

WOMEN IN COMBAT: THE ERADICATION OF THE U.S. MILITARY'S COMBAT EXCLUSION POLICY

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ABSTRACT

Women serving in the United States military have historically been excluded from combat operations. The Combat Exclusion Policy excluded women from assignments to units below the brigade level whose primary mission was to engage in direct combat on the ground. On January 24, 2013, the Combat Exclusion Policy was lifted and now both men and women can serve in front line combat operations. This paper explores leadership decision making leading up to the repeal of the Combat Exclusion Policy. It analyzes the process using Kingdon's Multiple Streams approach to policy change. It further focuses on the unique challenges associated with changing policy involving the United States' Armed Forces. Finally, an analysis of the effect of this significant policy change on operational military readiness is addressed.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, women in the United States have been excluded from combat operations in our nation's military engagements. The ground Combat Exclusion Policy dates to 1994 when the Pentagon stated that service members were eligible to be assigned to all positions for which they are qualified, except that women would be excluded from an assignment to units below the brigade level whose primary mission was to engage in direct combat on the ground. The policy also excluded women from assignment to certain military units whose proximity to direct combat posed risks. This limitation included assignments to units such as the Infantry, Special Forces, and Armor.

Pressure to change the combat exclusion for women grew slowly over time. In 2001, a commission headed by Lester L. Lyles, a retired Air Force general, recommended eliminating the policy, calling it a hindrance to promotion. In February 2012, a review of Pentagon policies resulted in the lifting of restrictions on 14,000 military positions, yet women were still ineligible to serve in 238,000 positions representing about one fifth of the United States Armed forces. Finally, on January 24, 2013, the Combat Exclusion Policy was lifted and now both men and women can serve in front line combat operations.

This paper explores leadership decision making leading up to the repeal of the Combat Exclusion Policy. It analyzes the process using Kingdon's[1] Multiple Streams approach to policy change. The Multiple Streams perspective explains how policies are made by national governments under conditions of ambiguity. Three streams are identified as flowing through the policy systems: problems, policies, and politics. [2] Each of these streams is predominantly separate from the other two, with its own dynamics and rules. During times identified as policy windows, the streams are coupled by policy entrepreneurs, which enhance the chances that a particular policy will be adopted by policy makers. [2]

This paper further focused on the unique challenges associated with changing policy involving the United States' Armed Forces. Finally, an analysis of the effect of this significant policy change on operational military readiness was addressed. The long-term implications of this policy change are significant and will likely result in further policy changes involving the United States military in the future.

CONCLUSION

Women serving in the United States military have historically been excluded from combat operations. The Combat Exclusion Policy excluded women from assignments to units below the brigade level whose primary mission was to engage in direct combat on the ground. On January 24, 2013, the Combat Exclusion Policy was lifted and now both men and women can serve in front line combat operations. This paper explored leadership decision making leading up to the repeal of the Combat Exclusion Policy. This paper analyzed the policy change process using Kingdon's Multiple Streams approach to policy change. It further focused on the unique challenges associated with changing policy involving the United States' Armed Forces. Finally, an analysis of the effect of this significant policy change on operational military readiness was addressed.

REFERENCES

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