well intentioned, it raises even more questions. If a Servicemember “follows” or “likes” a particular party and candidates of that party, and the Servicemember’s social media site is adorned with imagery and written material of that party and its candidates, does that not constitute partisan activity, regardless of whether the Servicemember is encouraging others to do the same?

Authors of the Department of Defense public affairs guidance for the 2016 election may have concluded that “liking” a political candidate’s Facebook page is the equivalent of putting a bumper sticker on a car, an allowable act according to DoDD 1344.10. However, other examples of political expression that are in-person vice those made in social media may be less comparable. At the very least, there is the question of reach and magnitude. DoDD 1344.10 states up front that Servicemembers are allowed to express their personal political opinions. And while DoDD 1344.10 does not explicitly state so, the underlying norm of nonpartisanship implies that such expressions should be in private.⁴⁸ Later, DoDD 1344.10 prohibits Servicemembers from the very public act of speaking before a political gathering or advocating for a political cause on a radio or television program. Yet political expression on social media, the modern day town square, raises more questions—questions that are not answered in the Department of Defense public affairs election guidance. If

posting a political comment on Facebook, where a post can be quickly read by thousands of people, is inherently a public act, is the Department of Defense public affairs guidance for presidential elections consistent with DoDD 1344.10? Likewise, the public affairs guidance compares a political post on social media to a letter to the editor, which DoDD 1344.10 classifies as allowable. But a letter to the editor must meet certain publication guidelines and usually pass a public affairs screening, and it is hard to conceive of a situation where a Servicemember could have one or several letters to the editor published each day; but, in social media, there are few, if any, barriers to or reviews of one's own political commentary. The accessibility, volume, and reach of political expression in social media are far different from the traditional measures identified in DoDD 1344.10. As the next section explores, this is not only a matter of consistent policy guidance, but also one of normative implications.

Implications for the Profession

While DoDD 1344.10 attempts to appeal to the better judgment of those in the military, the Department of Defense nonetheless grants considerable latitude to Servicemembers when it comes to political expression. However, the two most recent Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral (Retired) Michael G. Mullen and General (Retired) Martin E. Dempsey, often argued throughout their tenures for a stricter adherence to the nonpartisan ethic and a more conservative interpretation of DoDD 1344.10. Both suggested the nonpartisan ethic should extend into retirement, and General Dempsey, writing in the lead-up to the 2012 presidential election, argued for greater restraint in Servicemembers' political expression on social media, as highlighted in the quote that began the introduction to this paper.⁴⁹

Mullen's and Dempsey's admonitions are instructive, as they are undoubtedly reactions to what they perceived to be repeated violations in political and partisan activity by members of the military. Both Mullen

and Dempsey raise an important question about political expression by members of the military: even if it is allowable, is it proper? In their landmark TISS study, Feaver and Kohn address this normative issue and argue that most military officers underestimate the impact their seemingly personal views and expression have:

Officers who maintain (as many do) that they separate their personal views and voting behavior from their duties may underestimate the subtle and potentially corrosive effects of partisanship on their behavior, leadership, morale, and attitude towards the president. Soldiering is a "24/7" business, and such compartmentalizations are not normally accepted by military officers in other areas of their professional life. Officers have the right to vote, but those who go beyond the private exercise of that right need to be aware of the implications for civil-military relations.⁵⁰

Feaver and Kohn characterize the effect of military officers' overt partisanship as "corrosive," implying a slow degradation of trust and confidence over time. During his tenure as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Dempsey also emphasized the principle of trust, arguing that a breakdown in the nonpartisan ethic threatens to erode the trust between the military and the American public: "One of the things that marks us as a profession in a democracy is it's most important we remain apolitical. That's how we maintain our trust with the American people. The American people don't want us to become another special interest group. In fact, I think that confuses them."⁵¹

The Gallup Poll, which annually measures the American public's confidence in institutions, reported in 2015 that 72 percent of Americans had a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in the military, putting it atop the list of all institutions measured for the past 18 years in a row.⁵² Dempsey and other scholars of civil-military relations question the durability of such trust and confidence levels if the American public begins to view the military as a politicized or partisan organization.

As this study proceeds, it aims to answer the following questions: what are the nature and extent of political expression by members of the military on social media? How does political expression on social media vary between active duty and retired members and between members of the military and nonmilitary alike? Do members of the military violate the nonpartisan ethic on social media, and is there a distinction between the political expression of active duty and retired members of the military? And finally, what kind of partisan linkages to Servicemembers' social media political expression, if any, can be discerned?

Through a survey of U.S. military students attending the five colleges of the National Defense University

(NDU) and Cadets attending the United States Military Academy, this project aims to gain a better understanding of the nature of political expression by members of the military. While the broad topic of politicization in the military garners significant attention among civil-military scholars and interested practitioners, only a handful of military public opinion surveys on political attitudes over the past 25 years exist, and none to date provide insights into the military's political behavior on social media. The findings from this study are meant to inform both students of civil-military relations as well as senior military leaders and defense officials who aim to safeguard and promote the nonpartisan ethic, especially in the emerging realm of social media.

Methodology

This paper relies upon the observations of a sample of military officers attending the National Defense University (n = 230) and Cadets attending the United States Military Academy at West Point (n = 307). While West Point Cadets are future officers still in a pre-commissioning status, this study often refers to the entire sample of both National Defense University (NDU) students and West Point Cadets as military elites, following a classification used in similar past research.⁵³

To avoid potential social desirability bias, this survey primarily asked respondents questions about their observations of the behavior and attitudes of their military and nonmilitary friends on social media websites, as opposed to asking respondents to report details about their own political expression on social media. While this approach may help reduce the likelihood of respondents to under-report or over-report in an attempt to provide what they believe is “the correct” answer to a somewhat sensitive question, it is not without its own limitations. Chiefly, it relies upon the survey respondents to serve as accurate observers of their friends’ political expression on social media, and this of course entails some bias. Nonetheless, given the dearth of survey research on political attitudes and participation by members of the military, and given the untapped arena of how such attitudes play out on social media, this sample of convenience is sufficient to draw some initial conclusions about the be-

havior and attitudes of members of the military at the intersection of politics and social media.

From December 1 to 18, 2015, and again from January 14 to 21, 2016, this Internet-based survey (appendix A) was administered to military officers enrolled in the five main colleges within NDU: the National War College, the Dwight D. Eisenhower School for National Security and Resource Strategy, the College of International Security Affairs (CISA), the Information Resources Management College, and the Joint Forces Staff College (JFSC). The majority of officers surveyed across NDU were students attending senior service college, although officers enrolled in CISA and JFSC were not exclusively senior service college students. Students attending CISA also included a cohort at Fort Bragg enrolled in the Joint Special Operations Master of Arts Program, while officers surveyed in JFSC included those enrolled in both the Joint Advanced Warfighting School and the Joint and Combined Warfighting School. From December 8 to 18, 2015, the same survey was administered to sophomore Cadets at West Point enrolled in the core course, Introduction to American Politics. All Cadets are required to take Introduction to American Politics while at West Point, usually during their sophomore year, and therefore this population represents roughly half of the class of 2018. Additional information on response rates and sample demographics can be found in appendix B to this study.

Findings



Findings from the *Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey* are grouped into four main sections. The first section reviews the party identification and political ideology of the survey's respondents and compares those findings against surveys of the officer corps over the past 30 years. While the partisan and ideological make-up of the officer corps is not the primary focus of this study, both factors denote significant differences in the military's nature and extent of political expression through social media. This paper's analysis must begin there.

The next section details the extent of social media usage by respondents, noting the significant impact that age or generational cohort has on social media use, frequency of access, and friend groups, and the extent to which politics intersects with social media. Following that, the subsequent section examines the nature and extent of political discussions on social media. Analysis here centers on relative comparisons among the levels and types of political activity undertaken by non-military, active duty, and retired military social media friends. The fourth and final section of findings begins by assessing the degree of alignment between the political views of respondents and their social media friends. It then explores to what degree respondents are made uncomfortable by their friends' political posts and whether or not they sever social media ties with those friends. Finally, this section closes with a look at political behavior on social media that is considered at odds with the military's apolitical, nonpartisan ethic. Throughout all of this, the nuanced role that party identification and political ideology play will be closely studied.

Party Identification and Ideology

Party affiliation and political ideology are two currents that run through this entire paper. While not the study's central focus, both factors have tended to illuminate differences in more substantive matters in civil-military relations.⁵⁴ It only follows that party identification and ideology may also suggest different attitudes about political participation and expression within the military and varying levels of participation across social media.

Table 1 summarizes the party identification of West Point Cadets and NDU students along both a seven-point and three-point scale. Overall, 54 percent of those surveyed identified themselves as Republicans, compared to 24 percent who identified as Democrats and 14 percent as Independents. Despite the age difference, the results for West Point Cadets and NDU students are fairly similar, although West Point Cadets were slightly more likely to affiliate with the Democratic Party, while NDU students were somewhat more apt to identify as Independents.⁵⁵ The seven-point scale is also useful in identifying strength of partisanship. Only 18 percent of respondents are considered strong partisans, the most of whom are Republicans, while the vast majority of those surveyed are weak partisans.

The strong tendency of the officer corps to identify with the Republican Party has been well-documented since the advent of the all-volunteer force.⁵⁶ Table 2 shows a comparison between the party identification of respondents in this study and findings from past surveys of comparable military elite samples going back to 1988.⁵⁷ First, while this study confirms that a majority of military elites continue to identify as Republicans

Table 1. Party Identification of Military Elites

	Party Identification percent checking each option							
	Strong Democrat	Weak Democrat	Lean Democrat	Independent	Lean Republican	Weak Republican	Strong Republican	Other
TOTAL (n = 521)	3.84	5.37	14.59	14.40	26.30	14.01	13.82	7.68
West Point Cadets	3.63	6.93	17.16	10.89	26.07	14.19	15.18	5.94
NDU Students	4.19	2.79	10.70	19.53	26.51	13.95	12.09	10.23
O4s	6.45	0.00	12.90	19.35	29.03	12.90	9.68	9.68
O5s	3.87	3.87	9.68	20.65	26.45	15.48	10.97	9.03
O6s	3.57	0.00	14.29	14.29	25.00	7.14	21.43	14.29
	Democrat			Independent	Republican			Other
TOTAL (n = 521)	23.88			14.40	54.13			7.38
West Point Cadets	27.72			10.89	55.45			5.94
NDU Students	17.67			19.53	52.56			9.57
O4s	19.35			19.35	51.61			9.68
O5s	17.42			20.65	52.90			9.03
O6s	17.86			14.29	53.57			14.29

Source: Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015-2016.

To create a 3-point party identification scale, Independent “leaners” are counted as Democrats or Republicans.

today, NDU students questioned in this study were anywhere from 6 to 12 percentage points less likely to affiliate with the Republican Party than those of equal rank queried in surveys done over the past 30 years. This observation should not be overlooked since, with the exception of periodic *Military Times* surveys, this survey might be the first since the late 1980s to find that less than 60 percent of military elites self-identify with the Republican Party.⁵⁸ Second, while rates of affiliation with the Republican Party have remained relatively the same among West Point Cadets over the past 12 years, a growing trend may be emerging where a larger proportion seem to be self-identifying as Democrats, evident by just 9 percent who indicated they were Democrats in 1998-1999, compared to 28 percent today. This trend is mirrored among NDU students. About 19 percent of NDU students identified as Democrats today, compared to just 5 to 7 percent who did so in the 1980s and 1990s.

It is unclear if these changes in party affiliation are the result of partisan relabeling. Past research has found partisanship to be highly durable over time,

and while some people’s attitudes change over their lifetime, other research has found little-to-no evidence of officers changing their affiliation after joining the military.⁵⁹ A possible explanation is that a cohort effect is in play here, where a slightly greater proportion of Democrats have joined the military over the past 20 years and are continuing to join. Although a majority of the officer corps will still likely identify with the Republican Party in the years to come, it may no longer be at the record rates that characterized the past three decades.

Party identification and ideology, while often highly correlated, are two different things. Ideologies are loose belief systems, often abstract, while parties can be thought of as coalitions that form in order to win elections and achieve policy objectives.⁶⁰ Nearly 60 years ago, Huntington wrote that the military ethic, shaped by its “functional imperative,” could be characterized as realist and conservative in nature, and in doing so, he laid the groundwork for what has become nearly an unassailable belief over time: that military elites are ideologically political conservatives as well.⁶¹ As with the data presented

Table 2. Party Identification of Military Elites Then and Now: A Comparison to Past Surveys

	Party Identification Among Select Groups of Military Elites, 1988–2016 percent checking each option			
	Democrats	Independents	Republicans	Other/No Preference
Triangle Institute for Security Studies Survey, 1998–1999 West Point Cadets (n = 272)	8.82	20.22	48.53	22.43
West Point Cadet Pre-Election Survey, 2004 (n = 871)	12.00	27.00	61.00	
Civil-Military Relations in a Time of War Survey, 2009 Army O1s/O2s (n = 646)	23.68	14.86	52.94	8.51
Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015–2016 West Point Cadets (n=307)	27.72	10.89	55.45	5.94
Foreign Policy Leadership Project, 1988, NWC Students (n = 91)	6.59	26.37	60.44	6.59
Foreign Policy Leadership Project 1992, NWC Students (n = 103)	4.85	22.33	66.02	6.80
Triangle Institute for Security Studies Survey, 1998–1999 NWC and ICAF Students (n = 109)	6.42	18.34	63.30	11.93
Civil-Military Relations in a Time of War Survey, 2009 Army O5 & O6s (n = 1,216)	13.16	16.20	65.38	5.02
Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015–2016 NWC and ES Students (n = 148)	18.92	19.59	54.05	7.43

TISS Survey question, “Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?”

2004 Cadet Pre-Election Survey question, “Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?”

Civil-Military Relations in a Time of War Survey and Politics and Social Media question, “Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a strong Democrat, a not very strong Democrat, an Independent who leans Democrat, an Independent, an Independent who leans Republican, a not very strong Republican, a strong Republican, or what?”

Independent “leaners” in the Civil-Military Relations in a Time of War survey and Politics, Military, and Social Media survey are counted as Democrats or Republicans.

on party identification over time, empirical evidence has largely backed up that assumption, perhaps until now.

The political ideology of those surveyed in this study is summarized in table 3. While 47 percent of those surveyed self-identified as some degree of conservative, as shown in the seven-point scale, more respondents identified as moderates than any other category. Few have extreme ideological views, evident by the 75 percent of respondents clustered in the middle of the seven-point scale, identifying as moderate, somewhat liberal, or somewhat conservative. As with party affiliation, responses by West Point Cadets and NDU students are quite similar, although a slightly larger proportion of West Point Cadets self-identified as liberal than NDU students.

Just as levels of party affiliation appear to be undergoing a slight change within the officer corps, political ideology is also experiencing a noticeable shift. Table 4 provides a comparison of respondents’ ideology against ideology of officers in past surveys. The ideology of both West Point Cadets and NDU students has changed considerably, with the percentage of those self-identifying as moderate or liberal outnumbering those who describe themselves as conservative for perhaps the first time in decades. The most dramatic shift has come in NDU students over time, where 75 percent described themselves as conservative in 1988 compared to only 46 percent today. West Point Cadets have witnessed a similar but less dramatic decline, while the net result has

Table 3. Ideological Self-Identification of Military Elites

Ideological Self-Identification percent checking each option							
	Very Liberal	Liberal	Somewhat Liberal	Moderate	Somewhat Conservative	Conservative	Very Conservative
TOTAL (n = 519)	1.73	6.36	13.49	31.79	19.46	22.16	5.01
West Point Cadets	2.29	7.84	14.71	30.07	17.65	22.22	5.23
NDU Students	0.95	4.29	11.90	33.81	21.90	22.38	4.76
O4s	3.23	12.90	6.45	32.26	25.81	16.13	3.23
O5s	0.66	3.29	12.50	36.18	19.08	23.68	4.61
O6s	0.00	0.00	14.81	22.22	33.33	22.22	7.41
	Liberal		Moderate		Conservative		
TOTAL (n = 519)	21.58		31.79		46.63		
West Point Cadets	24.84		30.07		45.10		
NDU Students	17.14		33.81		49.05		
O4s	22.58		32.26		45.16		
O5s	16.45		36.18		47.37		
O6s	14.81		22.22		62.96		

Source: Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015–2016.

Table 4. Ideological Self-Identification of Military Elites Then and Now: A Comparison to Past Surveys

Ideological Self-Identification Among Select Groups of Military Elites, 1988–2016 percent checking each option			
	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative
Triangle Institute for Security Studies Survey, 1998–1999 West Point Cadets (n = 272)	15.07	21.32	54.41
West Point Cadet Pre-election Survey, 2004 (n = 871)	20.00	19.00	61.00
Civil-Military Relations in a Time of War Survey, 2009 Army O1s and O2s (n = 641)	18.25	29.64	52.11
Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015–2016 West Point Cadets (n = 306)	24.84	30.07	45.10
Foreign Policy Leadership Project 1988, NWC Students (n = 91)	3.30	19.78	76.92
Foreign Policy Leadership Project 1992, NWC Students (n = 103)	3.88	20.39	75.73
Triangle Institute for Security Studies Survey, 1998–1999 NWC and ICAF Students (n = 109)	5.50	33.94	60.55
Civil-Military Relations in a Time of War Survey, 2009 Army O5s & O6s (n = 1,215)	10.04	23.13	66.83
Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015–2016 NWC and ES Students (n = 145)	17.93	35.86	46.21

FPLP and TISS Survey question, “How would you describe your views on political matters? Far left, Very liberal, Somewhat liberal, Moderate, Somewhat conservative, Very conservative, Far right.”

Civil-Military Relations in a Time of War Survey and Politics and Social Media question, “Here is a 7-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from very liberal to very conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale? Very liberal, Liberal, Somewhat liberal, Moderate, Somewhat Conservative, Conservative, or Very Conservative?”

2004 Cadet Pre-election Survey question, “In terms of politics and political beliefs, where would you place yourself? Extremely liberal, Liberal, Slightly Liberal, Moderate, Slightly Conservative, Conservative, or Extremely Conservative?”

roughly the same percentage of West Point Cadets and NDU students identifying as conservative today.

While the percentage of those self-identifying as conservatives has dropped, there has been an ensuing increase in the percentage of moderates and liberals. Roughly a quarter of West Point Cadets identify as liberal, up from 15 percent in the late 1990s, and 30 percent now identify as moderate, an increase in 9 percentage points over the same timeframe. NDU students also are more apt to identify as liberal or moderate today than they were in the late 1980s, with 18 percent now identifying as liberal compared to just 3 percent in 1988 and 36 percent identifying as moderate today, up from 20 percent in 1988.

What does this all mean? First, while more research is necessary, the political make-up of military elites may be changing for the first time in decades, and that carries important implications that are beyond just the interest of political scientists. As past studies have shown, both party affiliation and ideology trigger differences in other, more substantive areas of civil-military relations. It is also significant because this is one of the first surveys in many years to suggest military elites are not all overwhelmingly conservative Republicans. To be sure, clear majorities of military elites still are conservative Republicans, but the changes occurring over time indicate perhaps a more politically diverse group is joining the military than in years past. Alternatively, it could be that military elites today are less likely to identify as Republicans due to the fractious nature of the 2016 Republican presidential nomination contest or changing dynamics within the Republican Party.⁶² More immediately, these findings also set the stage for the remainder of this study's observations and reaffirm the centrality that party affiliation and ideology have in shaping our understanding of political behavior on social media.

Social Media Usage and Characteristics

Findings from the *Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey* depict an officer corps actively engaged in social media networking sites, with age or generational cohort

signaling predicted, but significant differences in the extent to which respondents use social media. As table 5 shows, 71 percent of those surveyed responded that they have multiple social media accounts and only 9 percent reported they have none at all. More officers reported having a Facebook account than any other type of social media account measured (87 percent), although Facebook use was higher among West Point Cadets (94 percent) than among NDU students (77 percent). Age and rank have other expected impacts on social media use. For example, a significant disparity exists between West Point Cadets and NDU students' likelihood of having LinkedIn accounts, with only 15 percent of West Point Cadets having this account compared to 58 percent of NDU students and 82 percent of officers in the grade of O6 specifically. This is not surprising, as LinkedIn is a professionally-g geared social media networking site, used predominantly by employed college graduates, and it may be the only social media site where the proportion of 50- to 64-year-old users is higher than the proportion of 18- to 24-year-old users nationwide.⁶³ Likewise, West Point Cadets were more likely to report having Twitter and YouTube accounts than their senior officer counterparts. With the exception of LinkedIn, we would expect West Point Cadets to be more prolific in their social media use and more diverse in the variety of accounts they have than more senior officers because of their young age or generational cohort, and findings from this survey confirm that.⁶⁴

Differences in social media use based on party affiliation and ideology are not statistically significant. It should be noted, however, that the Pew Research Center's 2012 study, "Social Media and Political Engagement," did find statistically significant differences in the use of social networking sites and Twitter, with Democrats reporting higher rates of use than Republicans and liberals higher rates than conservatives.⁶⁵ Future research involving a larger, nonrandom sample of military officers may find differences in social media usage based on partisanship and ideology that are more meaningful.

Table 5. Social Media Use by Military Elites

Military Elites with Social Media Networking Accounts percent checking each option							
	Facebook	Twitter	LinkedIn	Google+	YouTube	No Social Media Accounts	Multiple Social Media Accounts
TOTAL (n = 526)	86.88	31.18	33.27	26.05	44.30	9.32	70.72
West Point Cadets	93.81***	36.81***	15.31***	27.36	56.68***	4.56***	73.62
NDU Students	76.85***	23.15***	58.33***	23.15	27.31***	16.20***	66.20
O4s	87.10	25.81	58.06	29.03	48.39	12.90	77.42
O5s	74.36	23.72	53.85	23.08	24.36	17.95	62.18
O6s	78.57	17.86	82.14	17.86	21.43	10.71	75.00
Democrats	90.32	32.26	26.61	30.65	58.06	7.26	75.00
Independents	85.33	18.67	40.00	25.33	40.00	14.67	66.67
Republicans	86.52	34.75	35.11	24.47	39.36	8.16	71.28
Liberals	91.07	26.79	28.57	30.36	58.04	8.93	73.21
Moderates	87.27	31.52	35.15	26.06	48.48	8.48	75.76
Conservatives	85.54	33.06	34.30	24.38	35.54	9.50	66.5

Source: Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015-2016.

*** Difference between West Point Cadets and NDU students significant at $p < .001$ in all categories except Google+ and Multiple Social Media Accounts.

Table 6. Frequency of Social Media Usage by Military Elites

How Often Military Elites Access Their Social Media Accounts percent checking each option						
	Several Times a Day	About Once a Day	A Few Days a Week	Every Few Weeks	Less Often	I'm Not Sure
TOTAL (n = 476)	55.04	24.16	13.45	4.41	2.73	0.21
West Point Cadets	70.21***	20.55*	7.53***	1.03***	0.34***	0.34***
NDU Students	31.49***	29.28*	23.20***	9.39***	6.63***	0.00***
O4s	51.85	18.52	22.22	3.70	3.70	0.00
O5s	29.69	31.25	21.88	8.59	8.59	0.00
O6s	20.00	28.00	32.00	20.00	0.00	0.00
Democrats	64.35*	20.87	11.30	1.74*	0.87	0.87
Independents	46.88*	29.69	14.06	7.81*	1.56	0.00
Republicans	55.43	21.71	13.95	5.04	3.88	0.00
Liberals	60.78	25.49	11.76	0.98*	0.98	0.00
Moderates	54.30	23.84	13.25	6.62*	1.99	0.00
Conservatives	53.21	22.94	14.68	4.59	4.59	0.00

Source: Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015-2016.

*** Difference between West Point Cadets and NDU students significant at $p < .001$ in all categories except "About Once a Day," which is significant at $p < .05$

* Difference in proportions test statistically significant at $p < .05$: between Democrats and Independents for "Several Times a Day" and "Every Few Weeks;" and between liberals and moderates for "Every Few Weeks."

The frequency of social media use among respondents is also largely a function of age or generation. As table 6 shows, while 55 percent of respondents indicated they check their social media accounts several times a day, 70 percent of West Point Cadets reported doing so, compared to just 31 percent of NDU students. While an argument could be made that college students simply have more time on their hands compared to more senior military officers at work all day, West Point Cadets, with their famously packed schedules, are also not your typical college students. Moreover, age or the proxy variable of rank shows further variation in frequency of social media access. For example, 52 percent of O4s (majors and lieutenant commanders) reported checking their social media accounts multiple times a day compared to 30 percent of O5s (lieutenant colonels and commanders) and 20 percent of O6s (colonels and captains). Party affiliation also highlights a slight difference in the frequency of social media use, with 64 percent of Democrats accessing their accounts multiple times a day compared to 47 percent of Independents. However, the absence of any discernible difference in the frequency of social media access between Democrats and Republicans suggests that party affiliation is not a significant factor in the frequency of social media access, at least in this sample. Ultimately, age seems to explain most of the variance in social media usage among military elites.

The impact of party affiliation is a bit more evident when examining to what degree military officers enjoy talking about politics and to what extent they get news about politics from social media. As depicted in table 7, 63 percent of respondents indicated they enjoy talking about government and politics with friends and family, a figure that did not vary substantially based on rank or political ideology. However, subtle differences in party affiliation and partisan strength are evident. A higher proportion of Republican respondents (66 percent) reported enjoying talking about politics compared to Independents (53 percent), but the proportions of Republicans and Democrats were virtually indistinguishable. What is more evident

Table 7. Military Elites' Interest in Talking About Politics

percent checking "a lot" or "some"	
How much do you enjoy talking about government and politics with friends and family?	
TOTAL (n = 520)	63.46
West Point Cadets	65.25
NDU Students	60.85
O4s	66.67
O5s	60.78
O6s	57.14
Democrats	64.46
Independents	53.33*
Republicans	66.43*
Strong Partisans ¹	74.73*
Weak Partisans ²	63.23*
Liberals	62.39
Moderates	60.00
Conservatives	67.08

Source: Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015–2016.

¹Strong Partisans are respondents who self-identified as Strong Democrats or Strong Republicans.

²Weak Partisans are respondents who self-identified as Weak Democrats, Independents Who Lean Democrat, Independents Who Lean Republican, or Weak Republicans.

* Difference of proportions test statistically significant at $p < .05$: between Republicans and Independents and between Strong Partisans and Weak Partisans.

than partisan identification, however, is the impact of partisan strength, as a larger proportion of strong partisans (75 percent) indicated they enjoyed talking about politics than weak partisans (63 percent). This latter finding is consistent with past research that has shown strong partisans to have a greater interest and involvement in politics, better knowledge about politics, and higher voter turnout levels than weak partisans and pure Independents.⁶⁶

Respondents' degree of interest in politics is an important factor in this study, as much of the analysis of the military's political participation in social media is based on respondents' observations of their military friends' political activity on social media sites. Respondents who are generally interested in politics are likely to be cognizant of their friends' political behavior, as opposed to those who might have an aversion to politics altogether. Another

er gauge of political awareness important to this study is whether or not respondents consume news about politics through their social media networking sites, as portrayed in table 8. Notably, 68 percent of those surveyed indicated they get some news from Facebook, by far the top social media vote-getter among respondents.

As with overall social media use, the impact of age or generational cohort is again evident, with 80 percent of West Point Cadets indicating they get some of their political news from Facebook compared to only 49 percent of NDU students.⁶⁷ This age or generational impact is expected and consistent with past research.

For example, a 2014 Pew Research Center study found that 61 percent of Millennials (those aged 18 to 33 in 2014) reported consuming political news on Facebook, compared to 51 percent of Generation Xers (those aged 34 to 49 in 2014) and only 39 percent of Baby Boomers (those aged 50 to 68 in 2014).⁶⁸ That West Point Cadets had a higher rate than Millennials surveyed in the Pew study is not surprising. First, the West Point Cadets are probably better educated than the Pew sample, as the latter would have included both college graduates and noncollege graduates, and college students and graduates are more apt to consume political news in the first

Table 8. Military Elites Who Use Social Media as a News Source

Military Elites Who Get News from Their Social Media Networking Accounts percent checking each option					
	Facebook	Twitter	LinkedIn	Google+	YouTube
TOTAL	67.99	16.14	3.14	4.19	19.08
West Point Cadets	79.86***	18.09	1.37**	3.41	27.30***
NDU Students	49.45***	13.26	6.08**	5.52	6.08***
O4s	51.85	11.11	0.00	7.41	7.41
O5s	53.49	15.62	7.03	3.91	5.47
O6s	28.00	4.00	8.00	12.00	8.00
Democrats	76.52*	17.39	3.48	5.22	26.96*
Independents	59.38*	7.81*	0.00	4.69	12.50*
Republicans	67.95	18.15*	3.47	3.09	16.22*
Strong Partisans	74.42	22.09	3.49	2.33	18.60
Weak Partisans	69.44	16.67	3.47	4.17	19.79
Liberals	79.41*	10.78	1.96	6.86	25.49*
Moderates	66.45*	17.22	2.65	3.31	19.21
Conservatives	64.38*	17.81	4.11	3.20	15.98*
Enjoy Talking Politics	69.67	18.06	3.68	4.01	20.07
Dislike Talking Politics	64.74	12.72	2.31	4.05	17.92
(n)	478	477	477	477	477
Pew American Trends Panel	48	9	3	6	14
Millennials (Ages 18–33)	61	14	2	7	23
Generation X (Ages 34–49)	51	9	3	6	11
(n)	2,901	2,901	2,901	2,901	2,901

Sources: Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015–2016 and Pew Research Center’s American Trends Panel (Wave 1), 2014.

*** Difference of proportions test between West Point Cadets and NDU Students for getting news from Facebook and YouTube statistically significant at $p < .001$.

** Difference of proportions test between West Point Cadets and NDU Students for getting news from LinkedIn statistically significant at $p < .01$.

* Difference of proportions test statistically significant at $p < .05$: for getting news from Facebook between liberals and conservatives, between liberals and moderates, and between Democrats and Independents; for getting news from Twitter between Independents and Republicans; for getting news from YouTube between Democrats and Republicans, between Democrats and Independents, and between liberals and conservatives.

place. But more importantly, age once again is a critical factor, as the Millennial cohort included individuals in their early 30s, while everyone in the West Point sample was between 18 and 24 years old. Younger digital natives are more active and more comfortable on social media than older digital natives, and certainly more so than digital immigrants.⁶⁹

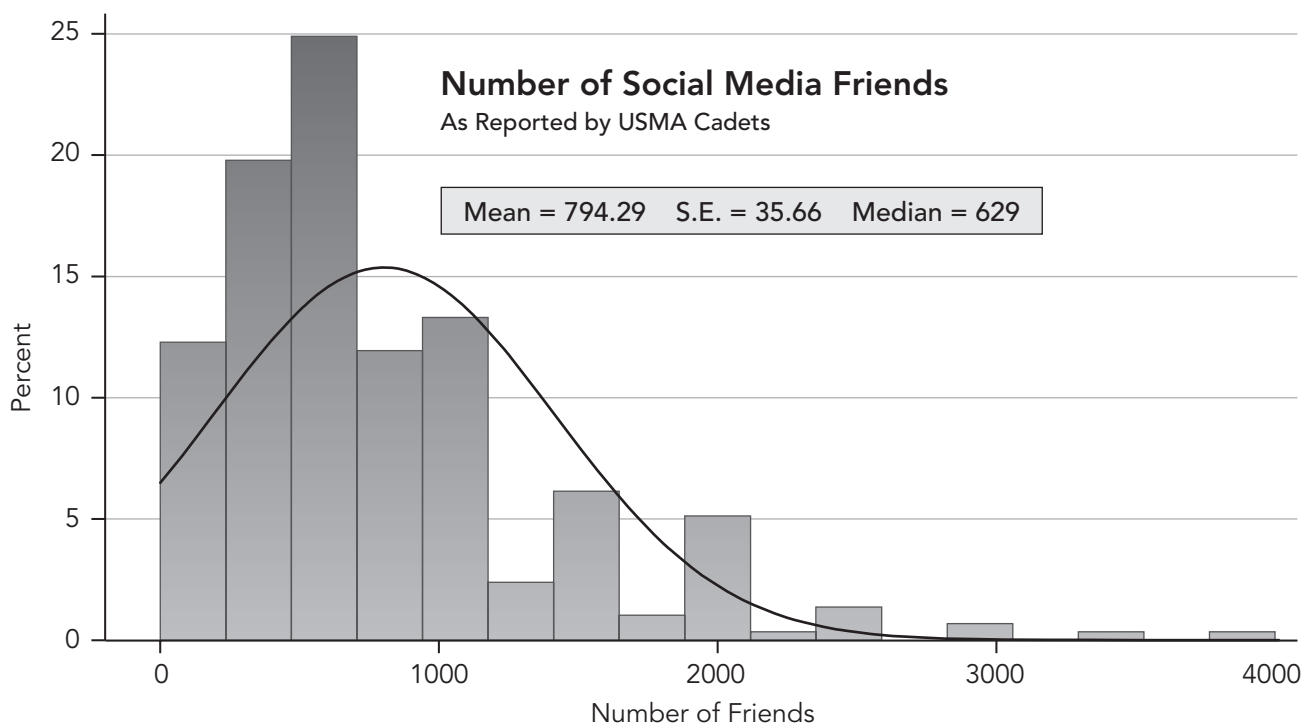
Although age or generation is the most noteworthy effect here, political ideology and partisan identification indicate slightly different patterns in news consumption through social media. A greater proportion of liberals (79 percent) reported getting political news through Facebook than both moderates (66 percent) and conservatives (64 percent), just as a greater proportion of liberals (25 percent) reported getting news from YouTube than conservatives (16 percent) did. Likewise, a higher percentage of Democrats (77 percent) reported consuming news through Facebook

than Independents (59 percent). Of note, there were no discernible differences in political news consumption on social media between those who naturally enjoy talking about politics with their friends and family and those who do not. Nor was strength of partisanship a factor. Again, of the variables measured in this study, age or generational cohort has the strongest association with social media use, in terms of variety of accounts, frequency of access, and propensity to consume news about politics through such sites.

The size and composition of respondents' social media networks also highlight significant differences between the samples of West Point Cadets and NDU students. Figures 1a and 1b present histograms of social media friend networks as reported by West Point Cadets and NDU students, respectively. The average number of friends reported by West Point Cadets was 794 (standard error = 35.66, median = 629) compared

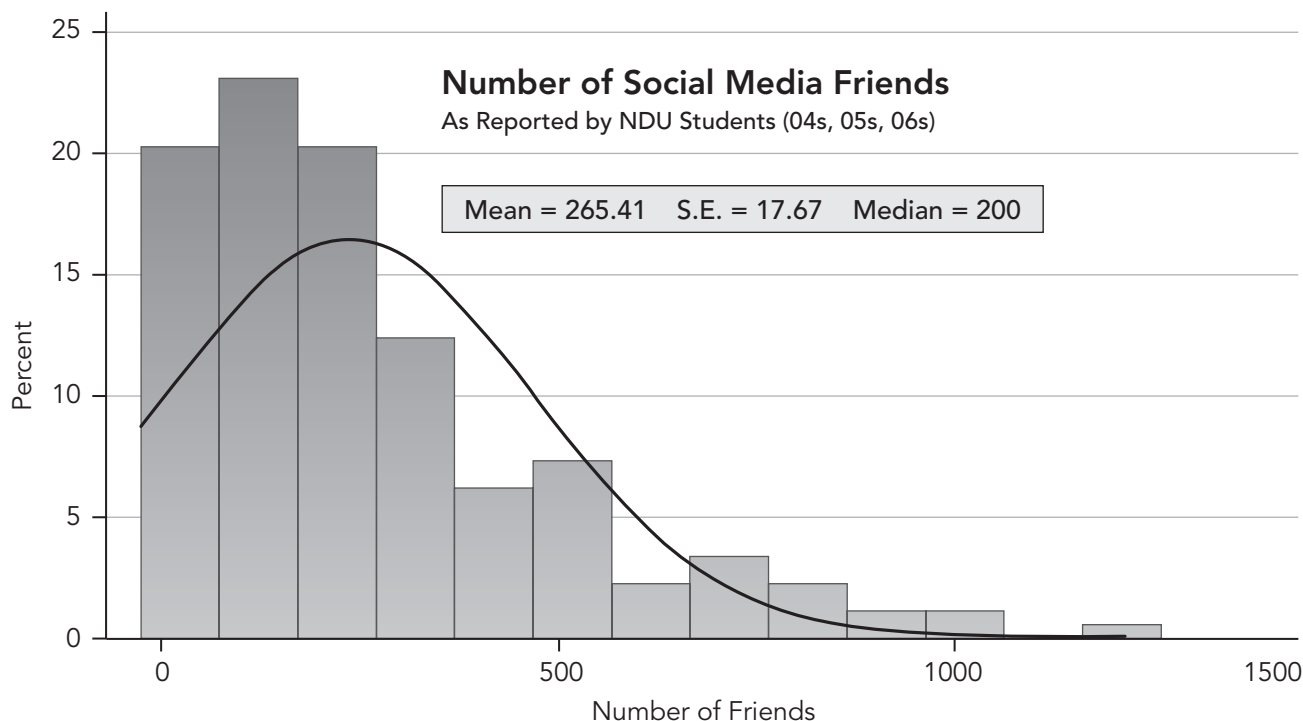
Figure 1. Number of Social Media Friends:
A Comparison Between West Point Cadets and NDU Students

Figure 1a. Number of West Point Cadets' Social Media Friends



Source: Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015-2016.

Figure 1b. Number of NDU Students' Social Media Friends



Source: Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015-2016.

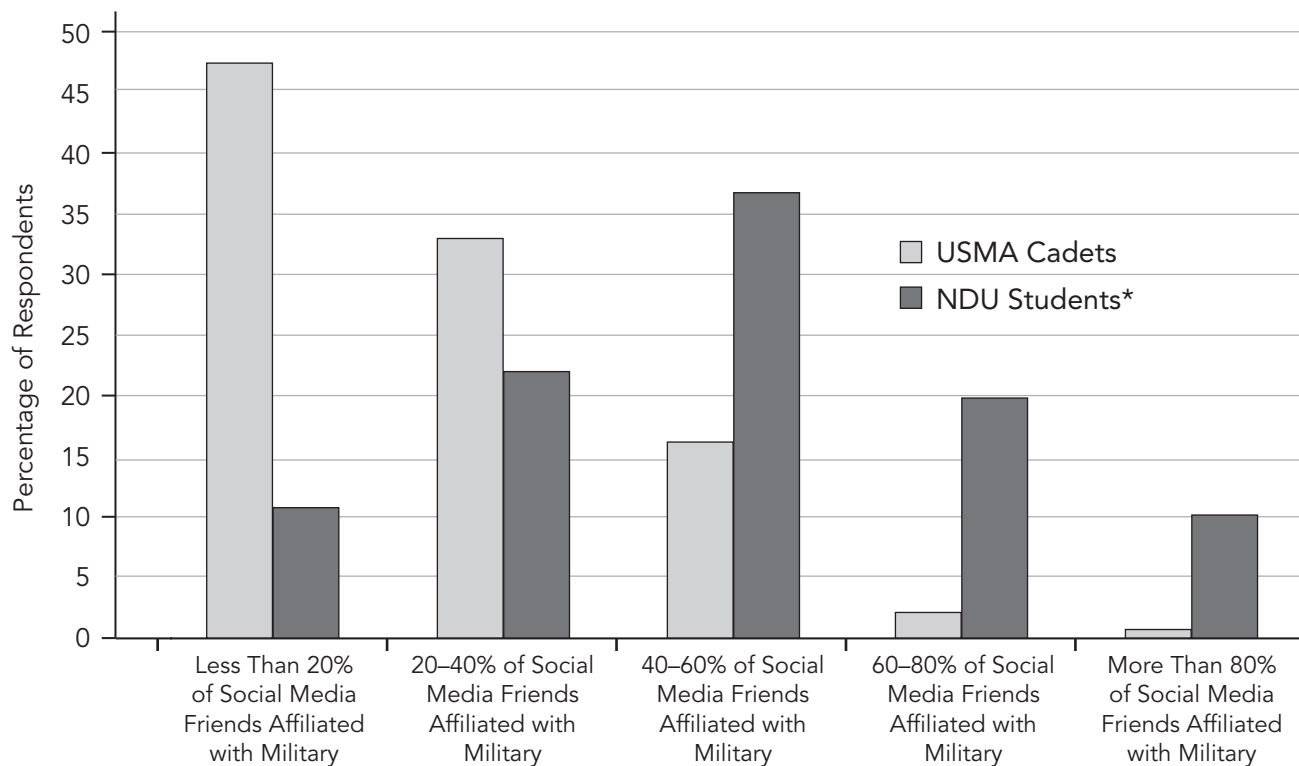
to NDU students' average of 265 friends (standard error = 17.65, median = 200).⁷⁰ The West Point Cadet histogram displays much more variance, with a higher standard error, compared to the NDU student histogram, which has a more narrow distribution and smaller standard error. Nonetheless, the difference between the two samples is significant and striking.⁷¹ West Point Cadets have nearly three times as many friends on social media than senior officers who are twice the Cadets' age.

At the outset, the difference in the sizes of friend networks seems remarkable, if not counterintuitive, given the relative young age of West Point Cadets compared to their more senior officer counterparts. Yet it is probable that West Point Cadets have been active on social media accounts longer than their elders, and the findings in this *Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey* are not dissimilar from past Pew studies. According to a 2013 Pew Research Center study, the average number of friends for adult Facebook users was

338, and the median was 200—statistics similar to those of NDU students.⁷² Yet the median number of friends of 18- to 29-year-olds in the Pew study was 300, and nearly one-third of that age group had more than 500 friends—far more comparable to the large social media networks reported by West Point Cadets.

While the West Point Cadets' networks of social media friends are far larger than the NDU students' networks, the make-up of these friend networks also varies considerably. Figure 2 shows the proportion of respondents' social media friends who are affiliated with the military (active duty or retired) compared to those who are civilian or have no military affiliation. Again, the differences between West Point Cadets and NDU students are striking, but not unexpected. NDU students' social media friends exhibit a normal distribution curve, with the largest proportion of respondents indicating that 40-60 percent of their social media friends had some affiliation with the military. In contrast, the West Point Cadet curve is heavily skewed, with nearly half of Cadets reporting

Figure 2. Percentage of Military Elites' Social Media Friends Who Are Also Affiliated with the Military



Percentage of Respondents' Social Media Friends Affiliated with the Military

Source: Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015-2016.

* NDU Students include O4s, O5s, and O6s.

that less than 20 percent of their social media friends were affiliated with the military. While West Point Cadets have far larger social media friend networks than NDU students, Cadets' friend groups were probably formed in high school and reflect limited exposure to others in the military at this stage in their careers. Their friends affiliated with the military are probably other West Point Cadets or friends from high school who enlisted in the military, joined the Reserve Officer Training Corps, or attended a sister service academy.⁷³

Nature and Extent of Political Expression on Social Media by Servicemembers

Much of this study's findings regarding political expression on social media by members of the military relies upon respondents' observations of their social media

friends' behavior. To this end, respondents were first asked whether or not their military friends, either active duty or retired, often talk about politics on social media networking sites. Overall, 45 percent of respondents responded affirmatively, but this figure varied significantly, with 51 percent of West Point Cadets indicating that their military friends talk politics compared to just 35 percent of NDU students (see table 9). This finding offers some initial evidence in support of the proposition that the nonpartisan ethic is largely a function of professionalism over time. Officers in the grade of O5 or O6 have made the military a career and are more likely to reflect institutionalized norms and values of the profession, whereas those in a pre-commissioning status have not been socialized to the profession to the same extent and may feel less bound to the constraints associated with the profession.

Still, as the data in table 9 shows, this idea of socialization to the profession is not perfectly linear. Fifty-six percent of officers in the grade of O4 (majors and lieutenant commanders) indicated their military friends on social media often talk about politics—a figure closer to that of West Point Cadets than to O5s and O6s. Admittedly, O4s form a small segment of the overall sample ($n = 31$), but it is somewhat surprising that their response more closely mirrors that of Cadets nearly 15 years their junior as opposed to O5s who are only a couple years older than they are. It could be that O4s have a more diverse set of military friends than either their more junior or more senior counterparts. At this point in their careers with over 10 years of service, most O4s have probably made the decision to stay in the military for a full 20-year career, yet it is likely a good number of their mil-

itary-affiliated friends on social media are more junior. Therefore, O4s may have a more diverse group of military friends on social media, whereas the more junior or senior cohorts may more closely reflect their peer group.

Two other variables elicited statistically significant responses that are worth examining a bit further. First, a significant difference of 12 percentage points exists between liberals and conservatives with respect to having friends who often talk about politics on social media. There are at least two ways to interpret this. First, liberal officers may be more likely than conservatives to indicate their friends often talk about politics, because their friends are mostly liberal, and liberal members of the military may be more outspoken about politics than their conservative peers. Conversely, a second explanation is liberal officers may report their friends talk about politics a lot because their friends share dissimilar political views, and liberal officers are more conscious of political dialogue since they are a minority in the officer corps. It is unclear at this point, but this theme will be revisited in later sections, when the role ideology and partisan identification play in social media discourse is more apparent.

A second variable here is worth highlighting. As table 9 highlights, respondents who enjoy talking about politics were more likely to indicate their military-affiliated social media friends also often talk about politics. Several things could explain this. It could be that people who enjoy talking about politics tend to also have friends who also like to talk about politics, just as those who dislike talking about politics tend to associate with like-minded people. Alternatively, even if people who enjoy talking about politics have both friends who actively talk about politics and those who do not, they may be more sensitized to and cognizant of discussions of politics compared to those who have a general dislike of politics.

While the data in table 9 is useful in providing a simple snapshot of political activity by members of the military on social media, a relative comparison is needed to make better sense of the magnitude of this

Table 9. Members of the Military Talking About Politics on Social Media

percent checking “strongly agree” or “agree”	
My military friends (both active duty and retired) often talk about politics on social media networking sites.	
TOTAL ($n = 520$)	44.54
West Point Cadets	50.85***
NDU Students	35.00***
O4s	55.56
O5s	35.43
O6s	12.00
Democrats	48.25
Independents	37.50
Republicans	43.63
Liberals	53.47*
Moderates	45.03
Conservatives	41.10*
Enjoy Talking Politics	49.16**
Dislike Talking Politics	36.05**

Source: Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015–2016.

*** Difference of proportions test between West Point Cadets and NDU Students statistically significant at $p < .001$.

** Difference of proportions test statistically significant at $p < .01$: between those who enjoy talking about politics and those who do not.

* Difference of proportions test between liberals and conservatives statistically significant at $p < .05$.

data. For example, do respondents' military friends talk about politics more or less than their civilian friends? And, within the category of military friends, are active duty members more or less politically active than retired military? The results of these questions are displayed in tables 10 and 11.

A few caveats are in order, as these relative comparisons have a number of limitations. First, just as the overall survey sample is not intended to be representative of the entire military or officer corps, respondents' civilian friends are by no means representative of the broader civilian populace. Nonetheless, having respondents contrast the political activity of their military and civilian friends provides a baseline comparison that is useful, absent any results from large-scale, random-sample inquiries. Second, while differences between West Point Cadets and NDU students have characterized much of the preceding analysis, comparisons between the two subsamples are less useful in this next section due to the low confidence in the data reported by West Point Ca-

dets. While West Point Cadets have a sufficient sample of military friends on social media to provide valuable insights throughout this study, it is less likely they are able to draw meaningful comparisons between active duty and retired military, given the likely composition of their social media friend network. Many West Point Cadets may have no retired military friends whatsoever, except those with family members who might have served careers in the military. Thus, while data from West Point Cadets is nonetheless reported in tables 9 and 10, the focus of this analysis centers on NDU students, who arguably have a more diverse circle of military friends from which to draw comparisons.

As table 10 outlines, 46 percent of respondents indicated that their nonmilitary friends talk about politics on social media more often than their military friends, while 24 percent responded that their military friends talk about politics more. Responses by West Point Cadets and NDU students were fairly similar, although the more senior the NDU students were, the more likely

Table 10. Most Active Friends Discussing Politics on Social Media

Who Is Most Active in Discussing Politics on Social Media? Your Military or Nonmilitary Friends? percent checking each option				
	My Nonmilitary Friends Talk About Politics More	My Nonmilitary Friends Talk About Politics As Much as My Military Friends Do	My Military Friends Talk About Politics More	I'm Not Sure
TOTAL (n = 475)	45.68	24.42	20.63	9.26
West Point Cadets	43.30	25.43	24.40*	6.87*
NDU Students	49.72	22.65	14.92*	12.71*
O4s	37.04	22.22	33.33	7.41
O5s	47.66	26.56	13.28	12.50
O6s	72.00	4.00	4.00	20.00
Democrats	41.74	27.83	24.35	6.09
Independents	42.19	28.12	12.50	17.19
Republicans	48.25	22.57	20.23	8.95
Liberals	41.18	31.37	21.57	5.88
Moderates	44.37	22.52	23.84	9.27
Conservatives	48.39	23.04	18.43	10.14

Source: Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015-2016.

* Difference of proportions test statistically significant at $p < .05$: between West Point Cadets and NDU Students for "my military friends talk about politics more" and "I'm not sure."

Table 11. Most Active Friends Discussing Politics on Social Media

	Who Is Most Active in Discussing Politics on Social Media? Your Active Duty or Retired Military Friends? percent checking each option			
	My Active Duty Friends Talk About Politics More	My Active Duty Friends Talk About Politics as Much as My Retired Military Friends Do	My Retired Military Friends Talk About Politics More	I'm Not Sure
TOTAL (n = 463)	18.14	10.80	33.05	38.01
West Point Cadets	26.33***	9.25	19.22***	45.20***
NDU Students	5.59***	12.85	54.75***	26.82***
O4s	7.41	25.93	44.44	22.22
O5s	5.56	11.11	57.94	25.40
O6s	4.00	8.00	48.00	40.00
Democrats (NDU only)	9.38	21.88	46.88	21.88
Independents (NDU only)	6.06	6.06	63.64	24.24
Republicans (NDU only)	5.26	13.68	51.58	29.47
Liberals (NDU only)	3.57	17.86	57.14	21.43
Moderates (NDU only)	6.35	17.46	46.03	30.16
Conservatives (NDU only)	5.95	8.33	59.52	26.19

Source: Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015–2016.

*** Difference of proportions test between West Point Cadets and NDU Students statistically significant at $p < .001$ in all categories except, “my active duty friends talk about politics as much as my retired military friends do.”

they were to report their nonmilitary friends talk about politics more. Of note, party affiliation and ideology elicited no statistically significant differences.

Table 11 displays the comparison of political expression on social media by active duty and retired military. As table 11 shows, 55 percent of NDU students indicated their retired friends talk about politics more than their active duty friends. As mentioned earlier, little stock should be put in the responses of West Point Cadets, given the low likelihood they have a sufficient sample of retired friends on social media. This is confirmed by the high degree of uncertainty in their responses, with 45 percent of West Point Cadets unsure who among their social media friends talks about politics more.

Even NDU students exhibited some ambiguity answering this question, as 27 percent indicated they were not sure who speaks about politics more. There are at least two explanations for this. One reason for this ambiguity may simply be that military respondents

do not pay enough attention to the political chatter by their military friends on social media, so they cannot distinguish who more actively discusses politics. Yet this study has already established that the majority of respondents who have social media accounts access them every day, consume news about politics through social media, and have a general interest in discussing politics, so this explanation does not seem adequate. An alternative explanation is that respondents cannot distinguish who talks about politics more, because the active duty and retired distinction, or at least their political opinions, is blurred even in respondents' minds. This carries larger implications for the norms of non-partisanship and being apolitical, because if military respondents tend to blur the opinions of their active and retired friends, civilians are even more likely to do so. Even if retired military are more politically outspoken than their active duty counterparts, their friends on social media, especially those with little connection

to the military, may see no qualitative difference, concluding simply that the military in general tends to actively talk about politics on social media.

Table 12 looks at the different political activities taken by respondents' military friends, both active duty and retired, on social media. Seven different measures of political participation are listed across the top row, and, for the most part, are arrayed in ascending order of political activism from left to right. For example, reposting or sharing a link to a political story is the most restrained form of political expression listed, while encouraging others to take action on a political issue is the most active form.

Of note, all forms of political activity are allowable according to DoDD 1344.10 and the Defense Department's Public Affairs Guidance for the 2016 election, with the exception of the last category: encouraging others to take action on a political issue, which is expressly forbidden.

Well over three-quarters of respondents indicated their military friends participate in the first four measures of political expression. While the percentage of positive responses from West Point Cadets was higher than NDU students in all four categories, more than 70 percent of NDU students still responded affirmatively, with reposting or sharing political stories and posting

Table 12. Military Friends' Activity on Social Media Networking Sites

	Do Your Military Friends Ever Do the Following on Social Media Networking Sites percent checking "Yes"						
	Repost or share links to political stories	Post links to political stories or articles for others to read	"Like" or promote material related to political issues that others have posted	Post their own thoughts/comments on political issues	"Friend" or follow political figures	Encourage others to vote	Encourage others to take action on political issues
TOTAL	84.42	82.91	77.05	76.00	41.56	32.98	36.71
West Point Cadets	88.01**	88.01***	80.82*	78.42	51.20***	30.34	40.07
NDU Students	78.89**	74.86***	71.67*	72.78	26.11***	36.67	31.28
O4s	88.89	88.46	88.89	81.48	48.15	40.74	46.15
O5s	79.53	74.02	70.87	74.22	25.20	37.01	31.50
O6s	68.00	68.00	60.00	58.33	8.00	32.00	16.00
Democrats	84.35	84.35	78.26	81.58	44.35	35.96	42.61
Independents	79.69	85.94	74.60	68.75	34.92	32.81	36.51
Republicans	86.05	81.32	76.06	74.52	40.70	29.96	34.11
Liberals	88.24	90.10	84.31*	85.15**	46.08	37.25	44.12
Moderates	83.44	81.46	71.33*	70.20**	36.42	30.67	34.67
Conservatives	84.33	81.57	77.98	76.15	43.06	32.87	35.02
(n)	475	474	475	475	474	473	474
Pew 2012 Survey	33	28	38	34	20	35	31
Ages 18–29	36	33	44	42	25	34	36
Ages 30–49	32	28	40	34	20	36	31
(n)	1,209	1,209	1,209	1,209	1,209	1,209	1,209

Sources: Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015–2016 and Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, "Civic Engagement Tracking Survey 2012."

*** Difference of proportions test statistically significant at $p < .001$: for posting links to political stories and friending political figures between West Point Cadets and NDU students.

** Difference of proportions test statistically significant at $p < .01$: for reposting or sharing links to political stories between West Point Cadets and NDU Students; for posting their own thoughts and comments on political issues between liberals and moderates.

* Difference of proportions test statistically significant at $p < .05$: for liking political material that others have posted between West Point Cadets and NDU Students and between liberals and moderates.

links to articles on politics cited as the most commonly performed activities. As table 12 shows, 76 percent of respondents overall indicated their military friends posted their own thoughts or comments on political issues, which is consistent with past research on political participation by Army officers, albeit not in the realm of social media. A 2009 survey of more than 4,000 active duty Army officers found that 74 percent indicated that they had expressed their personal opinion on political candidates or issues to others.⁷⁴ Those categories with reported high rates of participation are not only allowable political activities, but relatively benign on the spectrum of political activity.

The next category of political participation has more activist, partisan overtones. Approximately 42 percent of respondents acknowledged that their military friends have “friended” or “followed” political figures on social media, but this statistic varied substantially by subsample with 51 percent of West Point Cadets reporting this compared to just 26 percent of NDU students. While this was nonetheless an allowable activity per the Department of Defense’s guidelines, it is a more overtly political act than the previously mentioned four activities and carries clear partisan connotations. It is perhaps, then, unsurprising that only one-quarter of NDU respondents indicated their military friends do this compared to the younger cohort of West Point Cadets who have not been fully socialized to the norms of the profession yet.

The last two categories of political activity measured in table 12 are encouraging others to vote and encouraging others to take action on a political issue. Encouraging others to vote, with the obvious caveat that it is not done to influence the vote in a particular direction, is embraced by the all-volunteer military. High voter turnout rates within the military in recent years are attributed to the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act of 1986, and a 2009 survey of Army officers found that 80 percent of respondents acknowledged having encouraged others in the Army to vote at some point during

their careers.⁷⁵ As table 12 shows, roughly one-third of respondents indicated their military friends had used social media to encourage others to vote. Why the nearly 50 percentage point difference? Officers may be more inclined to make direct, in-person appeals to their work colleagues, reflecting adherence to laws and regulations adopted over the past several years aimed at providing voting assistance and education for military Servicemembers. Many officers view voting and affording others in the military the opportunity to vote as a duty and obligation of citizenship, and it makes sense that they are more apt to encourage Servicemembers with whom they work to vote than their military friends on social media.⁷⁶

The final category measured was whether or not respondents’ military friends encouraged others on social media to take action on a political issue. As table 12 highlights, 37 percent of respondents responded affirmatively, with a higher proportion of West Point Cadets (40 percent) indicating so than NDU students (31 percent). This is sensitive ground, as this activity clearly violates Department of Defense guidelines that prohibit partisan activity and political advocacy. Because respondents were not asked to differentiate between their active duty and retired military friends, it is entirely possible that the majority of those responding affirmatively had in mind their retired friends, who are not subject to the same constraints as those on active duty. Yet while that could be true for NDU students, 40 percent of West Point Cadets indicated their military friends encourage others to take action on political issues, and their pool of retired friends is likely quite low. Regardless, the data point is noteworthy for a couple of reasons. First, the data here show that military members, regardless of their status, discern differences along the spectrum of political participation. The large proportion of respondents who indicated their military friends share political news stories or comment on political articles stands in sharp contrast to the proportion of those willing to advocate publicly for a political issue. Yet this last category, which clearly crosses the line

in terms of permissibility, has more than just a small number of outliers; nearly two in five respondents indicated their military friends do this.

Comparisons between elite and mass samples are full of difficulties and are not the focus of this study. To draw meaningful comparisons, a civilian elite sample is needed. Yet a brief look at rates of political activity among the broader American public is useful, if for no other reason than to question the claims of other civil-military relations scholars who have argued that assertions of a politicized military are much ado about nothing. Lance Betros argues that while voting is a partisan activity, it is inherently a private one, and voting alone cannot constitute a violation of the nonpartisan ethic. Moreover, Betros contends that those who argue the military is politicized “ascribe to military voters a level of partisanship that is uncharacteristic of the voting public. The vast majority of people who cast ballots for Democrats or Republicans are not partisans.”⁷⁷ Richard Hooker agrees, arguing that “there is no real evidence that the military has become increasingly partisan in an electoral sense.”⁷⁸ Thus, Hooker and Betros argue that claims that the military has abandoned political neutrality are misleading, because they rely solely on voting as a measure of political activity.

Some data supports Betros and Hooker’s argument that claims of politicization might be overblown. A 2009 survey of Army officers queried them on six measures of traditional and allowable political activity, ranging from donating to political candidates to putting a political bumper sticker on a car. With the exception of voting and encouraging others to vote, political participation among Army officers was fairly muted, and they appeared no more politically active than the general public, as reflected in the American National Election Studies surveys.⁷⁹ But the findings of this study challenge the notion that the military is less politically active than the general public, at least when it comes to political expression on social media. A 2012 Pew Research Center study queried the general public on the same seven

measures of political expression on social media. The military friends of those surveyed in this study were significantly more active in five of the seven categories and about equal to the general public’s rate of encouraging others to vote or take action on a political issue.⁸⁰ While military officers may be more restrained in traditional forms of political activity, such as attending rallies or putting bumper stickers on their cars, they appear less so in the realm of social media. Scholars who are quick to dismiss the politicization charge would be well served to consider the implications of a politically active officer corps, even if the nature of such political expression may be beyond the confines of traditional forms of political participation. The very public nature of political expression on social media merits such a reexamination.

Challenges to the Norm of Nonpartisanship

This final section probes the tone and tenor of social media posts by members of the military and the extent to which they are consistent with the norm of nonpartisanship. To assess that, it is important to revisit the interaction between respondents and their military friends. Table 13 shows the degree of alignment in political views between respondents and their military friends on social media. Overall, only 26 percent of those surveyed responded that the political views of their military friends on social media were almost always or often in line with their own views. West Point Cadets and NDU students showed remarkable consistency here, with nearly identical percentages reported.

The variance among respondents, however, is clearly evident in partisan identification and political ideology. Republican respondents (34 percent) were more likely to indicate that their military friends on social media shared similar political views than both Independent (20 percent) and Democrat (16 percent) respondents. Ideology followed even a more pronounced pattern with 39 percent of conservatives indicating similar political views, compared to just 15 percent of liberals and 16 percent of moderates. When strength of partisanship and ideology

Table 13. Alignment in Political Opinions by Military Friends on Social Media

Degree of Alignment in Political Opinions by Military Friends on Social Media	
percent checking “almost always” or “often”	
Thinking about the opinions your military friends post about government and politics on social media networking sites, how often are they in line with your own views?	
TOTAL (n = 473)	26.43
West Point Cadets	27.15
NDU Students	25.70
O4s	25.93
O5s	24.41
O6s	33.33
Democrats	16.07***
Independents	20.31*
Republicans	33.72***
Liberals	15.15***
Moderates	15.89***
Conservatives	39.45***

Source: Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015–2016.
 *** Difference of proportions test statistically significant at $p < .001$: between liberals and conservatives; between moderates and conservatives; and between Democrats and Republicans.
 * Difference of proportions test between Independents and Republicans statistically significant at $p < .05$.

is taken into account, the differences become magnified. For example, 48 percent of strong Republicans indicated they share similar political views with their military friends on social media compared to just 6 percent of strong Democrats. Likewise, 44 percent of strong conservatives reported similar political leanings, compared to zero percent for strong liberals. This evidence shows that Republican and conservative respondents are more likely to see social media as their echo chamber, seeking to reinforce their own political beliefs, than their Democrat, Independent, liberal, and moderate counterparts.

These findings are in line with past research conducted by the Pew Research Center, where a 2014 study found that “consistent conservatives” were twice as likely as average Facebook users to report that political posts they saw were consistent with

their own views. And while “consistent liberals” in the Pew study reported a more diverse range of political opinions on Facebook, 32 percent still reported sharing similar political views—a far larger proportion than liberals and strong liberals in this study reported.⁸¹ The military sample from this study may mirror trends in the broader American public, where Republicans and conservatives are more likely to have military-affiliated social media friends with similar political views than Democrats and Independents, as well as liberals and moderates. However, the proportion of Democrats and liberals in the officer corps is also significantly underrepresented compared to the broader civilian populace—a finding that not only impacts military elites’ friend networks but also shapes respondents’ views of online discourse and how they respond to such discourse.

Table 14 delves into this a bit more with a review of the politics of “unfriending,” in which respondents were asked whether or not they have ever severed ties with social media friends, and specifically, if the politics of their social media friends were to blame. As discussed earlier, West Point Cadet responses regarding retired military members should be discounted given the low likelihood they have a sufficient number of retired military friends from which to draw comparisons. As table 14 indicates, while West Point Cadet responses are included, cross tabulations with other variables focus on NDU student responses only. Overall, 68 percent of respondents indicated they have unfriended or blocked nonmilitary friends on social media for nonpolitical reasons, compared to 39 percent who have unfriended active duty friends and 30 percent who have unfriended retired military friends. Both West Point Cadets and NDU students were far more apt to unfriend nonmilitary friends than military friends.

What this study is really interested in, however, is the degree to which officers unfriend or block their social media contacts, especially other military friends, for political reasons. Generally speaking, more respondents

Table 14. The Politics of Unfriending on Social Media

	Have you ever hidden, blocked, unfriended, or stopped following anyone in the following groups on a social media site for nonpolitical reasons?			Have you ever hidden, blocked, unfriended, or stopped following anyone in the following groups on a social media networking site because you did not agree with something they posted about government and politics?		
	percent checking "yes"			percent checking "yes"		
	Nonmilitary Friends	Active Duty Friends	Retired Military Friends	Nonmilitary Friends	Active Duty Friends	Retired Military Friends
TOTAL	68.22	38.59	29.84	40.51	25.74	18.42
West Point Cadets	72.66**	41.81	27.24	43.99*	27.84	14.91*
NDU Students	61.11**	32.96	33.15	34.44*	22.22	23.60*
O4s	62.96	22.22	22.22	44.44	18.52	23.08
O5s	60.16	33.07	33.33	32.28	21.26	21.43
O6s	66.67	45.83	45.83	36.00	32.00	36.00
Democrats (NDU only)	69.70	42.42	42.42	42.42	30.30	28.12
Independents (NDU only)	66.67	36.36	33.33	45.45	36.36*	39.39**
Republicans (NDU only)	56.84	29.47	29.03	28.42	15.79*	15.96**
Liberals (NDU only)	75.86	31.03	41.38	44.83	31.03	32.14
Moderates (NDU only)	58.73	25.40	33.87	31.75	25.40	26.98
Conservatives (NDU only)	59.52	17.86	31.33	33.33	17.86	19.28
Those Who Have Unfriended for Nonpolitical Reasons (NDU only)				50.46***	56.90***	55.17***
Those Who Have Not Unfriended for Nonpolitical Reasons (NDU only)				11.11***	6.36***	8.41***
(n)	472	469	449	474	474	456

Source: Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015–2016.

Most difference in proportions tests based on partisan identification and ideology barely miss statistical significance, although the difference between Independents and Republicans for unfriending active duty friends because of politics is statistically significant at $p < .05$ and for unfriending retired military friends because of politics at $p < .01$.

*** Difference of proportions test statistically significant at $p < .001$: between those who have unfriended for nonpolitical reasons and those who have not for nonmilitary friends, active duty friends, and retired military friends.

** Difference of proportions test between West Point Cadets and NDU Students for blocking nonmilitary friends for nonpolitical reasons statistically significant at $p < .01$.

* Difference of proportions test between West Point Cadets and NDU Students for blocking nonmilitary friends and retired friends for political reasons statistically significant at $p < .05$.

reported unfriending their nonmilitary friends than military friends based on political reasons. Yet surprisingly, NDU students unfriended their active duty and retired military friends for political reasons at roughly the same rate. This calls into question the oft-cited assumption by many in the officer corps and even some civil-military commentators that political outspokenness is largely a province of those who have taken off the uniform at the end of a career.⁸² Whatever it is about the political opinions of their military friends that is turn-

ing respondents off is happening equally for their active duty and retired friends alike.

Also, party affiliation and political ideology suggest subtle differences when it comes to unfriending based on politics. Republicans were less likely to report they unfriend due to political reasons than Democrats and Independents, and conservatives were less likely to unfriend than liberals and moderates. This generally tracks with findings from past research, most notably, a 2014 Pew study that found “consistent liberals” are

more likely to unfriend someone because they disagreed with that person’s political opinions on social media.⁸³ This paints a complex picture of how the factor of party affiliation manifests itself on social media. In this study, Democrats and Independents, as well as liberals and moderates, are less likely to have social media friends who share their political views, but they are more apt to unfriend or block friends on social media because they disagree with something they posted about politics. Republicans and conservatives are more likely to have social media friends who share their same political views and understandably are less likely to unfriend for political reasons.

A final measure of interaction between respondents and their military social media friends is provided in table 15. When respondents were asked how often they felt uncomfortable about their active duty military friends’ political posts on social media, only a few respondents—just 15 percent—reported “almost always” or “often.” While not shown in table 15, another 34 percent of respondents reported they “sometimes” felt uncomfortable, while 42 percent reported they hardly ever felt uncomfortable.

Party identification and political ideology trigger quite different responses. As table 15 shows, 25 percent of Democrats reported being almost always or often uncomfortable, compared to just 9 percent of Independents and 13 percent of Republicans. Likewise, 25 percent of liberals reported being uncomfortable, while only 16 percent of moderates and 10 percent of conservatives did. Finally, respondents who have political views dissimilar to their social media friends (19 percent) were more apt to indicate they often feel uncomfortable compared to respondents who share similar political views with their social media friends (9 percent).

What does this all mean? While overall, most respondents are generally not too bothered by the political opinions their active duty friends post on social media, Democrats and liberals generally tend to feel more uncomfortable more often. This is consistent with past

Table 15. Degree of Discomfort with Active Duty Friends’ Political Discussions on Social Media

percent checking “almost always” or “often”	
How often do you feel uncomfortable by the political content your active duty military friends discuss on social media networking sites?	
TOTAL (n = 471)	15.29
West Point Cadets	17.65
NDU Students	11.73
O4s	18.52
O5s	10.94
O6s	8.70
Democrats	25.44**
Independents	9.38*
Republicans	12.99**
Liberals	24.75***
Moderates	16.00
Conservatives	10.23***
Those Who Have Similar Political Views as Their Military Social Media Friends	8.80*
Those Who Have Dissimilar Political Views as Their Military Social Media Friends	18.69*

Source: Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015–2016.

*** Difference of proportions test between liberals and conservatives statistically significant at $p < .001$.

** Difference of proportions test between Democrats and Republicans statistically significant at $p < .01$.

* Difference of proportions test statistically significant at $p < .05$: between Democrats and Independents; and between those who share similar political views and those who do not.

research of a large sample of active duty Army officers, where Democrat-affiliated officers felt more uncomfortable talking about politics in the workplace than their Republican peers.⁸⁴ This raises a number of important questions: do Democrats and liberals feel more uncomfortable because they disagree with the politics being discussed by their Republican and conservative peers who outnumber them? Or do Democrats and liberals feel uncomfortable because the nature of the political discussions is normatively contrary to the military’s spirit of nonpartisanship, and Republicans and conservatives are somehow less sensitive to such violations? In other words, is discomfort a function of being a political minority, or is discomfort a function of sensitivity to

normatively inappropriate political behavior? From this data alone, it is unclear, but it is likely that the answer lies somewhere in the former explanation, not the latter. Data from the next three tables sheds more light on the influence of partisanship, ideology, and normatively inappropriate behavior.

Thus far, this paper’s analysis has focused on the following: the extent to which military friends discuss politics on social media; comparisons in the political discourse among social media friend groups; the types of political activity performed on social media; and the degree of alignment in the political views between respondents and their friends. As the data in table 15 showed, few respondents routinely felt uncomfortable because of the political opinions their active duty friends post on social media, which suggests that if normative violations of the nonpartisan ethic exist on social media, they are probably rare. Yet one-fourth of respondents admitted to unfriending active duty

friends because of something they posted about politics; thus, it is unclear to what extent normatively inappropriate behavior is prevalent among the military on social media, whether active duty or retired. Tables 16, 17, and 18 more acutely probe whether or not the political content on social media expressly violates the military’s nonpartisan ethic and, even worse, could be labeled as insulting, rude, or disdainful.

Tables 16, 17, and 18 summarize respondents’ observations of their social media friends’ political tenor that clearly crosses the line. Respondents were asked if they ever observed their nonmilitary, active duty, or retired military friends use or share insulting, rude, or disdainful comments directed at specific elected officials, politicians running for office, or the President of the United States. This question is especially delicate, as it touches upon expressly prohibited activities and punishable offenses under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Under Article 88 of that code, contemptuous

Table 16. Rude Comments Against Specific Elected Officials on Social Media

	Have you ever observed the following friends use or share insulting, rude, or disdainful comments directed against specific elected officials on a social media networking site?		
	percent checking “yes”		
	Nonmilitary Friends	Active Duty Friends	Retired Military Friends
TOTAL	75.90	34.53	43.71
West Point Cadets	78.01	39.86**	37.59***
NDU Students	73.18	26.40**	53.67***
O4s	96.30	44.44	66.67
O5s	70.87	23.02	52.80
O6s	62.50	25.00	45.83
Democrats (NDU only)	81.82	39.39*	60.61
Independents (NDU only)	66.67	36.36	54.55
Republicans (NDU only)	71.58	21.05*	52.13
Liberals (NDU only)	89.66	37.93*	69.87
Moderates (NDU only)	69.84	33.33	52.38
Conservatives (NDU only)	72.29	16.87*	50.00
(n)	473	472	453

Source: Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015–2016.

*** Difference of proportions test between West Point Cadets and NDU Students for retired military friends statistically significant at $p < .001$.

** Difference of proportions test between West Point Cadets and NDU Students for active duty friends statistically significant at $p < .01$.

* Difference of proportions test statistically significant at $p < .05$: between Democrats and Republicans for active duty friends; and between liberals and conservatives for active duty friends.

Table 17. Rude Comments Against Politicians Running for Office on Social Media

	Have you ever observed the following friends use or share insulting, rude, or disdainful comments directed against politicians running for office on a social media networking site?		
	percent checking "yes"		
	Nonmilitary Friends	Active Duty Friends	Retired Military Friends
TOTAL	80.42	50.21	50.56
West Point Cadets	84.30*	58.90***	46.30*
NDU Students	74.86*	36.72***	57.95*
O4s	88.89	55.56	70.37
O5s	74.80	35.20	58.06
O6s	62.50	25.00	45.83
Democrats (NDU only)	84.85	48.48	63.64
Independents (NDU only)	72.73	46.88	68.75
Republicans (NDU only)	72.63	33.68	54.26
Liberals (NDU only)	82.76	55.17*	68.97
Moderates (NDU only)	76.19	38.71	61.29
Conservatives (NDU only)	73.49	30.12*	52.44
(n)	475	472	449

Source: Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015–2016.

*** Difference of proportions test between West Point Cadets and NDU Students for active duty friends statistically significant at $p < .001$.

* Difference of proportions test statistically significant at $p < .05$: between West Point Cadets and NDU Students for nonmilitary friends and retired friends; and between liberals and conservatives for active duty friends.

words by a commissioned officer against the President, Vice President, Congress, the Secretary of Defense or secretaries of military departments, Secretary of Homeland Security, governors, or state legislatures is an offense punishable by court martial.⁸⁵ As with the majority of this survey’s questions about political behavior, respondents were asked for their observations of their friends’ social media activity, not their own, in order to avoid putting respondents in a compromising position.

A large majority of those surveyed—over three-quarters—responded that their nonmilitary friends had posted or shared rude comments about elected officials, politicians running for office, and the President. This finding alone is revealing, as it attests to broad incivility throughout social media. Yet this study’s primary interest is in whether or not active duty and retired military exhibit the same lack of civility in political discourse. As tables 16, 17, and 18 show, albeit not at the same scale, active duty and retired military mem-

bers follow suit in such behavior—an alarming finding to students of civil-military relations. More than half of NDU students reported that their retired military friends posted or shared rude comments about elected officials, politicians, and the President; and active duty members are equally guilty, with well over one-third of all those surveyed indicating their active duty friends do the same. Thus, while retired members of the military feel less constrained to make or share such controversial statements, active duty members are by no means silent.

For all three categories—elected officials, politicians, and the President—the variable of longevity of service or age indicates varying degrees of professionalism on social media by their active duty friends. West Point Cadets were far more likely to report normatively inappropriate behavior by their active duty friends than NDU students in each category. The largest gap between West Point Cadets and NDU students is in the category of politicians running for office, where 59 percent of Ca-

Table 18. Rude Comments Against the President of the United States on Social Media

	Have you ever observed the following friends use or share insulting, rude, or disdainful comments directed against the President of the United States on a social media networking site?		
	percent checking "yes"		
	Nonmilitary Friends	Active Duty Friends	Retired Military Friends
TOTAL	77.33	33.69	46.90
West Point Cadets	81.44*	39.52***	41.39**
NDU Students	71.35*	24.72***	56.25**
O4s	85.19	44.44	66.67
O5s	69.84	22.22	56.45
O6s	66.67	16.67	45.83
Democrats (NDU only)	75.76	39.39*	65.62
Independents (NDU only)	60.61	30.30	63.64
Republicans (NDU only)	72.63	21.05*	54.26
Liberals (NDU only)	79.31	37.93**	75.86*
Moderates (NDU only)	71.43	33.33**	54.84
Conservatives (NDU only)	68.67	13.25**	51.22*
(n)	472	472	452

Source: Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015-2016.

*** Difference of proportions test between West Point Cadets and NDU Students for active duty friends statistically significant at $p < .001$.

** Difference of proportions test statistically significant at $p < .01$: between West Point Cadets and NDU students for retired military friends; between liberals and conservatives for active duty friends; and between moderates and conservatives for active duty friends.

* Difference of proportions test statistically significant at $p < .05$: between West Point Cadets and NDU students for nonmilitary friends; between Democrats and Republicans for active duty friends; and between liberals and conservatives for retired friends.

dets reported observing their active duty friends direct inappropriate comments toward these politicians compared to just 37 percent of NDU students. Again, this reinforces the assumption that the longer one serves in the military, the more the member is exposed to and adopts the norms of the profession.

Within the three categories, respondents' active duty and retired military friends were most vocal toward politicians running for office, with 50 percent of those surveyed indicating their active duty friends have posted rude comments, and 58 percent of NDU students indicating their retired friends have done the same. It is also instructive to note that the active duty friends of both West Point Cadets and NDU students especially seem to draw a distinction among the three categories as to who is most "fair game" for rude comments and criticism, and this was even evident within the NDU student sample. While 37 percent of NDU students in-

dicated their active duty military friends post or share rude comments about politicians, that figure drops to 25 and 26 percent for the President and other elected officials, respectively. This is important, because despite the clear normative violations occurring, it shows that at least some active duty members recognize the tenets of the nonpartisan ethic and, more acutely, provisions of the Uniform Code of Military Justice and other pertinent regulations. Whether it is appropriate for active duty members to be engaging in such behavior toward politicians is another matter, but the difference in response rates among NDU students nonetheless is indicative of some degree of understanding of applicable policies, regulations, and norms.

From a relative comparison, respondents were less likely to report that their active duty friends were guilty of posting rude or inappropriate comments about individuals in the three measured categories, compared to the

strong majorities of their nonmilitary friends and retired military friends. Yet the scope of active duty friends engaging in the same behavior can by no means be written off as a mere outlier. True, the question asked of respondents was *if they had ever observed* their friends engaging in such behavior, and we do not have a true sense how often such inappropriate behavior is occurring on social media. Nonetheless, even if the offenders form a small proportion of a respondent's overall active duty friend group, the fact that a sizable minority of respondents attest that this is occurring—or 50 percent in the case of politicians running for office—is extraordinary.

As with previous analysis regarding the politics of unfriending, the degree of alignment in political views between respondents and friends, and the extent to which respondents feel uncomfortable by their friends' politics, the responses in tables 16, 17, and 18 also vary based on party identification and political ideology. Liberal-leaning respondents were twice as likely as conservatives to indicate their active duty friends posted rude comments about all three categories of individuals. Likewise, Democrats were more likely than Republicans to report their active duty friends posted or shared inappropriate comments against specific elected officials and the President. As mentioned earlier, this does not suggest Democrats or liberal members of the military are more likely to post rude comments about elected leaders. Nor does it necessarily mean that because Democrats are more apt to identify politically inappropriate behavior on social media, Republicans and conservatives must be the ones who are committing these political fouls. It simply means that Democrat and liberal officers are more likely to observe and report normatively inappropriate political behavior on social media; but inferences can be made that Democrats and liberal respondents are suggesting Republicans and conservatives are the source of the offending behavior.

However, it is also unclear to what extent this may be a case of partisan rationalization. Both this survey and the 2009 survey of Army officers were conducted

during the Obama administration.⁸⁶ If this survey were to be completed during a Republican presidential administration, would Democrats still be reporting higher levels of normatively inappropriate behavior, especially geared toward the President? Or would Republicans be more apt to identify political activity contrary to the nonpartisan ethic? It is unclear, especially given the large number of Republicans in the officer corps. In other words, even if these findings might reflect partisan rationalization, magnitude is a factor that cannot be ignored, and the voices of a large crowd tend to overpower those of a minority.

The findings about rude comments toward the President should be especially startling to senior military leaders and interested observers of civil-military relations. While attitudes toward the President generally mirrored attitudes toward other elected officials, the military has but one commander-in-chief. Two of five respondents overall reported their active duty friends engage in disdainful comments toward the President, and a quarter of the NDU sample reported the same. This finding carries the most significant implications for civil-military relations of any in this study, as it not only suggests a lack of respect and decorum within active duty military, but it also questions the military's overall deference to civilian authority. How well assured is subordination to the commander-in-chief if members of the active duty military engage in sarcasm or vitriol against him in a public forum?

Past research that examined the attitudes of Army officers in 2009 also found a worrisome lack of respect toward the President, evident by nearly one-third of respondents who felt that in order to be respected as commander-in-chief, the President should have served in the military.⁸⁷ This also split along party lines, with Republicans more than twice as likely as Democrats to feel this way. While this finding comes nowhere near the level of impropriety associated with disdainful comments directed toward the President in a public forum, it nevertheless raises further questions about

the durability of adherence to the bedrock of civilian control of the military. No serious student of American civil-military relations suggests a coup in the United States is possible, but views and behavior such as this that threaten to undermine the legitimacy of civilian control cannot be ignored.

This is not the first time that members of the military have been seen to be harboring resentment toward their commander-in-chief. In recent history, the Clinton administration stands out as a period of strained civil-military relations, where a level of disrespect within the ranks toward the President was widely assumed if not frequently observed.⁸⁸ Resistance to President Clinton's policies, such as his attempt to integrate gays in the military or intervention in Bosnia, were viewed as further manifestations of this disrespect. But the policy resistance debate centers largely on a handful of senior military leaders at the highest levels of the military and their interactions with the executive branch. What makes today different, and involves a much larger segment of the military, is the accessible, public outlet available for such disrespect. Even if normatively inappropriate behavior is somewhat limited to a small proportion of the military, such behavior is being publicly broadcast to wider audiences than ever before, and this challenges the principle of subordination to civilian authority.

The last set of findings in this study relates to the very public nature of social media, the debate over what constitutes private and public expression, and the perception that one's personal political views imply official endorsement by the military. To get at these issues, respondents were asked if they had ever observed their active duty friends on social media use a disclaimer to note that their personal political views do not reflect the official position of the Department of Defense. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the Department of Defense's Public Affairs guidance for the 2016 election stipulates that if individuals can be identified as active duty Servicemembers on their social media site, the standard disclaimer should ac-

company any political views they post. Yet, as table 19 shows, only 23 percent of respondents indicate they have observed their active duty friends on social media comply with this. Surprisingly, West Point Cadets (30 percent) were more likely to indicate their active duty friends used disclaimers than NDU students (12 percent). This seems counter to the professionalization argument, which holds that the longer one serves in the military and is exposed to its norms and regulations, the more likely one is to adhere to and adopt them. A potential explanation for this could be that while the more senior NDU students are well acquainted with the norm of nonpartisanship, they are unfamiliar with the relatively recent and specific guidance about social media guidelines. It is possible that West Point Cadets received particular emphasis about this, along with other social media etiquette, as part of their general instruction at West Point.

Table 19. Use of Disclaimers by Active Duty Friends on Social Media

percent checking "yes"	
Have you ever observed an active duty military friend post a disclaimer on a social media networking site that his/her political views are those of the individual only and not those of the Department of Defense?	
TOTAL (n = 474)	22.78
West Point Cadets	29.79***
NDU Students	11.73***
O4s	7.41
O5s	11.90
O6s	16.00
Democrats	19.30
Independents	18.75
Republicans	24.51
Liberals	14.71**
Moderates	20.00
Conservatives	29.03**

Source: Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015-2016.

*** Difference of proportions test between West Point Cadets and NDU Students statistically significant at $p < .001$.

** Difference of proportions test between liberals and conservatives statistically significant at $p < .01$.

While party affiliation did not elicit a statistically significant difference between responses by Democrats and Republicans, ideology did. Conservatives were twice as likely as liberals to indicate their friends use disclaimers on social media. This is interesting, especially given the findings of greater political homogeneity among conservatives' social media friends. Are conservatives more likely to show discretion and adherence to Department of Defense policies on political activity by using disclaimers? And, if so, how does this reconcile with other findings that liberals are more likely to observe normatively inappropriate political behavior among their more politically heterogeneous friend groups? This could be a situation where conservatives are reporting that their conservative friends employ disclaimers while liberals are reporting their conservative friends do not. Regardless, this muddles our ability to draw clear conclusions about what types of friends—conservative or liberal—are more apt to use disclaimers. More research is required, especially into the composition of social media friend groups.

Lastly, even if respondents lack the requisite Department of Defense disclaimer, it could be that military members' affiliation with the military is not widely visible on their social media networking sites. Clearly, the overwhelming majority of their friends must know whether they are or were in the military, but how well

would the general public be able to discern military affiliation from a social media site alone? A simple shortcut is whether or not military members include photos of themselves in uniform. Table 20 displays the findings for responses by West Point Cadets and National War College students, where 92 percent indicated that some, most, or all of their military friends had photos of themselves in uniform. Of note, this varied somewhat by age or cohort, with 97 percent of West Point Cadets reporting this compared to 74 percent of National War College students. Regardless of the difference in subsamples, strong majorities indicate their military friends do post photos in uniform, further blurring the lines between the perception of public and private personas on social media.

Table 20. Photos in Uniform on Social Media

percent checking "all," "most," or "some"	
Among your military friends, how many have photos of themselves in uniform on their social media networking sites?	
TOTAL (n = 364)	92.03
West Point Cadets	96.56*
National War College Students	73.97*

Source: Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015-2016.

* Difference of proportions test between West Point Cadets and NWC Students statistically significant at $p < .001$.

Conclusions

This study advances our understanding of political activity by uniformed military beyond traditional, if not outdated, measures of political participation. It also adds to the debate of whether or not the military is politicized by examining the impact partisanship and political ideology have on political expression in social media. First, findings suggest that while most military elites continue to identify as conservative and Republican, fewer appear to do so today than at any other time over the past 30 years. Second, military elites actively use social media networking sites, although younger elites are more prolific in their use, including the extent to which they consume political news on social media and the extent to which their friends discuss politics on social media. Third, while respondents' non-military friends were more politically active than their military friends, both active duty and retired military actively participate in a number of forms of political and partisan expression. In some measures, the levels at which members of the military express political opinions are considerably higher than the levels of members of the general public, who should theoretically be less constrained in their expression.

Fourth, party identification and political ideology elicit different responses and behavior, evident by the variance in the political heterogeneity of military social media friend networks, the degree to which military elites feel uncomfortable by their active duty friends' political posts, and the willingness of military elites to sever social media ties with their military friends for political reasons. While some of the differences are subtle, military elites who identify as liberals and Democrats

are more likely to have more politically diverse military friends on social media, but are also more likely to report feeling uncomfortable by their friends' politics. And fifth, a striking percentage of those surveyed indicated their military friends, both active and retired, have engaged in insulting, rude, or disdainful comments directed at politicians, elected officials, and the President. Again, differences are evident in political ideology and party affiliation, with liberals and Democrats more likely to report they observed such normative violations. These findings suggest Republican and conservative military elites tend to see social media as their echo chamber and raise further questions about the politicization of the force and its impact on the profession.

This study notes several significant differences between age or generational cohorts, as well as ideology and party identification, but stops short of suggesting that clear causal relationships exist between those variables and levels of political activity. Relationships, nonetheless, do exist, and future research is needed to more acutely probe the real impact these have in determining political behavior. Likewise, a larger, random sample of military elites may find stronger effects and differences than this study did, given its modest sample size and nonrandom nature.

This study also identifies gaps and inconsistencies in regulations and policies about political behavior, which should be quickly rectified given how prolific social media usage is among members of the military today. Department of Defense guidance on political activity, including political expression on social media, turns out to be fairly permissive, erring on the side of the Service-

member's right to free speech rather than erring on the side of caution and the norms of an apolitical, nonpartisan military. The policy guidance is also ambiguous and inconsistent at times, assuming a clear distinction exists between political and partisan and that the rank and file can clearly discriminate between the two. Moreover, the guidance has the implicit value judgment that "political" is acceptable—it is only "partisan" that can get you in trouble; but this is flawed reasoning. Nevertheless, according to this study's findings, members of the military active on social media are largely ignoring Department of Defense guidance, as reflected by the small minority to report ever having seen their friends use disclaimers accompanying their political opinions on social media. Moreover, the sizable percentage of respondents who reported their active duty military friends have posted or shared inappropriate comments about political figures, to include elected officials and even the President, suggests that enforcement of such policies is lacking.

At the root of the debate over political expression on social media is the distinction between public and private spheres. While unstated in DoDD 1344.10, implicit in the norms of being apolitical and nonpartisan is the idea that a Servicemember's political opinions and activity should be private. This is why DoDD 1344.10 goes to great lengths to distinguish activity that could be construed as implying official endorsement from the relatively private acts associated with "the obligations of citizenship."⁸⁹ Social media, despite its veneer of security and closed friend networks, is fundamentally a public sphere, a fact the Department of Defense fully acknowledges through the services' respective social media guidelines.⁹⁰ Moreover, unlike a discussion with colleagues or friends, political commentary on social media becomes a written, lasting record with an exponentially public reach, as friends of friends continue to share or pass on an original post or comment.

Here, the Department of Defense seems to have missed an opportunity to emphasize the unique implications of political expression in social media and how

this varies from more traditional means of political activity. Instead, the Department has chosen to split hairs, arguing that Servicemembers cannot use their affiliation with the military on social media to promote their political views, but can do so as long as they caveat that their opinion does not reflect those of the Department of Defense. In doing so, it sidesteps the issue of whether such public, political commentary by the military is appropriate and whether or not it contributes to the charges outlined at the beginning of this paper—that the military is too partisan and too vocal. It also seems to suggest that as long as a disclaimer accompanies Servicemembers' political posts, then there is "no harm, no foul"—regardless of the tone or content of the political commentary. Yet, each time Servicemembers post their political opinions, especially those with unmistakable partisan connections, they publicly reveal their politics, even if disclaimers are used. Given the historically strong but waning affiliation of military elites with one particular political party, this raises questions about the aggregate effect a steady stream of political commentary by members of the military has toward gradually eroding the nonpartisan, apolitical ethic.

The Department of Defense should update DoDD 1344.10 to include clearer, more consistent language about political activity and expression on social media. In doing so, it should use this opportunity to eliminate any ambiguity and revisit the currently allowable practices of "liking" political candidates or parties, as both constitute partisan activity, regardless of whether or not a Servicemember encourages others do the same. Next, senior military leaders should be more vocal and consistent in talking about the importance of being apolitical and nonpartisan and how violations of this norm threaten the level of trust and confidence in which the American public holds the military. Rather than focusing on what is allowable and what is not, discussions should center on whether or not such political activity is appropriate—even, and perhaps especially, those activities that are allowable. In doing so, senior leaders may strength-

en the nonpartisan ethic and reignite discussions about what it means to be part of a profession. Both Admiral Mullen and General Dempsey were strong advocates of an apolitical, nonpartisan ethic, but it is not solely the responsibility of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs to initiate such discussions, nor must they only occur on the eve of a presidential election. Service chiefs and general and flag officers across the services should be more vocal in stressing to their subordinates the need to remain apolitical. The normative violations discovered in this study suggest more attention, not less, is required. Accordingly, this should be a topic addressed at every level of professional military education and routinely at the unit level.

Finally, given some of the violations of decorum that seem to be occurring on social media by active duty military members, the military services should exercise greater enforcement of the policies already in existence. An institution that is subordinate to civilian authority

cannot tolerate rude and disparaging comments made by its members toward the President or other elected leaders. This is not a call to establish a police state, where every political post must be reviewed and scrutinized, but instead to deter inappropriate political activity from ever occurring in the first place. Moreover, commanders are already charged with maintaining the good order and discipline of their units, and the extension of that framework to include modeling prudent political behavior on social media is consistent with the scope and nature of their authority. Routine sensitization to the bounds of appropriate political discourse on social media should better regulate the political expression of those on active duty while reinforcing the norm of non-partisanship. In short, by more effectively linking political neutrality on social media to broad standards of the profession, it should encourage members of the military to “think before they post.”

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Appendix A

Survey Instrument

Politics, the Military, and Social Media Research Study

This survey is part of an approved research fellowship being conducted at the National War College. It seeks to examine the nature and extent of political expression on social media and will help researchers better understand the state of civil-military relations today.

Throughout the survey, your anonymity will be preserved, and identification of respondents will not be recorded. This survey should take no more than 5-10 minutes to complete. It is only with the generous help of people like you that such research on the professional military ethic can be successful. If you have any questions about the survey or would like to receive a final copy of the findings, please contact the chief researcher, LTC Heidi Urben, at heidi.a.urben.mil@gc.ndu.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Informed Consent

By completing this survey, I consent to participate in this study. I understand my participation is strictly voluntary.

Your Social Media Use

1. Which of the following social media networking sites do you currently have an account with? (please check all that apply)

- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Google+
- YouTube
- I do not have any social media networking accounts (If you selected this response, skip to question 22.)

2. Which social media networking sites did you get news about government and politics from in the past week? (Please check all that apply. If you are unsure, leave it unchecked.)

- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Google+
- YouTube

3. How often do you access your social media networking accounts?

- Several times a day
- About once a day
- A few days a week
- Every few weeks
- Less often
- I'm not sure

4. About how many friends do you currently have on social media networking websites?

Please specify the approximate number

5. Approximately what percentage of your friends on social media networking sites are affiliated with the military, either active duty or retired?

- Less than 20%
- 20 – 40%
- 40 – 60%
- 60 – 80%
- More than 80%
- I'm not sure

Social Media Observations

6. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: “My military friends (both active duty and retired) often talk about politics on social media networking sites.”

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

7. Generally speaking, who is more active in discussing politics on social media networking sites, your military friends or non-military friends?

- My non-military friends talk about politics more
- My non-military friends talk about politics as much as my military friends do
- My military friends talk about politics more
- I'm not sure

8. Generally speaking, who is more active in discussing politics on social media networking sites, your active duty military friends or retired military friends?

- My active duty friends talk about politics more
- My active duty friends talk about politics as much as my retired friends do
- My retired friends talk about politics more
- I'm not sure

9. Generally speaking, among all of your military friends, who is more active in discussing politics on social media networking sites, your officer friends or enlisted friends?

- My officer friends talk about politics more
- My officer friends talk about politics as much as my enlisted friends do
- My enlisted friends talk about politics more
- I'm not sure

10. Do your military friends ever do the following on social media networking sites?

	Yes	No	I'm not sure
1. Repost or share links to political stories	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Post links to political stories or articles for others to read	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. "Like" or promote material related to political issues that others have posted	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Post their own thoughts/comments on political issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. "Friend" or follow political figures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Encourage others to vote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Encourage others to take action on political issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11. Of the following list of topics related to government and politics, please check which ones your friends often discuss on social media networking sites (please check all that apply).

	Your non-military friends	Your active duty military friends	Your retired military friends
1. The 2016 election	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The war in Afghanistan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Russian President Vladimir Putin	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. ISIS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. President Obama	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Congress	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. The economy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Immigration	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Gun control	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Health care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. LGBT issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Women in combat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. The federal budget and sequestration	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Veterans affairs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. Thinking of that same list of topics related to government, which are the top 3 most commented upon topics by your friends?

Check 3 for each grouping of friends

	Your non-military friends	Your active duty military friends	Your retired military friends
1. The 2016 election	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The war in Afghanistan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Russian President Vladimir Putin	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. ISIS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. President Obama	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Congress	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. The economy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Immigration	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Gun control	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Health care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. LGBT issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Women in combat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. The federal budget and sequestration	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Veterans affairs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13. Among your military friends, how many have photos of themselves in uniform on their social media networking sites?

- All have photos of themselves in uniform
- Most have photos of themselves in uniform
- Some have photos of themselves in uniform
- Most do not have photos of themselves in uniform
- None have photos of themselves in uniform
- I'm not sure

14. Thinking about the opinions your military friends post about government and politics on social media networking sites, how often are they in line with your own views?

- Almost Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Hardly Ever
- I'm Not Sure

15. Have you ever hidden, blocked, unfriended, or stopped following anyone in the following groups on a social media networking site because you did not agree with something they posted about government and politics?

	Yes	No	I'm not sure
Your non-military friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your active duty military friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your retired military friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

16. Have you ever hidden, blocked, unfriended, or stopped following anyone in the following groups on a social media networking site for nonpolitical reasons?

	Yes	No	I'm not sure
Your non-military friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your active duty military friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your retired military friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

17. How often do you feel uncomfortable by the political content your active duty military friends discuss on social media networking sites?

- Almost always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Hardly Ever
- I'm not sure

18. Have you ever observed an active duty military friend post a disclaimer on a social media networking site that his/her political views are those of the individual only and not those of the Department of Defense?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

19. Have you ever observed the following friends use or share insulting, rude, or disdainful comments directed against _____ on a social media networking site?

Specific Elected Officials

	Yes	No	I'm not sure
Your non-military friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your active duty military friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your retired military friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

20. Have you ever observed the following friends use or share insulting, rude, or disdainful comments directed against _____ on a social media networking site?

Politicians Running for Office

	Yes	No	I'm not sure
Your non-military friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your active duty military friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your retired military friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

21. Have you ever observed the following friends use or share insulting, rude, or disdainful comments directed against _____ on a social media networking site?

President of the United States

	Yes	No	I'm not sure
Your non-military friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your active duty military friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your retired military friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

22. Below are a number of terms used to describe the overall tone of political discussions on social media networking sites. Please check which terms most accurately represent the tone of political discussions among your different groups of friends (please check all that apply):

	Your non-military friends	Your active duty military friends	Your retired military friends
1. Restrained	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Active	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. One-sided	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Diverse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Agreeable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Confrontational	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Informative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Combative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Balanced	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Polarizing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Non-Partisan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Partisan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Your Beliefs and Background

23. How much do you enjoy talking about government and politics with friends and family?

- A lot
- Some
- Not much
- Not at all

24. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a strong Democrat, a not very strong Democrat, an Independent who leans Democrat, an Independent, an Independent who leans Republican, a not very strong Republican, a strong Republican, or other?

- Strong Democrat
- Not very strong Democrat
- Independent who leans Democrat
- Independent
- Independent who leans Republican
- Not very strong Republican
- Strong Republican
- Other (please specify)

25. Here is a 7-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from very liberal to very conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale?

- Very liberal
- Liberal
- Somewhat liberal
- Moderate
- Somewhat conservative
- Conservative
- Very conservative

Demographics

26. What is your age group?

- 18-24 years old
- 25-29 years old
- 30-34 years old
- 35-39 years old
- 40-44 years old
- 45-49 years old
- 50-54 years old
- 55 or older

27. What is your branch of service?

- U.S. Air Force
- U.S. Army
- U.S. Coast Guard
- U.S. Marine Corps
- U.S. Navy
- Other (please specify) _____

28. What is your current status in the military?

- Active Duty
- Reserve
- National Guard
- Pre-commissioning
- Other (please specify)

29. What is your current grade?

- Cadet / Midshipman
- O-1 / O-2
- O-3
- O-4
- O-5
- O-6
- Other (please specify) _____

Thank you for participating in this study.

Appendix B

Survey Background and Additional Tables

Survey Deployment

At the National Defense University (NDU), the author relied upon the directors of institutional research at each of the five NDU colleges to administer the survey to their military students. As a result, there was some variance as to precisely when the surveys were emailed to students and the number of reminder emails sent. Likewise, at West Point, the Director of American Politics and faculty members who taught Introduction to American Politics administered the survey to their Cadets on the author's behalf.

Response Rate

The survey received an overall response rate of 44 percent with a total of 537 respondents (see table B-1). For results based on the entire sample, one can say with 95 percent confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 3.25 percentage points. The highest response rate (74 percent) came from within National War College, where the author was a student during Academic Year 2015-2016. The lowest response rate (20 percent) came from the Joint Forces Staff College (JFSC) and is at least partially attributed to the fact that the 191 students attending Joint and Combined Warfighting School (JCWS) graduated two weeks prior to the survey launch date. The JFSC administrators sent the survey to the JCWS graduates' personal or military email addresses as opposed to the .edu email addresses they had while they were enrolled students at JFSC.

Finally, for an indeterminate amount of time between December 10 and 11, 2015, the survey link was down due to a server failure at the Joint Staff. It is unclear what impact, if any, this had on survey response rates.

Demographics and Representativeness

Table B-2 provides a brief demographic breakdown of the survey respondents. While it may appear the U.S. Army is dramatically overrepresented in this sample, West Point Cadets are counted as Army officers in this table. However, the West Point sample consists mainly of first semester sophomores, who arguably have more in common with their counterparts at the other service academies at this point in their careers than they do with active duty Servicemembers in the Army. While not a perfect substitute, they are a fair proxy for pre-commissioning status regardless of service. Age and rank are closely correlated, and the two largest subsamples include the 18-24-year-old group and the 40-44-year-old group, which largely corresponds to the rank of Cadets and O5s (lieutenant colonels and commanders).

While this sample is by no means intended to be representative of the entire U.S. military, or the officer corps for that matter, it does provide unique insights into the tenor and volume of political activity on social media by the military, both active duty and retired. Most significantly, it provides a suitable sample of military elite opinion, bookended by those on the path to commissioning and senior officers approaching the pinnacle of their careers.

Table B-1. Response Rate by Subsamples

	# Surveyed	# Responded	Response Rate %
Overall	1,226	537	43.80
National Defense University	623	230	36.92
National War College	121	90	74.38
Eisenhower School	171	59	34.50
Joint Forces Staff College	222	44	19.82
College of International Security Affairs	99	33	33.33
Information Resources Management College	10	4	40.00
U.S. Military Academy at West Point	603	307	50.91

Source: Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015–2016.

Table B-2. Survey Sample Demographics

	n	percent
West Point Cadets	307	58.48
O3s	3	0.58
O4s	31	5.90
O5s	156	29.71
O6s	28	5.33
Total	525	100.00
U.S. Air Force Officers	80	15.27
U.S. Army Officers*	369	70.42
U.S. Coast Guard Officers	5	0.95
U.S. Marine Corps Officers	20	3.82
U.S. Navy Officers	50	9.54
TOTAL	524	100.00
Pre-commissioning	307	58.37
Active Duty	210	39.92
Reserve	6	1.14
National Guard	3	0.57
TOTAL	526	100.00
18–24 age group	307	58.48
25–29 age group	0	0
30–34 age group	6	1.14
35–39 age group	36	6.86
40–44 age group	119	22.67
45–49 age group	44	8.38
50–54 age group	13	2.48
Over 55 age group	0	0
TOTAL	525	100.00

Source: Politics, the Military, and Social Media Survey, 2015–2016.
For this table, West Point Cadets are counted as U.S. Army Officers.

Notes

¹ Martin E. Dempsey, "From the Chairman: Putting Our Nation First," *Joint Force Quarterly* 65 (April 2012), 4.

² Thomas E. Ricks, *Making the Corps* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997).

³ Ole R. Holsti, "A Widening Gap Between the U.S. Military and Civilian Society: Some Evidence, 1976-1996," *International Security* 23, no. 2 (Winter 1998/1999), 5-42.

⁴ Peter D. Feaver and Richard H. Kohn, eds., *Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

⁵ Andrew J. Bacevich and Richard H. Kohn, "Grand Army of the Republicans," *The New Republic*, December 8, 1997; Eliot A. Cohen, "Are U.S. Forces Overstretched? Civil-Military Relations," *Orbis* 41, no. 2 (Spring 1997), 179; and Feaver and Kohn, *Soldiers and Civilians*, 466.

⁶ Lance Betros, "Political Partisanship and the Military Ethic in America," *Armed Forces & Society* 27, no. 4 (Summer 2001), 514-515; Richard D. Hooker, "Soldiers of the State: Reconsidering American Civil-Military Relations," *Parameters* (Winter 2003-04), 9; and Joseph J. Collins, "Correspondence: Civil-Military Relations: How Wide is the Gap?" *International Security* 24, no. 2 (Autumn 1999), 199-203.

⁷ Jason K. Dempsey, *Our Army: Soldiers, Politics, and American Civil-Military Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Donald S. Inbody, *The Soldier Vote: War, Politics, and the Ballot in America* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016).

⁸ Collins, "Correspondence: Civil-Military Relations," 201.

⁹ Heidi A. Urben, "Party, Politics, and Deciding What's Proper: Army Officers' Attitudes After Two Long Wars," *Orbis* 58, no. 2 (June 2013), 351-368; Heidi A. Urben, "Wearing Politics on Their Sleeves? Levels of Political Activism of Active Duty Army Officers," *Armed Forces & Society* 40, no. 3 (July 2014), 568-591.

¹⁰ Feaver and Kohn, *Soldiers and Civilians*, 464.

¹¹ Richard H. Kohn, "Out of Control: The Crisis in Civil-Military Relations," *The National Interest* 35 (Spring 1994). The Air Force two-star general in question was Major General Harold Campbell who, in a speech to 250 Servicemembers and their families at a base in the Netherlands, referred to President Clinton as a "dope-smoking," "skirt-chasing," "draft-dodging" commander-in-chief. Eric Schmitt, "General to Be Disciplined for Disparaging President," *The New York Times*, June 16, 1993.

¹² David Cloud, Eric Schmitt, and Thom Shanker, "Rumsfeld Faces Growing Revolt by Retired Generals," *The New York Times*, April 13, 2006; and Martin Cook, "Revolt of the Generals: A Case Study in Professional Ethics," *Parameters* (Spring 2008), 4-15.

¹³ Richard Swain, "Reflection on an Ethic of Officership," *Parameters* (Spring 2007), 18-19.

¹⁴ Richard H. Kohn, "Erosion of Civilian Control of the Military in the United States Today," *Naval War College Review* 55, no. 3 (Summer 2002), 28.

¹⁵ Cook, "Revolt of the Generals," 7; Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider, eds., *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 303.

¹⁶ Matthew Moten, *Presidents and Their Generals: An American History of Command in War* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2014), 377; Richard H. Kohn, "General Elections: The Brass Shouldn't Do Endorsements," *The Washington Post*, September 19, 2000; James Golby, Heidi Urben, Kyle Dropp, and Peter D. Feaver, "Brass Politics: How Retired Military Officers Are Shaping Elections," *Foreign Affairs*, November 5, 2012.

¹⁷ "We, the Undersigned, Proudly Support Governor Mitt Romney as Our Nation's Next President and Commander-in-Chief," *Washington Times*, November 5, 2012.

¹⁸ Using publicly available data on campaign contributions by retired four-stars from 1977 to 2002, Golby found that Republican Presidents almost always appoint conservative senior officers, while Democratic Presidents typically appoint liberal senior officers when Democrats control the Senate. James Golby, "Duty, Honor Party? Ideology, Institutions, and the Use of Force" (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 2011).

¹⁹ Urben, "Wearing Politics on Their Sleeves?" 582-583.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 577.

²¹ Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

²² *Ibid.*, 68.

²³ Michael R. Gordon, "Powell Delivers a Resounding No on Using Limited Force in Bosnia," *The New York Times*, September 28, 1992; and Colin L. Powell, "Why Generals Get Nervous," *The New York Times*, October 8, 1992.

²⁴ Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 259-263; Kohn has written: "If civilian control is defined first by the relative influence of the military as opposed to civilians in military affairs, and second by the appropriateness of the areas in which the military exercises its influence, then it was under Colin Powell's tenure that civilian control eroded the most since the rise of the military establishment of the 1940s and 1950s." Kohn, "Out of Control."

²⁵ Cohen, "Are U.S. Forces Overstretched?" 179.

²⁶ Ole R. Holsti, "Of Chasms and Convergences: Attitudes and Beliefs of Civilians and Military Elites at the Start of a New Millennium," eds. Peter D. Feaver and Richard H. Kohn, *Soldiers and Civilians*, 86-87; and Urben, "Party, Politics, and Deciding What's Proper," 363.

²⁷ Peter D. Feaver, "The Right to Be Right: Civil-Military Relations and the Iraq Surge Decision," *International Security* 35, no. 4 (Spring 2011), 94.

²⁸ Feaver and Kohn, eds., *Soldiers and Civilians*, 465; Cook, "Revolt of the Generals," 6; Mackubin Thomas Owens, "What Military Officers Need to Know About Civil-Military Relations," *Naval War College Review* 65, no. 2 (Spring 2012), 75.

²⁹ Nielsen and Snider, eds., *American Civil-Military Relations*, 291.

³⁰ Brian Babcock-Lumish, "Uninformed, Not Uniformed? The Apolitical Myth," *Military Review* (September-October 2013), 48-56.

³¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, eds. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 87.

³² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1957), 71, 73.

³³ Owens, "What Military Officers Need to Know About Civil-Military Relations," 72.

³⁴ U.S. Department of Defense, Department of Defense Directive 1344.10, *Political Activities by Members of the Armed Forces* (Washington, DC: February 19, 2008). Often updated prior to a presidential election year, the current version was last published in February 2008.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁷ Leo Shane III, "Army Reservist Who Endorsed Ron Paul Receives Reprimand," *Stars and Stripes*, March 30, 2012.

³⁸ Tony Perry, "Marine Who Criticized Obama Will Be Dismissed from the Service," *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 2012.

³⁹ Department of Defense Directive 1344.10, 2-3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁴¹ Ibid., 5.

⁴² Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, *2016 DoD Public Affairs Guidance for Political Campaigns and Elections*, 2016.

⁴³ Ibid., 9–10.

⁴⁴ Harold D. Lasswell, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, and How* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1936).

⁴⁵ Civilian employees in the executive branch of the federal government are bound by the Hatch Act, which has similar provisions to DoDD 1344.10 and prohibits employees from engaging in certain types of political activity. “The Hatch Act: Frequently Asked Questions on Federal Employees and the Use of Social Media and Email,” U.S. Office of Special Counsel, November 2015.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ *2016 DoD Public Affairs Guidance for Political Campaigns and Elections*, 10.

⁴⁸ General (Retired) Martin Dempsey seems to make this point in his quote that leads off this introduction. By contrasting the far reach of social media against “the confines of our homes,” his implicit assertion is that while Servicemembers have the right to personal, political expression, such views should be made in private, not in a public forum.

⁴⁹ Michael G. Mullen, “From the Chairman: Military Must Stay Apolitical,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 50 (July 2008), 2–3; Michael G. Mullen, “Speech Delivered at National Defense University Commencement” (Washington, DC: June 11, 2009); Martin E. Dempsey, “Civil-Military Relations and the Profession of Arms,” *Chairman’s Corner Blog*, June 25, 2012, available at <www.dodlive.mil/index.php/2012/06/civil-military-relations-and-the-profession-of-arms/>.

⁵⁰ Feaver and Kohn, eds., *Soldiers and Civilians*, 466.

⁵¹ Jim Garamone, “Dempsey: Political Activity Erodes Trust in Military,” *Armed Forces Press Service*, August 12, 2012.

⁵² Jeffrey M. Jones, “Confidence in U.S. Institutions Still Below Historical Norms,” *Gallup*, June 15, 2015, available at <www.gallup.com/poll/183593/confidence-institutions-below-historical-norms.aspx>.

⁵³ Holsti, “Of Chasms and Convergences,” 20.

⁵⁴ Feaver and Kohn, eds., *Soldiers and Civilians*; Golby, “Duty, Honor Party?”; Jim Golby, Kyle Dropp, and Peter Feaver, “Listening to the Generals: How Military Advice Affects Public Support for the Use of Force,” Center for a New American Security, April 2013; and Urben, “Party, Politics, and Deciding What’s Proper.”

⁵⁵ Hans Noel, *Political Ideologies and Political Parties in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); and E.E. Schattschneider, *Party Government* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004).

⁵⁶ Feaver and Kohn, eds., *Soldiers and Civilians*; Holsti, “A Widening Gap Between the U.S. Military and Civilian Society”; Jason K. Dempsey, *Our Army: Soldiers, Politics, and American Civil-Military Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); and Heidi A. Urben, “Civil-Military Relations in a Time of War: Party, Politics, and the Profession of Arms” (Ph.D. dissertation, Georgetown University, 2010).

⁵⁷ To ensure valid comparisons to past surveys, responses from only National War College students and Eisenhower School students are displayed in table 2.

⁵⁸ *Military Times* episodically conducts surveys of its subscribers’ party identification and political ideology, but these are nonrandom samples with plenty of bias. Nonetheless, they have charted a drop-off in affiliation with the Republican Party within the officer corps and the military writ large over the past 10–15 years. See Urben, “Civil-Military Relations in a Time of War”; and Stephen Losey, “America’s Military: A Conservative Institution’s Uneasy Cultural Revolution,” *Military Times*, December 21, 2014.

⁵⁹ Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York: Wiley, 1960); Donald Green, Bradley Palmquist, and Eric Schickler, *Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002); and Urben, “Civil-Military Relations in a Time of War.”

⁶⁰ Philip E. Converse, “The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics,” *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David E. Apter (New York: Free Press, 1964), 206–261; and Noel, *Political Ideologies and Political Parties in America*.

⁶¹ Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 79.

⁶² Moreover, this could be evident of a social desirability bias, where military elites are temporarily suppressing their affiliation with the Republican Party for any of the aforementioned reasons, especially if military elites are more akin to the “Republican establishment.” John Sides, “Why Are So Many Democrats and Republicans Pretending to Be Independents?” *Monkey Cage Blog*, April 4, 2016; Hans Noel, “Why Can’t the G.O.P. Stop Trump?” *The Washington Post*, March 1, 2016. See also, Claire Malone, “The End of a Republican Party,” *fivethirtyeight.com*, July 18, 2016 and David Frum, “The Great Republican Revolt,” *The Atlantic*, January/February 2016.

⁶³ Maeve Duggan, “The Demographics of Social Media Users,” *Pew Research Center*, August 19, 2015, available at <www.pewinternet.org/2015/08/19/mobile-messaging-and-social-media-2015/2015-08-19-social-media-update_10/>.

⁶⁴ The correlation between a binary variable representing the 18–24-year-old demographic and having a Facebook account is weak but positive ($r = 0.24$, $p < .001$), while the correlation between the 18–24-year-old age bracket and having a LinkedIn account is moderate and negative ($r = -0.45$, $p < .001$).

⁶⁵ Henry Brady, Lee Rainie, Kay Lehman Schlozman, Aaron Smith, and Sidney Verba, “Social Media and Political Engagement,” *Pew Research Center*, October 19, 2012, available at <www.pewinternet.org/files/old-media/Files/Reports/2012/PIP_SocialMediaAndPoliticalEngagement_PDF.pdf>.

⁶⁶ See generally: Bruce E. Keith, David B. Magleby, Candice J. Nelson, Elizabeth A. Orr, Mark C. Westlye, *The Myth of the Independent Voter* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992); David B. Magleby, Candice J. Nelson, and Mark C. Westlye, “The Myth of the Independent Voter Revisited,” in *Facing the Challenge of Democracy: Explorations in the Analysis of Public Opinion and Political Participation*, eds. Paul M. Sniderman and Benjamin Highton (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011); and Michael Lewis-Beck, William Jacoby, and Helmut Norpoth, *The American Voter Revisited* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

⁶⁷ A positive correlation exists between the 18–24-year-old cohort and getting news from Facebook ($r = 0.32$, $p < .001$).

⁶⁸ Amy Mitchell, Jeffrey Gottfried, and Katerina Eva Matsa, “Millennials and Political News: Social Media—the Local TV for the Next Generation?” *Pew Research Center*, June 1, 2015, available at <www.journalism.org/2015/06/01/millennials-political-news/>.

⁶⁹ Marc Prensky was the first to use the term “digital natives” to describe those who have grown up in the digital world of new technology. In contrast, “digital immigrants” were not born into this world but try to embrace most aspects of it. See Marc Prensky, “Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants,” *On the Horizon* 9, no. 5 (October 2001).

⁷⁰ Clearly, a few responses from West Point Cadets are outliers, including the four respondents who reported having over 3,000 friends.

⁷¹ Difference of means test for average number of social media friends between West Point Cadets and NDU students was statistically significant at $p < .001$ ($t = 13.29$).

⁷² Aaron Smith, “Six New Facts about Facebook,” *Pew Research Center*, February 3, 2014, available at <www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/02/03/6-new-facts-about-facebook/>.

⁷³ It should be noted that a small percentage of each West Point Class consists of former enlisted Servicemembers with prior military experience. For the Class of 2018, 17 of the 1,223 students admitted were combat veterans. Cadets with prior military service likely have a higher proportion of their social media friends who are in the military, but this still comprises a small percentage of any given class. "Profile of Class of 2018," United States Military Academy, available at <www.westpoint.edu/oir/Class%20profiles/Class%20of%202018.pdf>.

⁷⁴ Urben, "Wearing Politics on Their Sleeves?" 577.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 573-576.

⁷⁶ Past research into Army officers' attitudes found that 93 percent of Army officers agreed with the statement that members of the military should vote, and 81 percent of Army officers stated they voted in the 2008 presidential election—far outpacing voter turnout levels for the general public. Urben, "Wearing Politics on Their Sleeves?" 575.

⁷⁷ Betros, "Political Partisanship and the Military Ethic in America," 514-515.

⁷⁸ Hooker, "Soldiers of the State: Reconsidering American Civil-Military Relations," 9.

⁷⁹ Urben, "Wearing Politics on Their Sleeves?" 577.

⁸⁰ Brady, Rainie, Schlozman, Smith, and Verba, "Social Media and Political Engagement."

⁸¹ Amy Mitchell, Jeffrey Gottfried, Jocelyn Kiley, and Katerina Eva Matsa, "Political Polarization and Media Habits," *Pew Research Center*, October 21, 2014, available at <www.journalism.org/files/2014/10/Political-Polarization-and-Media-Habits-FINAL-REPORT-7-27-15.pdf>.

⁸² See generally: Kohn, "General Elections: The Brass Shouldn't Do Endorsements"; Golby, Urben, Dropp, and Feaver, "Brass Politics: How Retired Military Officers Are Shaping Elections"; Swain, "Reflection on an Ethic of Officership"; Kohn, "Erosion of Civilian Control of the Military in the United States Today"; Cook, "Revolt of the Generals: A Case Study in Professional Ethics"; and Nielsen and Snider, eds., *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era*.

⁸³ Mitchell, Gottfried, Kiley, and Matsa, "Political Polarization and Media Habits."

⁸⁴ Urben, "Wearing Politics on Their Sleeves?" 580.

⁸⁵ 10 U.S. Code § 888 - Article 88, Contempt toward officials.

⁸⁶ Urben, *Civil-Military Relations in a Time of War*.

⁸⁷ Urben, "Party, Politics, and Deciding What's Proper," 361.

⁸⁸ Andrew J. Bacevich, "Tradition Abandoned: America's Military in a New Era," *The National Interest* 48 (Summer 1997); Kohn, "Out of Control"; and Kohn, "The Erosion of Civilian Control of the Military Today," *Naval War College Review* 40, no. 3 (June 2002). Much of the military's apparent aversion to President Clinton can be traced to the revelation during the 1992 campaign that he avoided the draft through multiple educational deferments and by joining the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) but never serving in it, along with the fact he joined in protests of the Vietnam War while overseas. A letter he wrote to the head of the University of Arkansas' ROTC Department, in which he admitted to having loathed the military, probably did not help. "The 1992 Campaign: A Letter by Clinton on His Draft Deferment: 'A War I Opposed and Despised,'" *The New York Times*, February 13, 1992.

⁸⁹ Department of Defense Directive 1344.10, 2.

⁹⁰ Department of the Army, *The United States Army Social Media Handbook*, April 2016, available at <www.army.mil/e2/rv5_downloads/socialmedia/army_social_media_handbook.pdf>; Department of the Navy, *Navy Command Leadership Social Media Handbook*, Chief of Naval Information, Fall 2012, available at <www.navy.mil/ah_online/OPSEC/docs/Policy/Navy_Social_Media_Handbook_2012.pdf>; Department of the Air Force, *Air Force Social Media Guide*, 4th edition, 2013; and Defense Media Activity, Marine Corps Production Directorate, *The U.S.M.C. Social Media Principles*, available at <www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/61/Docs/Social-Media-Handbook%20REVISED.pdf>.

About the Author

Colonel Heidi A. Urben was commissioned as a Distinguished Military Graduate through the Reserve Officers' Training Corps at the University of Notre Dame in May 1997. A career Military Intelligence Officer, her past assignment highlights include deployments to Bosnia (1999–2000) and Afghanistan (2004–2005, 2010–2011); various staff positions in the 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry) and 25th Infantry Division (Light); command of an intelligence company in Hawaii; Military Aide to Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates; Operations Officer and Executive Officer for a counterintelligence battalion at Fort George G. Meade; Assistant Professor of American Politics, Policy, and Strategy in the Department of Social Sciences at the United States

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Colonel Urben holds a BA in Government and International Studies from the University of Notre Dame; an MPM, MA, and Ph.D. in Government from Georgetown University; and an MS in National Security Strategy from the National War College. A Visiting Research Fellow in the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University, Colonel Urben's research interests include civil-military relations, mass media and politics, and public opinion. Her dissertation is titled "Civil-Military Relations in a Time of War: Party, Politics, and the Profession of Arms."

