Military Voting From a Combat Zone

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MILITARY VOTING FROM A COMBAT ZONE

by

Robert E. Reichner

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the men and women of all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces, especially those who are serving in combat zones.

Robert E Reichner
MILITARY VOTING FROM A COMBAT ZONE

Robert E. Reichner, M.A.
Western Michigan University, 2008

This study involves analyzing the Rational Choice Theory presented by Anthony Downs (1957) regarding the cost of information when casting a ballot. The context of the study will be under the auspices of casting a ballot according to the Uniform and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA). Of particular concern, the study will focus on uniformed members of the U.S. Armed Forces deployed overseas to Department of Defense combat zones. The policies put into place regarding political participation while serving as a military member will be addressed. Additionally, the study will employ a comparative case study of each individual service and how the policies of each branch impacts its members in terms of political participation. Outside resources such as living in a combat zone, individual state laws that govern absentee voting, and the inherent barriers to casting a ballot from the combat zone will illustrate that it is more difficult to cast a ballot from a combat zone than from the United States.

This study of the military voter in a combat zone will attempt to fill in where other recent researchers have left off in terms of the military voter. The environment of the combat zone that is inherently part of service while deployed will be brought forward to show that the military voter incurs additional costs and barriers when casting a ballot. Solutions will be proposed to the issue of ballot transmittal as well as procedural changes to make gathering information easier for service members who choose to cast a ballot.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

After World War II, the United States found itself as a superpower able to project its military might almost anywhere it needed to. Occupation of former Axis powers Germany, Italy and Japan were in full swing. Since 1950, 54 countries have hosted at least 1,000 troops. According to Dr. Tim Kane, “On average, 2.3 million U.S. troops were on duty per year from 1950–2000. Of this average, 535,000 troops (23% of all military personnel) were deployed on foreign soil” (2004). This signifies a large amount of the U.S. Military stationed outside the United States. During the timeframe from 1950 until the present, there have been 14 U.S. Presidential contests with some of them held during times of foreign conflict (Korean War, Vietnam War, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq).

Since 2001, the U.S. has been embroiled in a two-front ideological war against an enemy that wears no uniform, swears no allegiance, and has no face. Once again, the United States must choose a president, and there will be voters stationed in combat zones that will be implementing policies on day one of Inauguration Day. Although the number of service members who turn out are small in terms of potential voters, their turnout has been important to American presidents of the past, including President Harry S. Truman who said in a letter to the American Congress in 1952:

About 2,500,000 men and women in the armed forces are of voting age at the present time. Many of those in uniform are serving overseas, or in parts of the country distant from their homes. They are unable to return to
their States either to register or to vote. Yet these men and women, who are serving their country and in many cases risking their lives, deserve above all others to exercise the right to vote in this election year. At a time when these young people are defending our country and its free institutions, the least we at home can do is to make sure that they are able to enjoy the rights they are being asked to fight to preserve. (Truman Library, 2008)

President Truman spoke these words over 50 years ago; currently there are still problems with the casting of ballots by military members from overseas. His speech was during the Korean War, a war which lasted three years. Current military members, embroiled in a war going on eight years, share a few things in common with their Korean War brethren, with one of the problems being able to cast a ballot from overseas.

This thesis seeks to identify the costs and barriers that U.S. Military members face when deployed to combat zones such as Afghanistan and Iraq. This thesis will fill the gap that exists in literature in the case of military members casting a ballot from a combat zone. Although other political scientists have covered absentee voting, coverage of service members from a combat zone is missing. This lack of study is probably tied to the relative recent and new concept of 21st century American combat zone voters.

With the large number of U.S. Military members stationed overseas in such areas, often fighting large scale battles day and night, when does the service member have time to vote? How does the service member go about voting from a combat zone? Where does the service member get information about candidates? The basis for these questions comes from an interest not just in the military or politics, but how the military, the individual state in the union, and the power of technology, can improve the effectiveness of the U.S. voting system from afar especially from a combat zone.

How the U.S. military votes from combat zones is important for several reasons. First, it will offer a virtual referendum on how the policies of the current administration
sit with the members who are implementing them. Next, the 2008 U.S. presidential
election will also serve as a barometer of many pressures such as the strain of the war on
families, individual soldiers, as well as the military itself. The current military is referred
to as the “all volunteer military” which is in its first “long war” since the inception of the
all volunteer military in 1975, shortly after the end of the Vietnam War. Third, the
military voter offers a distinct look at a different person altogether.

The military voter more than likely has at least a high school education, a steady
income, and is of varying races. For the political scientist, the study of the military voter
offers a glimpse into a population that must operate under restrictions on political
participation not often seen by the average American. Some of these restrictions include
the regulation that governs attending rallies after work, the regulation that governs what
can and cannot be placed onto personal vehicles, and also extends to what the military
voter cannot do during off duty time, such as volunteer for elections, or pass out partisan
based information.

In this thesis I am employing a comparative case study review of the individual
service policies of political participation, the literature involving the lack of information
for voting purposes, as well as anecdotal evidence of life in a combat zone. The physical
and geographical barriers to voting from a combat zone will also be addressed. It is
important that a case study be involved in the process due to the fact that each individual
service may prescribe its own set of regulations involving political participation. In
addition, a comparative case study is useful in viewing each individual state’s
transmission method for ballot materials as well as the state population of military voters.

The second chapter of the thesis begins with a literature review of the transaction
costs of information. Transaction costs and barriers are defined in this chapter as well.
Anthony Downs (1957) states that once information is received the person is put more at ease and then can point more strongly towards an alternative as being the most rational. In his model for voters, Downs assumes that no false information is published by any source, and that contextual knowledge and information as previously mentioned can be treated together as information by itself (1957). This lack of information by a military voter deployed to a combat zone can be detrimental in his or her candidate choice. Downs attempts to prove that, “in an uncertain world, rational decision makers acquire only a limited amount of information before making choices,” and that “a rational citizen keeps properly well-informed by systematically exposing himself to a particular set of information sources he has chosen for this purpose” (1957, 207–208).

The literature review then progresses into what is currently known about the military voter in the discipline of political science. Political scientists such as Rachel Sondheimer, Jeremy Tiegen, R. Michael Alvarez, Thad E. Hall, and Brian F. Roberts talk about the barriers to the military voter, veteran vote choice, as well as electronic voting by military members overseas. To illustrate why the military voter matters, Kosuke Imai and Gary King wrote in 2004 an article titled, “Did Illegal Overseas Absentee Ballots Decide the 2000 U.S. Presidential Election?” This section of the literature review discusses the importance of the absentee voter in the 2000 presidential election. It addresses the fact that absentee ballots indeed offer an additional barrier to voting from afar with something as simple as a missed postmark, or someone who forgets to sign his or her envelope (resulting in the vote not being counted legally).

The literature review proceeds by talking about the cost of registering to vote which every American must do in order to cast a ballot. Registering to vote is a costly act that must be absorbed by all who wish to cast a ballot. Rosenstone and Wolfinger (1978)
explain that in some states, registration is relatively easy and in other states, it is rather onerous (23). James King (1994) analyses the political culture inside each state and shows that individual state laws which govern registration can be influenced by political culture. These state laws can affect registration, which can lead to voter turnout being affected. As one must be registered to vote, one must also have the means to be able to register to vote from afar. This usually involves the internet, a fax, or e-mail. Alvarez, Hall, and Roberts (2007) touch on the fact that increasingly, individual states have different methods of registering as well as increased transmission times due to their state laws.

Chapter III focuses on the review of the U.S. Armed Forces political participation policies and offers a framework that showcases the differences between each branch of service regarding political participation. It is important to show the difference in service regulations as this may inherently give a service member an advantage in information costs as well as political information over another member in a different service.

By showing differences and similarities in terms of political participation, the reader can appreciate the policies that a service member must navigate in order to cast a vote and also stay within guidelines designed to protect the institution of the U.S. Military. The chapter focuses on the barriers inherent to members stationed in a combat zone in regards to the service policies and details that even with policies designed to help the service member, being located inside a combat zone may hamper his or her political participation even further. This chapter also introduces the reader to the demographics of the U.S. military which are an important descriptor involving the propensity to cast a ballot. The large military age group of 20–24, and the Army rank of Specialist (E-4), is
used to give a snapshot of the largest population of military members in November 2004, the last time there was a U.S. presidential election held.

Chapter IV illustrates life in a combat zone environment from the perspective of a soldier. Literature provided by active duty and former members of the U.S. Army showcase the connectivity problems that members face from the combat zone. Along with the connectivity problem, the issue of increased mail time is investigated and shown to have a negative impact on the receipt of balloting materials by service members stationed in combat zones. Voter registration difficulties are also highlighted and a table showing each state’s current active duty military population is included. Each state also has a different method for requesting an absentee ballot which further exacerbates the problem of requesting balloting materials. A table showing the different methods of requesting balloting materials is presented to illustrate this fact. The tables taken together will show the reader at face value how hard it is to request balloting materials from a combat zone.

As military members must navigate the nebulous nature of each state’s individual rules and regulations regarding the requesting and casting of ballots, the idea and training of the Unit Voting Officer (UVO) as a tool for the service member to use is also discussed. The Unit Voting Officer may be the “go to” resident expert involving requesting and casting absentee ballots, but recent U.S. Government reports highlight that training and real world missions of each individual unit sometimes place the UVO at the bottom of the list in importance and illustrates that the daily threat of enemy action and real world life or death missions do ultimately impact the voters’ minds in deciding whether to vote or not. The daily threat of enemy action may physically inhibit the
service member to cast a vote due to the fluid chaotic movement of his or her unit to contact with the enemy, even on Election Day.

Chapter IV continues by offering solutions to the barriers and costs of voting by looking to secure methods of transferring information that the military has already had in place for years. By offering solutions to the problem, it may be possible to stimulate the works of others to enable the overpowering problem of vote transmission to almost nil. By dropping the lag time between actually mailing a ballot to the county official receiving the ballot, the military member will gain a new trust in the system he or she is protecting each and every day. From state law referendums, to easing the restriction of how many fax machines and computers connected to the internet a unit has access to, the military voter has a need to have all methods of transmission available on the day he or she is supposed to cast his or her absentee ballot. Since one military voter is not the same as another in terms of state rules of transmission, the system itself must be streamlined to accept a universal ballot without regard to where or from whom it came so long as that person is registered.

The study of the military voter will be important in the coming decades because military members will be deployed abroad for the foreseeable future. As technology continues to grow in terms of secure internet connections, so does the possibility that a military member may be able to vote online securely. It may soon be the case that military members will demand a better way to cast their vote than is offered now. The military member definitely has a stake in the outcome of elections. When a military member signs up for the military, there are many guarantees that can be written into the contract. Casting a ballot is one of the guarantees due to regulations, but having the ballot count is not guaranteed by serving in the military. Service members often carry out the
policies of the U.S. in some of the most violent places on earth, and in doing so, they need to be counted. They should not have the mail, the internet, or a state law getting in the way of casting their ballot.

President Truman, in his letter to Congress in 1952, said he had asked the American Political Science Association (APSA) on October 23, 1951 to conduct a special study of voting in the U.S. Armed Forces. He also asked the APSA to review the history of Federal and State laws and procedures on the subject of the military voter (Truman Library, 2008). The APSA then gave the President a list of ten “rights” called the Servicemen’s Bill of Voting Rights:

We believe that all servicemen of voting age, whether in the United States or overseas, should have the right:

1. To vote without registering in person.
2. To vote without paying a poll tax.
3. To vote without meeting unreasonable residence requirements.
4. To vote without meeting unreasonable literacy and educational requirements.
5. To use the Federal postcard application for a ballot.
6. To receive ballots for primary and general elections in time to vote.
7. To be protected in the free exercise of their voting rights.
8. To receive essential information concerning candidates and issues.
9. To receive essential information concerning the methods by which the right to vote may be exercised.
10. To receive essential information on the duty of “citizens in uniform” to defend our democratic institutions by using, rather than ignoring, their voting rights.

(Truman Library 2008)

The “rights” proclaimed by the APSA in 1952 form a basis for why it is imperative that service members in any location be afforded their right to vote. The year 1952 was not the first time though, that America grappled with voting rights. America, almost from the beginning of its history as a nation, has attempted to form a more perfect union by enfranchising as many different groups as possible, albeit slowly and not all at once.
White men, who did not own property, were enfranchised by 1860; women were not allowed suffrage for another century (Cooper 2004).

By 1919, with the help of Susan B. Anthony, women gained the right to vote, empowered by the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution which states, “The right of the citizens of the United States to vote shall not be abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex” (Cooper 2004, 913). Earlier, in 1870, the right to vote was afforded to slaves with passage of the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution which states, “The right of the citizens of the United States to vote shall not be abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude” (Cooper 2004, 913). Left out of these rights were the Native Americans, who, because they were not citizens, could not enjoy the 15th Amendment until the Snyder Act was passed in 1924 (Cooper 2004, 913). Even with the Amendments put into place, minorities in America did not enjoy all rights afforded to them. This was due to the practice of poll taxes, which were abolished by the 24th Amendment in 1964 (Cooper 2004). In terms of the most recent group of citizens to win their rights to vote, men and women in the age group of 18–21 won the right to vote due to passage of the 26th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1971. This was due to an inherent double standard where 18 year old men were drafted into the military, but were not allowed to vote (Cooper 2004).

America was formed by the words, “We the people, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity” (The Constitution of the United States, preamble). The Constitution, and all amendments that have been adopted since its inception in 1776, are on the minds of
military members the first day they enlist. The Enlistment Oath, which is required to be
recited by all enlistees coming into the U.S. Military, is as follows:

I, __ _, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the
Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and
domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I
will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of
the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform
Code of Military Justice. So help me God.

(Title 10 U.S.C. Part II Ch. 31 §502)

In effect, the service member submits to the Constitution of the United States, which
guarantees his or her right to vote as citizens. Jeremy Tiegen (2006), an Air Force
veteran, writes, “The citizen-soldier is the hallmark of the armed forces and military
veterans are woven into the fabric of American elections” (601). Prior to becoming a
veteran, they must first be a member of the military, either active duty or reserve.

Similarly to what Tiegen wrote, it can be said that the service member is woven into the
fabric of American elections from President Truman’s letter to Congress in 1952. He
wrote,

Our experience during and after World War II conclusively demonstrates
that unless early action is taken, hundreds of thousands of servicemen and
women of voting age will be deprived of their constitutional right to vote
this year. I am confident that all Members of Congress and all State
officials will join me in the determination that those who are on the front
line in the defense of our freedom shall have a chance to exercise one of
the great rights associated with that freedom. (Truman Library 2008)

Part of this thesis is to show that President Truman’s words are as salient today as they
were in 1952, if put into a modern context.

In 2000 and 2004, I was one of those members who had trouble voting because of
absence from the polls due to overseas military service, each time from non-combat
areas. Although both areas were remote areas by many standards (Rangoon, Burma in
2000 and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba in 2004), they were not combat zones. Much like
President Truman wrote in 1952, this thesis offers a small glimpse into the problem that military voters share in their attempt to exercise their rights as citizens. It is my opinion that it will not be the U.S. Government by itself that will better enable the military to vote; it will be a mix of military leadership, civilian leadership, and input from academic institutions that will assist the voter in casting his or her ballot from afar, and sometimes under arduous circumstances.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Voter turnout, specifically among active duty military members, is a topic in which there is little research being conducted, particularly by political scientists. Beyond the importance of capturing the empirical numbers which can be extremely difficult to do, primarily due to mobility issues, the research being conducted does not address active duty military voter turnout. The 2000 U.S. presidential election created hype among researchers in terms of vote choice, but no research has been done on voter turnout by the military (Sondheimer et al. 2008). Although there is recent research on veteran vote choice (Tiegen 2006), as of this date there are no research studies being conducted regarding active duty military voter turnout. Alvarez, Roberts, and Hall (2007) also offer a glimpse into the problem of military absentee voting that military members face, but not specifically from the combat zone.

This chapter will look at Rational Choice Theory, and specifically, the cost of voting. Also discussed in Chapter II will be barriers to voting, which are separate from the costs of voting. Rational Choice Theory focuses on the economic and political goals of each individual (Downs 1957, 6). Downs states “The political function of elections in a democracy, we assume, is to select a government...we borrow from traditional economic theory the idea of the rational consumer” (1957, 7). The voter will prefer candidate A over candidate B if candidate A maximizes his or her utility (Downs 1957).
It is important to capture the cost of voting at a basic level since military members stationed abroad, especially members stationed in combat zones, inherit costs that are not common to the normal electorate of the rest of the United States. This basic understanding of voting costs and benefits will allow the reader to better appreciate the costs of voting in a combat zone. Secondly, the chapter will assess where the discipline of political science stands on the topics of military voters and overseas voting, not only from the present, but the past as well. This will show the reader that although much has been written about the military voter, much work needs to be done, especially about military voters in combat zones, of which there is no current research being undertaken.

**Rational Choice Theory**

Rational Choice Theory (Downs 1957) will be the theoretical framework the cost benefit analysis will be built upon. The theory can simply be expressed by the following equation: \( R = (PB) + D - C \) (Aldrich 1993, 252). According to John H. Aldrich, author of the 1993 article, “Rational Choice and Turnout,” the first variable, \( R \), is the reward, utility or benefit that a citizen receives from the act of voting. The variable \( P \) is the citizen’s expectation that his or her vote will be decisive in determining the outcome of the election. The value of \( B \) is the benefit the citizen receives from his preferred candidate winning the election instead of the less preferred candidate. Variable \( D \) is the value of one’s duty as a citizen to vote. Finally, \( C \) is the cost of the act of voting to the citizen (Aldrich 1993, 251–252).

In terms of a military voter and for this thesis, I will focus on “\( C \)” of the vote calculus. I believe that by focusing on \( C \) rather than \( D \), this will allow the thesis to grow into a more comprehensive look at the trials and tribulations that military voters have
endured over time. Rather than focusing on \( D \), which is the citizens’ duty to vote, I will expand on the subject from personal experience and state that not everyone joins the U.S. military for the same reasons. It is not always about fighting the enemy, some join for college money or journeyman cards in a specific trade. Some leave home and join the military for the wrong reason. By focusing solely on “\( D \)”, this will not solve any of the problems that military members face, such as an increase cost to register from overseas, or the barrier that absentee voting inherently brings to the forefront of casting a ballot or not. People join the military for a variety of reasons, none of which the institution of the military can control. The military is built on individuals who serve for many different reasons. In my case, I originally joined the Marine Corps to leave a small town. When I reenlisted into the Army Reserve, I did so for economical reasons as well as money for college.

The cost of voting is an important aspect of the often nebulous procedure of a service member casting a ballot from an active combat zone. Costs to voting, also known as transaction costs, are defined by Aldrich as, “the costs of obtaining the information, processing it, and deciding what to do and the direct costs of registering and going to the polls” (Aldrich 1993, 248). These costs can be broken down into two categories as pronounced by Downs as (1) transferable costs, and (2) nontransferable costs (Downs 1957). Transferable costs can, by definition, be shifted from the voter onto someone else. Some examples of transferable costs are: (a) procurement costs (such as gathering, selecting, and transmitting data), (b) analysis costs (such as the costs of making the factual analysis of the data), and (c) evaluative costs that require the voter to make a connection between the data and individually specified goals. Nontransferable costs must be borne by the voter. An example of a nontransferable cost would be the actual process
of going to the polls. In the case of service members deployed overseas, a nontransferable cost may be requesting to be registered from an overseas location, and then asking for an absentee ballot from the state where he or she is currently registered (Downs 1957, 210). As with anything that bears cost, the lower the amount of investment in information involved, the easier it will be to cast a ballot. As such, each citizen must decide how much information to acquire before voting.

Separate from the costs of voting are the barriers to voting that service members must also incur. These increased voting barriers for service members are registering from afar and/or requesting an absentee ballot. These barriers to voting are not borne by ordinary citizens not serving in a combat zone. Other barriers that were once a part of the American voting populace were poll taxes, literacy tests, etc. (Beinart 1989, 154). A cost is therefore separate from a barrier in that the cost may “be paid” by the potential voter. On the other hand, the barrier may be overcome, but with additional effort may not be perceived as worth the undertaking required, or may be seen as impossible to overcome. An example of a barrier to voting would be the poll tax. The poll tax had to be paid with money to vote. This meant that if a voter had no money, he or she could not vote. An example of a barrier to a voting member of the U.S. military stationed in a combat zone would be a mail delay in receiving the ballot. The barrier for the mail delay would be the increased wait time to receive materials from county officials, as well as sending materials (the ballot) back to the originator in order to be counted. In the case of mail delays, the ballot may not arrive in time for the service member to make a choice on the ballot, or the ballot may not arrive back in time to be counted. Another barrier may be the additional cost of postage that may be required to send the ballot if no U.S. postal facilities exist where the service member is located. This may happen when a service
member needs to send his or her ballot back to be counted, but cannot due to the lack of postal facilities that will take the ballot for free and stamp it as being in the U.S. mail system.

In the case of a service member casting a ballot in favor of a certain candidate, the vote that is cast might yield the service member the benefit of potentially leaving the combat zone earlier due to a change in Federal government leadership, specifically the President. An increase in family care policies, or a simple raise in monthly base pay are also other potential benefits for voting for a particular candidate. These potential benefits are only a few of the incentives that an active duty military member may receive when casting a ballot in favor of his or her candidate.

The cost of voting as written by Anthony Downs in his manuscript, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957), is increased by the lack of uncertainty in an ever changing world full of information. Uncertainty can be viewed as a lack of sure knowledge about past, present, future, and even hypothetical events (Downs 1957, 77). The uncertainty Downs speaks of can be mitigated by information of sufficient quantity. Once the information is received, the person is put more at ease and then can point more strongly towards the most rational alternative (Downs 1957, 77–78). The information that one receives plays a role in the political decision making process and does help in formulating a choice between two or more candidates.

Information by itself is not sufficient enough to cast a vote. One must have reason, which Downs assumes all men possess. Reason, as defined by Downs, is “the process of logical thought and the principles of causal analysis” (Downs 1957, 78). In addition to the information we receive, voters are seen as having contextual knowledge as well, which Downs defines as “cognizance of basic forces relevant to some given field of
operations” (Downs 1957, 79). This would mean that a voter would have a basic grasp of the type of government that he or she is in, how the government works, and the history of voting. By combining reason and the contextual knowledge of the procedure of voting, the service member can accurately sort out the information that he or she needs to cast a ballot. The information that one receives as pointed out by Downs consists of, “data about the current developments in and the status of those variables which are the objects of contextual knowledge” (Downs 1957, 79). Information is a good that is costly to acquire and process, and it is a good that voters will need in order to vote. Having contextual knowledge by itself, like information about the voting process, is not enough to cast a vote.

If information is essential to casting a vote according to Downs’ theory, then how does one acquire information? Downs seeks to discover what political decision making is like when uncertainty exists and information is available, but only at a cost (1957). He mentions that a rational voter would seek to minimize the scarce resources needed to gather sufficient information for decision making. With that said, Downs attempts to prove that, “in an uncertain world, rational decision makers acquire only a limited amount of information before making choices,” and “a rational citizen keeps properly well-informed by systematically exposing himself to a particular set of information sources he has chosen for this purpose” (1957, 207–208).

A voter must know what his or her goals are, what other ways he or she can reach those goals, and the consequence of choosing an alternative to those goals (Downs 1957). The goals in terms of a service member who is voting from a combat zone may be to stop the war, support the war, or neither. The service member may have other goals in mind: to keep his or her family safe from terrorism, or to make sure he or she can receive an
increase in pay if he or she votes for a certain candidate. In addition, the goals of the
service member may not be immediate. This is due to the vote in a U.S. presidential
election, where the goals of the voter may not be realized immediately. Often times the
goals are realized months, or even years later. In this instance, people are hedging their
current vote on a future outcome with the hope that it will be fruitful. In terms of a
service member, he or she may have goals for when the uniform is taken off due to
fulfillment of his or her military contract. Some of these may be an increase in
Department of Veterans Affairs health benefits or an increase in disability compensation
benefits. As Downs states, “even choosing goals requires information” (1957, 208). As
an example, this information may come from the government itself in terms of pamphlets
about current veteran benefits.

In his model for voters, Downs assumes that no false information is published by
any source and that contextual knowledge and information can be treated together as
information by itself (1957). Once the information is acquired, Downs writes that voters
will then go through a series of steps to rationally vote. Each voter will then gather
information relevant to each issue he or she would like to vote upon, analyze the facts
selected to arrive at a factual conclusion about possible alternatives, and then make the
voting decision by comparing the net evaluations of each party and then weigh the
evaluations against future decisions. Finally, the citizen will actually vote or abstain from
voting based on the information gathered and analyzed pertaining to his or her own
benefit maximization. Downs also adds that during each step of the above process
besides actually voting or abstaining, information gathering may be delegated to another
person such as an expert in the particular area of question. However, this involves a cost
of getting the information from the expert to the voter. Since this transaction must be
borne by someone, adding the price of gathering information from the expert must be added to computing the costs of making the decision by the voter (Downs 1957).

As will be talked about later in this thesis, military members in a combat zone face higher costs of acquiring information leading up to Election Day than the average voter in the United States. As such, like other rational citizens in Downs’ model, they will seek to minimize their costs. Downs does not portray his model as being the real world which is often complex and is not regulated by a perfect set of variables. He offers substantive propositions that can be applicable in the real world. In terms of the topic of this thesis, I will focus on both the information that is free, and the information that is focused upon service members by the government. As Downs states, democratic systems provide their citizens with free information; information that is given to a citizen without any transferable cost. The only cost involved is the actual absorbing and possible use of the data. Some of the data may be presented by the government, political parties, professional publishers, interest groups, and citizens. In addition, various avenues of entertainment sources may provide information about policies that may be of interest to the potential voter (Downs 1957).

In regard to the free data received, providers of free information may focus on a specific type of person or a specific group of people. In terms of the government as a focused information provider, the service member often hears from the government first in relation to information that is free. Examples of the government providing free focused information may be telling the service member he or she can in fact cast a ballot according to individual rights and written regulation, where to go to cast a ballot, and the steps that he or she has to undertake to cast the ballot (Downs 1957). In the case of the U.S. government, it produces mass amounts of information that may or may not be
relevant to the focused information that the voter needs. Therefore, agencies are
developed and invented to better focus the information relevant to the voter in terms of
casting a ballot. Such agencies may be the Department of Defense (DOD), the
Department of State (DOS), the Federal Election Commission (FEC) and a variety of
others dedicated to absentee voting to citizens overseas. In addition, individual states
may offer focused information regarding registration procedures.

Even if the citizen has all of the data necessary, he or she must still reduce the
costs to a manageable flow in making a decision to vote or abstain. Downs offers
different ways to continually reduce these transaction costs by either reducing the
quantity of information the citizen is receiving (receive the same amount of information,
but reduce procurement costs by utilizing more free information), or receive the same
amount of information (by delegating the transaction costs to others by utilizing expert
advice). In terms of a service member assigned to a combat zone, it is a realistic
probability that he or she may have to resort to receiving additional free information by
reducing the procurement costs, or accepting information subsidies whenever possible, or
use both reduction techniques (Downs 1957). This is due to the remoteness of location, as
well as reduced information flow that the service member must contend with.

However, it may also be the case that due to reasons of remoteness and
information constraints, the service member must also reduce the quantity of information,
thereby reducing the resources needed to make a decision. This reduction in information
quantity may reduce the overall amount of knowledge, leading the service member to
perhaps make an incorrect decision or make a decision that is not based on an aggregate
of facts. I contend that, in fact, service members deployed to combat zones have to
reduce the quantity of information they receive due to the remoteness of their location.
The information that the military member receives may be manipulated by the media and by experts. Downs mentions that people themselves who have a utility in telling others how to vote may be seen as agitators, which are defined by Downs (1957) as voters who use scarce resources to agitate others. These agitators may be prevalent in combat zones as well due to the possibility that as an aggregate population of potential voters, the military is a microcosm of society. The agitators may also be strengthened by their location and the remoteness of a combat zone, coupled with the lack of information flow. While there, the agitators may influence others into making decisions that they may not have otherwise made had they had access to information, the same as other voters outside of a combat zone. This problem of agitators also may be inflated due to the hierarchy of the military, and the charisma that senior leaders may have over junior officers and enlisted persons. Charisma, often seen as a desirable leadership trait in the military, may ultimately influence a voter to make a decision when information flow is limited.

Another cost to voting that may apply to individual service members may be the cost that is undertaken with regard to the makeup of the Federal Government. According to McDonald and Popkin, one reason for decreased turnout may be “Federalism and the separation of powers increase the costs to voters to gather and process the information about which vote, for which candidate, for which office, on which date, matters for a given issue, and registration is neither done by the government nor compulsory” (McDonald and Popkin 2001, 970). Since voting by the military is not compulsory, McDonald and Popkin look at the costs of voting from an institutional perspective.

Using that same institutional perspective and the constraints that military members share while overseas in a combat zone away from the United States, it can be said that party contacting in person or even by phone is diminished once the military
member is stationed abroad, especially in a combat zone. With the exception of Congressional Delegation visits, colloquially known as “CODELS,” the military member in a combat zone may never be contacted by a party member, even via telephone or e-mail. Wielhouwer and Lockerbie (1994) state that “our conception of political parties is that they are political organizations, that following North (1990), have been formed in order to reduce transaction costs associated with exchanges between the electorate and the government…we see the canvass as a way of reducing the transaction costs associated with political behavior” (213). As stated by Wielhouwer and Lockerbie, the party contact is the means in which parties contact their constituents and non-constituents alike. The party then becomes one less resource that a military member has in reducing his or her transaction costs.
The State of Political Science and the Military Voter

Although military voters have not been as thoroughly studied as other groups, they have received attention as far back as the early 20th century. P. Orman Ray (1918) found that state laws in relation to military absentee voting laws were drastically different, more so than they are now. He classified the differing state laws on absentee ballot laws as either “Kansas type” or “North Dakota type” (Ray 1918, 251). These laws were based on the 1911 laws of Kansas, or the 1913 voting laws of North Dakota. Ray looked at each law, described each in detail, and showed that each law has similarities as well as disparities. His research was perhaps one of the first comprehensive attempts to place all of the different voting laws from around the United States in the same study. The article detailed what a military voter would have to do to vote via absentee ballot following his or her state’s laws. The intent of Ray’s article may have been one that would have benefited the Army. The article is descriptive in nature and does not offer any theoretical concepts, just the manner in which the military voter needed to take to cast a ballot. Ray sets the stage for more political scientists to look into the problems and differences in the state laws that govern the military voter.

It was not until 1952 that the next piece of scholarly work about the military voter would be prepared by political scientists. President Harry Truman requested the APSA to make a special study of voting in the U.S. Armed Forces (David et al. 1952). The collaboration found that many states still had variations in their laws that were probably due to state constitutions, legalities, administrative, and political situations in the respective states. The report to President Truman, and later given to Congress, also said that State and Federal officials would ultimately determine, in large part, how hard
service member voting would be due to administrative activities of those officials. Additionally, the report looked at voter information distribution, and stated that, “Very little information is available as to the effectiveness with which voting information is currently being disseminated throughout the Armed Forces” (David 1952, 517).

The report also recommended amending certain federal statutes, including removal of the term “in time of war” from the United States Code governing military voting (Serviceman’s Voting Act), to show that the military voter would be covered by laws when the nation was not at war (David 1952, 519). Perhaps the most important part of the report as it pertains to the military voter is the proposal of a Federal ballot that would allow a service member to vote when a state could not provide a ballot in time. The article also addresses the issue of how old a citizen has to be in order to vote (later set at the age of 18 due to the 26th Amendment in 1971). The committee stated that, “it can be argued with considerable force that men and women who are old enough to serve in the Armed Forces are old enough to vote and that they should be authorized to do so” (David 1952, 523).

The voter registration question brought up by both American Political Science Association articles do show that there are problems in registering to vote due to the many different sets of voter registration laws that each state has. One point that is not covered in the APSA report to President Truman is the concept that the military is constantly on the move and does not have a central location for the purpose of registering to vote. Rachel Sondheimer, a professor at the United States Military Academy (USMA) at West Point, New York, writes that regardless of where a service member is in the lifecycle of voting, residential mobility is an active part of military service. In fact, military members can expect to be moved. Between the years of 2000 and 2001, active
military members moved more frequently than non-military civilians at a rate of 37% to 15% respectively (Sondheimer et al. 2008, 15). Although moving inside the United States may be typical for non-military citizens, military personnel usually move overseas to such places as Germany, Korea, Okinawa, the United Kingdom, and even to places as remote as Dakar, Senegal or Dhaka, Bangladesh. Clearly, military service in terms of residential mobility can be perceived as a barrier to voting.

Although the “Motor Voter” bills of the late 20th century mitigated the previously cumbersome registration laws, Sondheimer points out that in addition to the movement of people in the military, it might be unwise to assume that all members of the military change their drivers licenses with each move. In addition, as stated by Sondheimer, a quick drive though almost any military post located in the United States will net a diverse set of license plates that confirms the notion that a significant proportion of active duty members maintain permanent residence in other states outside of the state where they are stationed (Sondheimer et al. 2008). The point is that many service members choose to keep their home of record in a state with state tax policies that maximize their utility benefit. Michigan, as an example, is one such state that does not tax the active duty or reserve military earnings of a service member earned either in or outside the state. While Sondheimer addresses the registration problems of the military as mobility issues that usually cannot be solved due to his or her profession of being in the military, her article does not address the additional strain on registration by the military member deployed to a combat zone.

After registration, if a military member is stationed in the United States, he or she may enjoy the liberty of either sending a ballot via U.S. mail from inside the country or going to his or her polling location where currently registered. Alvarez, Hall, and Roberts
(2007) have attempted to shed a modern light on the problems of the military voter from afar and the many problems that he or she faces when attempting to cast an absentee ballot. They look at current problems facing the military absentee voter such as the Uniformed and Overseas Citizen Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA), mail delays, and information regarding the often complex and seemingly disenfranchising laws which each state imposes on the voter in regards to casting a ballot. In their findings they wrote, “for example, the deadline for registering as a UOCAVA voter ranges from 30 days prior to an election in 21 states to absolutely no registration requirement in 15 states. Similarly, ballots have to be received prior to Election Day in several states, but can be received even after Election Day in 15 states. This variation can easily create confusion among overseas and military voting” (Alvarez et al. 2007, 5). Alvarez, Hall, and Roberts bring the potential of disenfranchisement to the forefront, offering a look into the problem of not only the federal laws which govern absentee voting, but also the inherent problem of a globalized electorate and the transmission of ballots.

Part of the crux of the problem for Alvarez, Hall, and Roberts, and one that they illustrate, is the 17th Amendment which grants the right of individual voter eligibility to the state to dictate. The Amendment reads, “The electors in each state shall have the qualifications requisite for electors of the most numerous branch of state legislature” (Alvarez et al. 2007, 9). They go on to say that in terms of changing the laws which allow for easier access by military personnel to the ballot, “it was often wars or other major military mobilizations that drove the changes that ultimately occurred in both enfranchisement and procedural improvements in military voting” (Alvarez et al. 2007, 9). Alvarez, Hall, and Roberts offer a historical institutional approach to the problem of military voting by tracing the military voter from the Revolutionary War to the current
Global War on Terrorism, illustrating that it does in fact take major conflicts to enact changes to laws and procedures regarding the military voter.

Perhaps one of the reasons for their study is the 2000 U.S. presidential election between George W. Bush and Al Gore. The election showcased the problem of counting the absentee voting population. Alvarez, Hall, and Roberts highlight the logistical problems of transferring ballots which may have a spurious relationship in regards to state laws and the actual number of ballots counted. In other words, they offer the real problem of the transit of the ballot from A (the military voter), to B (the county ballot commissioner), and show that mail delays can influence a vote being counted, or balloting materials being received by the potential voter (Alvarez et al. 2007, 31–32).

In addition to highlighting the problems of the voting laws and transit problems, Alvarez, Hall, and Roberts find that solutions are needed to combat the shortcomings of the law, as well as the transit problem. Internet voting is seen as a solution to the transfer of balloting material by mail. Alvarez, Hall, and Roberts (2007) do not see the lack of internet voting or any of the other ballot casting methods (e-mail or fax) as technological hurdles that cannot be overcome; it is the lack of trust in the technology that is the reason for not employing the internet as a means of transmission. They offer a governmental approach to correcting the problem by mentioning that, “if Congress provides the statutory guidance and funding, and state and local election officials work constructively with Federal officials, it is likely that a fully realized technological answer to the ongoing troubles in absentee voting could be developed that alleviates, if not all, then at least most of the difficulties faced by overseas and military voters” (Alvarez et al. 2007, 51).

Sondheimer (2008), along with Alvarez, Hall, and Roberts (2007), focus on the military voter outside of a combat zone. Another political scientist tackles military
voting issues from another angle, one that is worth mentioning in terms of voter turnout by former members of the military. Jeremy Tiegen writes about former members of the military and how they participate after leaving their respective service. He writes, "Military service has the capacity to inculcate members with politically relevant traits that influence political participation later in life" (Tiegen 2006, 601). Tiegen’s article is useful for this thesis in that it shows the possible effects of military service (some of which may have been in combat zones) on a service member. Tiegen notes that the military, right behind the education system, is where American men have experience. Tiegen analyzes turnout rates among military veterans from 1972 to 2004 and finds that in WWII, the Korean War, and post-conscription era veterans, previous military service positively influences turnout when compared to contemporaries without military service, while Vietnam-era veterans exhibited lower turnout rates than their non-veteran peers (2006, 601). As Tiegen divides his group of 17–27-year-old cohorts of various wars into groups, he discovers that WWII veterans and Korean War veterans are higher than their civilian counterparts of the same age who did not serve. For Vietnam Era veterans, Tiegen finds that the drop in post-service voting turnout was due to the type of war that Vietnam was, “an unpopular war waged for controversial reasons that ended ignominiously…the lack of ticker-tape parades and worse indignities could not have stimulated positive and enduring feelings of patriotism, political efficacy, or civic duty among veterans of the Vietnam War era” (Tiegen, 606). Using the socialization that veterans during the Vietnam Era were accustomed to while serving, he states that socialization is a major factor why there was a reduced turnout among the Vietnam Era cohort.
Although Tiegen does not mention combat zone voters directly, he does show that his study is important not only to study past veteran turnout rates, but that his study involving socialization might also spur investigation into the political participation among those that are currently in service during the Global War on Terrorism (2006, 606). This is important to the study of the combat zone voter in that it shows that socialization may also play an important part when he or she is actively serving the nation as well.

The preceding political scientists have showcased why the military is important to the American electorate overall. From a normative perspective it is easy to see why enfranchisement of the service member is important to be upheld. Enfranchisement of the service member stationed overseas has been an important piece of American electorate history. Due to the large numbers of Americans stationed overseas during WWII (and their triumphant return), President Truman asked the APSA to conduct a study on the health of the military voting system. By analyzing the military voting system from the mid-1940s to the early 1950s, the APSA recommendations became more salient as the United States had just gotten out of war and was embroiled in another. These recommendations not only helped the military voter, but the recommendations assisted the civilian electorate overseas as well, with something as simple as the adoption of the Federal Write-In ballot. From addressing the increased barriers that military members share due to military service, to the hypothesis that socialization is a factor in determining voter turnout amongst military veterans, political science as a discipline has done much to show that the military voter is important to not only this specific subgroup of the electorate, but that the military voter may influence and spur increased enfranchisement of the civilian living or working overseas as well.
As much as each political scientist mentioned has covered the different types of barriers to vote or types of voter, there is much work to be done in regards to military voting literature. This thesis attempts to highlight the problems that military voters face from a combat zone. The combat zone, in my opinion, is perhaps the hardest place to vote from due to not only the daily stressors of actual combat, but the increased distance between the voter and the person who counts the vote. My thesis will fill in the gap where the others left off. It will showcase the unique, additional barrier of combat service that the military voter faces, and how being assigned to a combat zone during an election will increase informational transaction costs. It is important to study the costs and barriers that are inherent to the military voter stationed in a combat zone, as well as draw from the previous political science literature that addresses some of the challenges that combat zone voters will face.

The Globalized Electorate

One of the challenges that all overseas military voters will encounter, not just those deployed to a combat zone, are absentee ballot laws that differ from state to state. This is one of the challenges of a globalized electorate. One of the most recent and most striking examples of how much an absentee ballot was worth was during the U.S. presidential election in the year 2000. It can be said that the election of 2000 was more about the year of the absentee ballot versus the year of the “hanging chad.” To show how much the absentee ballot mattered during the 2000 election, Kosuke Imai and Gary King wrote in 2004 an article titled, “Did Illegal Overseas Absentee Ballots Decide the 2000 U.S. Presidential Election?” In their study of the outcome of the 2000 election, Imai and King looked at 680 ballots that the New York Times investigated. One of the questions
posited by the *Times* was, “Were these 680 inappropriately counted ballots enough to have thrown the election to the wrong candidate?” (Imai and King 2004, 537).

The 680 votes that the *Times* found as flawed fell into several categories: 344 ballots had late, illegible, or missing postmarks; 169 ballots were received from voters who were not registered, who had failed to sign the envelope, or who had not requested a ballot; 96 ballots lacked the required signature or address of a witness; 19 were cast as two ballots, both of which were counted, and 5 ballots were received after the November 17 deadline but were counted anyway (Imai and King 2004, 538). The Imai and King article increases the saliency of not only the overseas electorate at large, but the military voter as well. In addition to showing the increased saliency of absentee votes during a U.S. presidential election, the article also highlights the costs of voting that members of the electorate must endure to have their vote counted. It addresses the fact that absentee ballots indeed offer an additional barrier to voting from afar with something as simple as a missed postmark or someone who forgets to sign his or her envelope, as that vote will not be counted legally. The hurdles to voting such as postmarks and mail delays as mentioned in the article will be addressed later in this thesis, but are important to mention now.

In finding out if Al Gore would have indeed won the election based on the improper counting of ballots, the Imai and King article stated that Gore would have won the election in certain counties by 73%, and if his manual recount of the entire state had been granted, he would have won the state by a high probability (Imai and King, 2004). They also used six months of interviews and archival research in Florida to conclude that, “the Republicans mounted a legal and public relations campaign to persuade canvassing boards in Bush strongholds to waive the state’s election laws when counting overseas
ballots... Their goal was simple; to count the maximum number of overseas ballots in counties won by Mr. Bush, particularly those with a high concentration of military voters, while seeking to disqualify overseas ballots in counties won by Vice President Gore” (Imai and King 2004, 543).

Although there definitely is a challenge in counting a globalized electorate due to the remoteness of location of Americans abroad, it is not impossible to count them. While there are estimates of at least six million Americans living abroad (Dark 2003), the challenge should not dissuade political scientists from studying the cost versus benefit analysis of those serving overseas, especially those that are serving in active combat zones. The voice in the combat zone has been heard before: there is nothing new to service members casting a ballot from a combat zone. With that said, the importance of that population being counted is becoming increasingly, albeit slowly made aware of. As stated in an article by Dark, “We’re the party’s secret weapon,” said the Executive Director of Republicans Abroad, who claimed the overseas vote was composed largely of military personnel and affluent business people” (Dark 2003, 733). In 2000, active duty military personnel abroad numbered 263,072 (Dark 2003, 734). At that time, the two largest active combat zones in terms of troop strength were Kosovo and Bosnia. Kosovo and Bosnia are nothing like the war zones the U.S. is currently engaged in. By counting the once undocumented military members as a group that is part of the globalized American electorate who are engaged in two large scale wars, political scientists can possibly challenge current theories of political participation by citizens who vote absentee.

In looking at additional costs to actually cast a ballot, whether it be from a polling station in a small or large town, or from afar using an absentee ballot (such as the Federal
Post Card Write-In ballot), Americans must be registered to vote. As stated by Steven J. Rosenstone and Raymond F. Wolfinger from the University of California, Berkeley, “Not only must citizens care enough to go to the polls, but to register they must also make an earlier expenditure of time and energy. Indeed, registration is often more difficult than voting...at a time when interest in the campaign is far from its peak” (Rosenstone & Wolfinger 1978, 22). Registering to vote is a cost that must be absorbed by all who wish to cast a ballot. Rosenstone and Wolfinger explain that in some states, registration is relatively easy and in other states it is rather onerous. To offer a more up-to-date look at registration costs, James D. King (1994) said it may be the case that political cultures dominate voter turnout over other variables.

King assessed each state in terms of its political culture and found that it is a preexisting characteristic of the state’s political environment. Also, given that registration is necessary for voter turnout, legal requirements directly affect voter registration but not turnout (King 1994). From the basic assumptions on turnout and the legalities, it can be said that political culture definitely influences registration; political and legal requirements directly influence voter registration and political culture; and voter registration directly influences voter turnout (King 1994, 124). This was mentioned in the report from the APSA to President Truman in 1952 which stated, “Most of the variation was probably due to differences in the constitutional, legal, administrative, and political situations in the respective States” (David 1952, 513). Voter turnout as professed by King is directly related to the individual state political culture as well as the legal requirements of registering. This is an important point to make since each state has different laws and ways to register members from overseas. Although it may not be hard to register to vote from afar, there may be an invisible hand deterring one from doing so and that hand may
be labeled as individual state political culture. As stated by King, “On the micro level studies incorporating political culture into the design have demonstrated links between culture and attitudes that foster individual participation, such as political efficacy and sense of duty” (King 1994, 127). This individual state political culture is more pronounced in some states than others. If King is correct about political culture influencing efficacy, then this problem may be hard to fix among military members who may shy away from such political culture by virtue of the military regulations governing such actions.

A further barrier that is worth mentioning, and that must be borne by military voters, is the state electoral structure that dominates the political map of the United States. As stated by Downs earlier, the theory of voting assumes that the decision to vote is governed by a cost return model. If returns outweigh the costs, a person votes, but if the costs are too high, the person abstains (Blank 1973). Robert Blank discusses state electoral structure and inconvenience costs in his 1973 manuscript and looks at the differing state laws that affect turnout. The state laws that affect military absentee ballot requests may be seen as the same as state laws that affect regular (non absentee) poll day voter turnout. Finding this information may be an inconvenience to voters stationed in combat zones. Blank states, “Voting itself can be inconvenient if the polls are open only a limited amount of hours. Closely related to the cost of inconvenience is the cost involved in obtaining information on how and where to register and vote” (Blank 1973, 989).

Related to turnout, Blank said, “State election laws are considered an important determinant of voting turnout” (Blank 1973, 990). In terms of a military member casting a vote from a combat zone (effectively seen as turnout), some of the information may be
hard to find and may require visits to different sources of information to find the answer on where, or even when to vote. Although the military voter in a combat zone will, by definition, not go to traditional polls, the barriers involved of actually casting a ballot from an overseas location are great. Special rules, as delegated from state institutions in how a service member physically casts a ballot are enormously widespread in differences between each state.

In terms of what we do know about the military voter, political science literature has shown that the individual voter has increased costs associated with registration, has increased barriers in relation to casting an absentee ballot, and also has increased barriers due to individual mobility issues which may interfere with turnout. Also, we know that socialization may be a variable in predicting voter turnout and choice among the veteran populace. The veteran populace, if studied correctly, may offer an insight into predicting how active duty members vote during peacetime or war time service.

What we do not know, and what this thesis will try to fill in, are the additional barriers that the combat zone voter must overcome in addition to all of the other barriers previously mentioned. In addition, this thesis will fill in the gap about increased transaction costs that come with being assigned to a combat zone during an election. By observing and studying combat zone service as a new barrier to voting, political science may become a richer field due to the new data sets and concepts that may be formed by studying the military member in combat setting which inherently have additional barriers.

Ultimately, it will be up to Congress, not political scientists, to enact changes to current laws and procedures that currently make military voting a chore to those affected by it. With political scientists like Alvarez, Hall, and Roberts at the forefront, showing the problems of the military voter, there may be some attention brought to the problem.
Downs said that nontransferable costs such as the actual process of voting may not be delegated to other people (Downs 1957, 210). The military member cannot delegate the costs and barriers of being located far away in a combat zone to anyone else. The barriers to voting from afar are greater than they are from a local polling station located in a precinct. The barriers are exacerbated by increased information costs, and military restrictions on political participation. In addition, in terms of voters located in combat zones, there are virtually no outlets for political participation. Lessened information flow and the daily and sometimes deadly rigors of daily combat operations, combined with the lack of political participation that service members must deal with, can overshadow their willingness to cast a ballot. The preceding chapters have introduced various academic theories and have explained why the military voter should be counted by political scientists. The next two chapters show the reader not only the combat zone as a barrier to the military voter already constrained in his political participation outlets by virtue of being located in a combat zone, but also provide solutions to the ballot transit problem. By showing the combat zone, coupled with military regulations that decrease political participation, another barrier that has not been addressed by political scientists will emerge to show that indeed the military voter has the potential to be disenfranchised due to military service abroad.
CHAPTER III

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN COMBAT ZONES

To cast a vote in an American election, information is just one of many pieces in the voting puzzle; one must also have the means to cast a ballot. The military society is different from civilian society in that it needs to enact rules and regulations to maintain a constant state of readiness of combat forces in order to win the nation’s battles. These military rules and regulations may sometimes infringe on the rights that the service member had prior to joining.

Military order and discipline is derived from written regulation that have been tested time and time again in the cauldron of not only the battlefield, but in everyday use among a large group of people for some time. In creating a policy for use by the members of the Armed Forces, it is important to note that there is usually a reason behind the policy. The reason is not always apparent on the surface. In terms of military policies, the reasons may be those which emphasize safety, maximize lethality against an enemy, or maintain good order and discipline.

When policies pertaining to political participation are aimed at U.S. Military members, the policies of the military are based on tradition, survival of the institution, and discipline within the ranks. As each American citizen of voting age may cast a ballot for his or her candidate, so too may military members who are also citizens. However, to diminish the perception that the military plays a part in selecting its own Commander in Chief, the U.S. Military has established rules designed to maximize political participation
while maintaining military rules designed to shield the military as an institution from partisanship.

Review of Service Policies on Political Participation

In understanding the costs and barriers associated with military policies that govern political participation by a service, it is important to form a conceptual framework to define the restrictions associated with political participation. Some of the restrictions outside of the actual physical voting process are concepts that most Americans take for granted. Americans, who are not in the military, may at their leisure, wear a campaign button, have a bumper sticker on their car or property to show their support for their candidate or political cause, attend campaign rallies or show support for a candidate by working for their campaign as a volunteer. These are forms of political participation. Military members stationed in a combat zone do not have the luxury of enjoying the many forms of political participation.

For Americans serving in the U.S. Military, there are certain restrictions on political participation that would seem alien to the general population. These restrictions can be classified as barriers to political participation and add to the already restrictive policies set forth outside of the military, such as requesting an absentee ballot from afar due to individual state rules. Some of the restrictions that can be classified for the purpose of this thesis include behavioral restrictions, uniform restrictions, informational restrictions, and candidate appearance restrictions.

The various service regulations are designed primarily to keep the military from taking up partisan or political causes. Some of the policies are individual policy orders prescribed by each service, such as the *Air Force Instruction 51-902 Political Activities*
by Members of the US Air Force (1996). Others, such as the Army regulation that prescribes political participation, are part of an overall policy, titled AR 600-20 Army Command Policy (2006). Each policy covers both active duty forces as well as reserve component forces on active duty.

In terms of both the Army National Guard and Air Force National Guard, which are under individual state governor control unless federalized, each individual policy covers personnel only when federalized under Title 10 United States Code (Department of the Army, 2006). The United States Navy, United States Marine Corps, and the United States Coast Guard each have reserve forces, but do not have forces which operate under a United States Governor as a separate entity. Although there are states that do have individual Army and Naval militias, they will not be considered part of the United States Armed Forces for the purpose of this thesis.

The Department of Defense has a stake in why the military should not overtly participate in political partisanship while on active duty. Department of Defense Directive (DODD) 1344.10 Political Activities by Members of the Armed Forces on Active Duty (2008) spells out the over arching policy of the Department of Defense that states, “In keeping with the traditional concept that members on active duty should not engage in partisan political activity, and that members not on active duty should avoid inferences that their political activities imply or appear to imply official sponsorship, approval, or endorsement, the following policy shall apply” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2008, 2).
Department of Defense Order

The Department of Defense order governing political participation begins by detailing activities that members of the military may do at their leisure, much the same as any American of eligible voting age could do. The first activity mentioned that is the most poignant is that a member may, “Register, vote, and express a personal opinion on political candidates and issues, but not as a representative of the Armed Forces” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2008, 2). This statement, as part of the overall policy, forms the basis for political participation in the U.S. Armed Forces.

In enacting this policy, the Department of Defense is distancing itself from individual voter preference while a member is in uniform, since the service member represents the DOD in uniform. In terms of political participation, some of the other important regulations in the policy are that a member may, “promote and encourage others to exercise their voting franchise, if such promotion does not constitute use of their official authority or influence to interfere with the outcome of any election”; “Join a partisan or nonpartisan political club and attend its meetings when not in uniform”; “Sign a petition for a specific legislative action or a petition to place a candidate’s name on an official election ballot, if the signing does not obligate the member to engage in partisan political activity and is done as a private citizen and not as a representative of the Armed Forces” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2008, 2).

These regulations are important to the overseas military voter because they guarantee some forms of participation even in an active combat zone. The regulations are designed to inform the potential voter that he or she, as a member of the Armed Forces may vote, even from afar. In the age of the internet, where online contributions are
becoming the norm, the regulation states that a member of the military may, "make monetary contributions to a political organization, party, or committee favoring a particular candidate or slate of candidates, subject to the limitations under section 441a of title 2, United States Code (U.S.C.) (Reference (d)); section 607 of title 18, U.S.C. (Reference (e)); and other applicable law" (U.S. Department of Defense, 2008, 3).

Because of the recent popularity of the internet as a means of political fundraising, the aforementioned portion of the regulation that deals with campaign contributions is very important due to the remoteness of the voter location in places such as Iraq or Afghanistan. Another of the more interesting regulations that covers political participation by members of the military is the provision that deals with bumper stickers; members may, "Display a political bumper sticker on the member’s private vehicle" (U.S. Department of Defense, 2008, 3). This is an interesting provision in that it deals primarily with personal vehicles, but does not cover military vehicles which have been known to be personalized by service members during war time.

Perhaps the most popular and most traditional form of political participation, which is the easiest due to the fact that almost anyone can participate, is the act of attending a rally of a particular candidate. This type of political participation is also covered by Department of Defense policy that states members may, "attend partisan and nonpartisan political fundraising activities, meetings, rallies, debates, conventions, or activities as a spectator when not in uniform and when no inference or appearance of official sponsorship, approval, or endorsement can reasonably be drawn" (U.S. Department of Defense, 2008, 3). As the policy is written, to participate in politics on the individual level like a civilian, all a military member must do is not wear his or her
uniform. Additionally, military members may not state that they are participating on behalf of the U.S. Armed Forces.

However, not oddly enough, and as one who is not familiar with the military can imagine, the military has more restrictions on what a service member may not do, rather than what he or she is permitted to do. Some of the provisions that I shall mention specifically deal with participation from a remote area; one of which deals specifically with military installations abroad such as any base, port or even a base located in a combat zone such as a Forward Operating Base, colloquially known as a “FOB.” As written in the regulation, a member may not “display a partisan political sign, poster, banner, or similar device visible to the public at one’s residence on a military installation, even if that residence is part of a privatized housing development” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2008, 4). This restriction would seem to translate to an active combat zone where military members actively “reside,” when in reality they are deployed. However, for the purpose of the regulation, I argue that the term military installation would also translate into anywhere there are sleeping quarters for military personnel in a combat zone, however remote or spartan the location may be. Military members may be conditioned by their surroundings into not thinking about Election Day approaching due to the operational tempo of the combat zone, and policies that prohibit political signs, placards, yard signs and banners that are commonplace in the United States during an election season. As an example, I was stationed at the Naval Station in Guantanamo Bay Cuba, where it was totally devoid of political signs, and banners due to it being a military installation. Also, due to operational security reasons, I, along with other military members were not allowed to talk about politics on the job inside the detention facility to
maintain operational security, as well as to keep the detainee populace out of the information loop as much as possible.

In keeping with the traditions of the services being able to adopt their own provisions, each individual service may enact service specific orders that prohibit political activity by members of that particular service, in addition to Department of Defense regulations. The Department of Defense directive defines active duty as “full-time duty in the active military service of the United States regardless of duration or purpose. Active duty includes full-time training duty; annual training duty; and attendance, while in the active military service, at a school designated as a Service school by law or by the Secretary concerned. For purposes of this directive only, active duty also includes full-time National Guard duty” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2008, 12). This is to establish a set of rules by which each of the services can govern their individual members according to their specific mission and culture.

The current Department of Defense Regulation that governs political participation was published February 19, 2008, one month into the U.S. presidential primary season. At 15 pages, it is broad in stroke to include definitions of active duty, reserve duty, as well as regulations dealing with members of the Armed Forces who want to run for elected office. The regulation does not govern candidate appearances by U.S. Presidential nominees. At the end of the regulation it states, “This is a lawful general regulation. Violations of paragraphs 4.1. through 4.5. of this Directive by persons subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice are punishable under Article 92, ‘Failure to Obey Order or Regulation’” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2008, 10). Sections 4.1 through 4.5 as stated in the sentence dealing with punishment are specifically what the members may and may not do in terms of political participation. The provision for punishment under
the Uniformed Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) at the end of the document is commonplace among military orders. It establishes that if any regulation in the policy is broken, then that member may be charged by his or her Commanding Officer. Such punishment may range from a reduction in pay, restriction to quarters, or both depending on the severity of the violation as stated in the UCMJ. The punishments serve as incentives to follow the rules as stated in the publication.

The Individual Service Orders

Currently, each branch of the Armed Forces may adopt service-specific regulations to add to the Department of Defense Regulation. Each of the services, with the notable exception of the U.S. Navy, has their own specific regulation about political participation among members of the U.S. Armed Forces; the service with the most recent publication is the United States Coast Guard. The Coast Guard last published a regulation dealing with political participation on January 16, 2008 (U.S. Coast Guard, 2008). For the branches that have them, the manuals governing political participation are generally the same. The manuals contain the basic regulations governing political participation regarding service, as written in the Department of Defense Regulation, albeit with minor modifications for clarity.

In reviewing each service’s regulation dealing with political participation, I found that the United States Coast Guard message released on January 16, 2008 was the most encompassing and most in-depth of all of the four Armed Forces which have current individual service regulations governing political participation. This may partly be due to the fact that the U.S. Coast Guard falls under the auspices of the Department of Homeland Security (formerly under the Department of Transportation until 2003); both
civilian agencies, both covered under the Hatch Act of 1942. The Hatch Act of 1942, “restricts the political activity of executive branch employees of the federal government, District of Columbia government and some state and local employees who work in connection with federally funded programs” (U.S. Office of Special Counsel, 2007). However, the U.S. Military is not covered under the Hatch Act, and this would include the U.S. Coast Guard.

The U.S. Coast Guard, under Title 14 USC, Part I, Chapter 1 states, “The Coast Guard as established January 28, 1915, shall be a military service and a branch of the armed forces of the United States at all times. The Coast Guard shall be a service in the Department of Homeland Security, except when operating as a service in the Navy” (Title 14 USC Part I § 1). With the Coast Guard having the most restrictive policies, this may be due to the restrictive nature of the Hatch Act, especially pertaining to candidate appearances. However, according to a United States Office of Special Counsel advisory opinion dated August 9, 2004, the governing body and enforcer of the Hatch Act stated, “[The Hatch Act] does not govern the actions of an individual who is running for partisan elective office, it does regulate the political activity of federal executive branch employees and District of Columbia government employees...Political activity is defined as ‘an activity directed toward the success or failure of a political party, candidate for partisan political office, or partisan political group.’ 5 C.F.R. §734.101.” (U.S. Office of Special Counsel, 2004, 1). The opinion paper then offers a reason on why perhaps the current U.S. Coast Guard regulation is the most restrictive in candidate participation by giving examples of activities prohibited. The opinion states,

Examples of activities prohibited by the preceding restrictions include the following: authorizing the use of a federal building or office as described above for campaign activities, such as town hall meetings, rallies, parades,
speeches, fundraisers, press conferences, “photo ops” or meet and greets; attending or planning such campaign events while on duty or in a federal building or office; or distributing campaign literature or wearing campaign-related items while on duty or in a federal building or office.

(U.S. Office of Special Counsel, 2004, 1)

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is the parent agency to the U.S. Coast Guard, who operates as a service to DHS. The DHS may have imposed a portion of Hatch Act rules onto members of the U.S. Coast Guard uniformed members. This decision to impose some Hatch Act provisions onto the Coast Guard which is part of the military at all times, is perhaps to bring the total Coast Guard in line with the parent agency by exercising its right to impose its own rules according to its mission and culture.

Both the Army and Marine Corps have a clause in their policies which state, “Some activities not expressly prohibited may be contrary to the spirit and intent of the policy. In determining whether an activity violates the traditional concept that military personnel should not engage in partisan political activity, rules of reason and common sense will apply” (Department of the Army, 2006, 89). Interestingly, the United States Navy had a regulation at one time, but later cancelled the regulation that dealt with political participation by its members, and instead adopted the Department of Defense Regulation as the standard it would use for the reason that it “served its purpose” (Department of the Navy, 1997).

In terms of looking at each service on its own in regards to a framework that shows each restriction previously mentioned it is important to define each restriction as its own separate concept. By doing this, it will be easier for the reader to see that there are in fact regulatory variations among the services that may influence participation in one service versus another. The regulatory differences may also indicate additional
restrictions for service members in terms of geography of a combat zone, since the Coast
Guard operates primarily near large bodies of water such as the Persian Gulf, and the
Army operates away from large bodies of water such as Afghanistan. Table 1 illustrates
certain restrictions that are pertinent to the topic of military voters in a combat zone.

Table 1

Restrictions on Political Behavior, by Service and the Department of Defense (DOD)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Restrictions</th>
<th>Air Force</th>
<th>Army</th>
<th>Marines</th>
<th>Navy</th>
<th>Coast Guard</th>
<th>DOD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


To begin, all of the policies involve restrictions while wearing the uniform of the
United States Armed Forces. If a member does not wear a uniform, then that policy may
not apply to them. It is assumed that a military uniform of some kind, whether it is a
combat uniform or a physical fitness uniform, will be worn at all times in a combat zone.
The first restriction that will be talked about will be behavioral restrictions. Behavioral
restrictions, when they apply to service members in a combat zone, are those restrictions
that prevent a service member from participating in rallies, partisan club meetings
(private or public), and distribution of campaign material by individual members. Each
service prohibits members from participating in rallies, conventions, and partisan club
membership in uniform. By enacting these restrictions, the service member is denied
access to potential information that a non-military voter in the United States has access to.

The next restriction to consider as part of this framework is the uniform restrictions. Each of the service policies has restrictions while wearing the uniform of the United States Armed Forces. As stated in each service regulation, a member of the military in uniform may not wear a campaign button off or on duty. As one example of all of the service restrictions that are consistent among each other, the Air Force Regulation states that, "a member may display a political sticker on the member's private vehicle, or wear a political button when not in uniform and not on duty" (Department of the Air Force, 1996, 3). The term, "on duty" may mean the whole day in some areas. A service member may be considered on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week in a combat zone. Additionally, commanders may prescribe a uniform of civilian clothes to be the uniform of the day. Hence, a member of the military required to wear civilian clothes in the execution of his or her duties in a combat zone, such as working at an American Embassy, may not wear a campaign button or any other partisan item in civilian clothes.

The policy states a member may wear a campaign button or other partisan items while off duty and in civilian clothes, although in a combat zone this would be extremely rare for a typical service member. Increasingly popular items such as partisan tee-shirts, since they would only be worn in civilian clothes and off duty, may potentially be worn by service members in a combat zone such as Iraq, but once again this would be extremely rare. If they are worn by members of the military in an off duty status this would lessen information costs to the military voters in the theatre of operation. A service member stationed in Afghanistan or Iraq would have to wait for a rest and recuperation.
(R & R) leave of approximately two weeks or a four day pass to a non-volatile region in the area such as Qatar to wear civilian clothes for any length of time.

Informational restrictions are paramount to the costs of voting. Information is required to cast a vote. The Coast Guard message released on January 16, 2008 covers not only restrictions on political participation by uniformed members of the Coast Guard, but also goes in to detail regarding official support of political candidates. Although the other service regulations (Army, Marine Corps, and Air Force) do not specifically commit to restricting information dissemination by its members, there is a provision which can be interpreted as prohibiting dissemination of information of a partisan nature. The Army policy which mimics the other regulations states in part, “In determining whether an activity violates the traditional concept that military personnel should not engage in partisan political activity, rules of reason and common sense will apply. Any activity that could be viewed as associating the Department of the Army directly or indirectly with a partisan political cause or candidate will be avoided” (Department of the Army, 2006, 89).

In terms of restrictions not seen in the other regulations, there are some additions in the Coast Guard regulation that specifically tackle individual units and their ability to disseminate partisan information. In part it states, “Unit magazines, newsletters and newspapers shall not carry partisan discussions, cartoons, editorials, political advertisements, or commentaries pertaining to partisan or candidate issues” (U.S. Coast Guard, 2008). This restriction is more in depth than the other services, in that it specifically states that no mention of political partisan material in any form is allowed in articles that are designed to disseminate information to members of a unit. This would seem to prohibit minor political statements such as the ever popular political cartoon,
which is commonplace in newspapers inside the United States. This specific prohibition would seem contrary to what Anthony Downs states, in that “democratic systems provide their citizens with free information; which is given to a citizen without any transferable cost. The only cost involved is the actual absorbing and possible use of the data” (Downs 1957, 222–223). A related provision promulgated by the Coast Guard in the most recent message specifically states that, “commanding officers shall prohibit distribution of campaign material by anyone on or in any CG property, facility, or unit” (U.S. Coast Guard, 2008).

When these policies are applied to a military member assigned to a combat zone, it is a realistic probability that the military member may have to receive additional free information by reducing the procurement costs or accept subsidies whenever possible. This free information is different than the restrictive information flow of the military. The military, due to operational necessity in terms of fighting an elusive enemy, may be required to restrict the flow of information from time to time. In some cases, national security measures such as classifying the information coming in and out as secret or above are necessary to ensure military success. This is not to say that all information that comes from the military is classified in practice. However, by limiting information coming both in and out of the military institution, the commanders of military units are granted a tool that they may use to ensure success. This information flow may seem arcane and unnecessary to the average American, and may be construed by military outsiders as censorship. However, rules and concepts that are used outside the military are not the same as ones that are used inside the military. As such, military members may also try other techniques of receiving information, such as the internet (Downs, 1957).
Candidate restrictions on visiting members to the military in a combat zone are mentioned in the regulations promulgated by all of the services, to include the broad stroke Department of Defense regulation regarding political participation. However, in the Coast Guard message released on January 16, 2008, there are restrictions on the use of government facilities (vessels or buildings) when a candidate for office visits Coast Guard units. This prohibition is not germane to the Coast Guard only, as each of the services that have a regulation states the same about their facilities as well.

The Coast Guard message specifically includes any and all types of gatherings as prohibited including assemblies, meetings, rallies, and press conferences by candidates, either incumbent or challenger. It further states that Commanding Officers will inform candidates ahead of time that media representatives cannot accompany the visitor to the Coast Guard facility (U.S. Coast Guard, 2008). This barrier to political participation is possibly one of the most far reaching in terms of a specific service; it effectively prohibits participation in rallies that otherwise may be attended by service members. In the case of the Coast Guard overseas, no candidate seeking office will be able to visit any Coast Guard facility, and in terms of the various service regulations which state that some activities not expressly prohibited may be contrary to the spirit and intent of the policy other services may do the same thing. This restriction on the part of the Coast Guard may effectively change other service regulations and ban similar campaigning stops by candidates on military bases everywhere, let alone a combat zone. This prohibition is a barrier to participation that is relatively germane to military members, but more specifically to those military members deployed to a combat zone.

With the upcoming 2008 U.S. presidential general election, according to the Coast Guard regulation, no candidate from any party may visit the troops solely to solicit
votes or to attend partisan rallies located in Iraq or Afghanistan. The regulation does not specifically prohibit the candidates from visiting troops as part of their official duties as a Senator for example, but the candidates may not solicit votes or hold large partisan rallies or have TV spots with military members as a backdrop. Would this restriction mean that if a U.S. Presidential candidate is not an office holder of the United States government, and he or she were a candidate for president, that the candidate could not visit the troops in combat because he or she is not conducting official U.S. Government business? With Iraq and Afghanistan being a part of the issues that may affect American voters, military members deployed to combat zones will not enjoy the large partisan rallies or hold a get together such as town hall meetings that many Americans in the United States have enjoyed for years and often expect. This further exacerbates the lack of interactivity on issues that the military voter can understand firsthand compared to other Americans. And this, in turn, may dwindle the information flow that a service member may have had, had he or she not been deployed in a combat zone. As stated by each service regulation, as well as the over arching regulation by the Department of Defense, military members may participate in general elections so long as they do not do so in an official capacity of the U.S. Armed Forces. The restrictions set forth in policy are designed by the military institution to continuously shield it from the perception that it influences and endorses certain political and partisan issues. The tradition of a non-partisan military in terms of political participation is now a rule, punishable under the UCMJ.

As these regulations extend to long term combat zones, if taken as an aggregate, they effectively limit political participation by members of the military to almost nil due to one overarching simple reason: the wearing of their respective uniforms. Although I do not place uniforms in a vacuum by themselves as the singular reason why military
members cannot participate in electoral activities, it is one that is worth mentioning and is practical. The regulations as currently written specifically state military uniforms must not be worn while participating in political activity. Uniforms are a natural requirement of a military engaged in both offensive and defensive operations, which for the most part are almost a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week timeframe. Even something as simple as wearing a candidate button is not allowed as a member of the military in a combat zone like Iraq or Afghanistan. Also, unlike inside the United States, a member of the military cannot leave the fire base to attend political rallies or attend partisan clubs. The service member cannot drive a personal vehicle adorned with political stickers on it, due not only to the remoteness of where he or she is located, but the constant threat of terrorism and general state of war against the United States military in a combat zone. In effect, the base is the place that he or she calls home. Therefore, given the uniform restrictions inherent to a combat zone and the restrictive military policies that govern political participation, opportunity for political participation is reduced for eligible voters in a combat zone. Although the other service regulations do not specifically prohibit distribution of partisan material by service members, they state that any actions that are not specifically covered by the regulation will be avoided. In keeping with the spirit of their respective regulations, both the Army and Marine Corps, two of the largest forces in Afghanistan and Iraq, probably do not allow the distribution of campaign material by their members (Department of the Navy, Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 1993).

By prohibiting political participation due to the location of the members of the U.S. Armed Forces, the transaction costs as well as the barriers are increased to members of the military in a combat zone. Put together with uniform restrictions, behavioral
restrictions, and candidate restrictions, the service member is virtually cut off from traditional methods of information that Americans have enjoyed as long as there have been elections. This lack of information flow, candidate appearances, and information that is not available to them may place the service member in a state of zero to low information flow. By combining the aforementioned restrictions, the sterility of partisan signs and information on U.S. bases, and stress of daily life in a combat zone, Americans stationed in combat zones have greater costs and barriers to voting than their stateside American counterparts. For these reasons, it is important to understand how the demographics of the troops stationed in combat zones differ and compare to those of the greater American public.

U.S. Troop Demographics

While looking at the policies of the military and the reasons for limiting political participation, it is also important to view the military as an institution made up of people who share a common thread of identity. In contrast, American society is based on individual identities which are seen as more important than group identities. This identity is what makes studying the electorate of the military voter so fascinating. The people who make up the military are of varying backgrounds (educational level, age, as well as race). The military as a whole, at any one time, is a snapshot of the microcosm of the nation. Members of the military are employed in a variety of positions of trust and also carry out specific jobs, in addition to being basic trained riflemen. Some of the jobs they perform include supply clerk, court reporter, infantryman, aircrew member, pilot and submariner to name a few. Some of the people who make up the military joined for love of country, family tradition, or college educational benefits.
Historically speaking, since 1950, 22% of all U.S. servicemen on average were stationed on foreign soil during 1950–2000 (Kane 2004). In terms of United States troop levels in Iraq, as of 2004, there were approximately 130,000 U.S. troops deployed in Iraq. In Afghanistan in 2004, there were approximately 16,000 U.S. troops stationed in the country. For the last presidential election in 2004, the approximate total of U.S. troops in both theatres of operation was close to 150,000 potential voters out of approximately 1,426,836 troops stationed in both the United States and abroad; that equates to approximately 9.5% (Kane 2004). To be sure, not every service member in the 9.5% is an eligible voter; some are not U.S. citizens. Likewise, not every service member is registered to vote.

To illustrate just how large the electorate of U.S. military has become since 1950, Germany alone for nearly four decades has been host to one-quarter of a million troops according to Kane (2004). As relations hardened between the east and the west, Germany became the primary potential battleground for World War III and U.S. troop levels tripled from 1950 to 1953. In other places of the world such as Asia, the war in Vietnam brought hundreds of thousands of American military personnel from all branches to many countries in Southeast Asia. Troop levels in Vietnam proper accelerated sharply in 1962 and peaked in 1968 at over 500,000 servicemen. The situation was similar in Taiwan, with a sudden buildup from 811 to 4,174 troops in 1954, peaking in 1958 at 19,000 and then stabilizing between 4,000 and 10,000 until 1977 (Kane 2004). It was usually the buildup to war, the war itself, and then the cessation of hostilities which brought spikes in overseas troop increases.

The numbers from 1950 and onward suggest that a growing troop presence overseas has in turn sparked more legislation designed to enfranchise voters who are also
stationed abroad. These numbers lend credence to the notion that legislation needs to be created by the states as well as the federal government to account and ensure everyone had the chance to cast a ballot from afar given the ever growing size of a global U.S. electorate. The legislation that was eventually passed (i.e., the UOCAVA) ensured that previously disenfranchised members were given a voice to be heard in terms of casting a ballot while serving overseas. The policies were created due to older policies falling out of usefulness in terms of gains in technology that streamlined the process.

For the purposes of the demographics of this topic, I will exclude those serving in DOD designated combat zones outside of Iraq and Afghanistan as stated later in Chapter IV. The reasoning for the exclusion of U.S. service members in the military that are currently stationed in other combat zones (Kosovo and other areas of the Middle East) is paramount to the argument that military members stationed in combat zones such as Iraq and Afghanistan have higher information costs and barriers compared to other U.S. citizens. Kosovo and other combat zones will be excluded due to the relatively low numbers of personnel engaged in those areas, as well as the lack of violence that members face in those areas. To include Kosovo and other Middle Eastern combat zone voters would diminish the barriers to voting that personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan face every day (the lack of connectivity as well as uniform restrictions and the daily threat of enemy action).

While I will not concede that the other combat zones are devoid of enemy action—they are after all designated combat zones—the threat and connectivity problems are not as numerous as in locations such as Afghanistan or Iraq. Afghanistan and Iraq both have a fragile, almost nonexistent infrastructures, are increasingly more violent, and are geographically more separated than other designated combat zones. These reasons
increase the barriers to military voters. I also exclude other members of the military stationed in the U.S. and overseas, and also those stationed afloat in designated combat zones. Although members of the military stationed afloat in the waters off of Iraq have increased barriers due to their positions aboard vessels, they are excluded as their combat zone is based on geographic coordinates which may be circumvented, effectively placing them in international waters outside of designated combat zones.

In addition to determining the area where the U.S. Military combat zone voter is located, it is important to understand the demographic of the U.S. Military in general. The following statistics are mentioned to give a prediction of how the military voter in a combat zone might vote in 2008 or beyond, depending on individual circumstances. Statistics taken from the 2004 Department of Defense publication titled, *Population Representation in the Military Services* (U.S. Department of Defense, 2004) are used to explain the demographics of the U.S. Military as a whole. Any one of the service members noted herein may have been transferred in or out of Iraq or Afghanistan at any one time during 2004, the last presidential election cycle.

Some of the most important demographics that are used to determine possible voter turnout are age, gender, and education. Education, according to Brady, Verba and Schlozman “is important for some political activities because it enhances political and civic skills” (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman 1995, 271). The Department of Defense in 2004 had over 1,184,102 personnel on active duty. The largest age group in the Department of Defense (excluding the U.S. Coast Guard) is the 20–24 age group that has 461,930 men and women and makes up 39.01% of the force. The next largest age group is the 25–29 age group that has 243,475 men and women, approximately 20.56% of the force. Both age groups total over 50% of the force at 59.57% (U.S. Department of
Defense, 2004). From these statistics we can posit that the Department of Defense, as a whole, is a young force. Traditionally, younger people tend not to vote as much as their older counterparts (McDonald and Popkin 2001). As a young force only 41.9% of the total population in the younger age group (18–24) voted compared to 69.7% of the total population in the age group of 55–64 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2004).

In terms of gender within the Department of Defense (continuing to exclude the U.S. Coast Guard), the males are not surprisingly the majority of the force. The 2004 Department of Defense number of males on active duty was 1,009,333 of which 387,624 were in the 20–24 age group (38.04%) and 206,239 were in the 25–29 age group (20.43%). In terms of females, 174,769 females were on active duty of which 74,306 were in the 20–24 age group (42.52%) and 37,236 females were in the 25–29 age group (21.31%) (U.S. Department of Defense, 2004). These numbers signify the number of males and females of the active component. “In a closely divided nation, even small shifts in the political choices of men and women can have significant electoral consequences (Kaufmann 2006, 447). Gender, stated as sexual differences by Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) in their book titled, Who Votes? does not play a large role in turnout among men and women up to approximately age forty based on data from 1972. After age forty however, each group begins to diverge and later splits away from each other. In 2004, the gender gap was at an all time low (Kaufmann 2006). Kaufmann writes, “The gender gap traditionally is understood as a function of male-female differences in public opinion and issue priorities” (448).

Education is a socioeconomic identifier of the propensity to vote; the more education one has, the higher the probability that one will vote. Political Scientist Robert A. Jackson states that “education exerts a powerful influence on civic duty, internal
efficacy, external efficacy, and registration status (Jackson 1995, 285). Education, according to Brady, Verba and Schlozman “is important for some political activities because it enhances political and civic skills” (Brady, et al. 1995, 271). In terms of a combined high school diploma or GED certificates in 2004, the Department of Defense total was 1,175,614 out of 1,184,102 (U.S. Department of Defense, 2004). This figure also takes into account personnel with civilian college experience which is defined by the Department of Defense as, “attendance, full or part-time, in any 2 or 4-year college or university in a class for which credit may be applied toward a degree” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2004). According to the statistic which is rather vague, all a person would need is just one semester of college to qualify to be counted as having college experience. There is no data set for personnel in the Department of Defense for those that have college degrees. The Officer Corps is required to have at least a baccalaureate degree in any discipline to become an officer, with some rare exceptions.

In determining who actually votes, according to a DOD report that states the military rank breakdown of the U.S. Armed Forces, the amount of personnel in the grade of E-4 in the Army (the branch with the greatest number of troops deployed in both Iraq and Afghanistan) during the period ending November 30, 2004 was 116,665 out of 412,895 total enlisted Army personnel at that time (U.S. Department of Defense, 2004). The period of November 2004 is used to give a snapshot of the force during an election month as well as an election year. Based on this data, we can determine that 28.25% of the total Army enlisted force fell into the 20–24 age group. This population of approximately 116,665 (both male and female) will be used to represent the age group of 20–24, since the grade of E-4 in the Army can be attained in as little as two years, assuming all 116,665 enlisted at age 18.
In using the grade of E-4, precise numbers are not available on enlisted members in Afghanistan and Iraq due to the ever changing and fluid population of the military operations in these two countries. In fact, the precise number may be classified. Therefore, it will be necessary to reconstruct approximate numbers of military members to offer an age group to measure. We will use the U.S. Army rank of Specialist (abbreviated as SPC), the 4th enlisted rank in the U.S. Army (E-4), just above the rank Private First Class. As stated before, the estimated strength of the U.S. Military in Afghanistan and Iraq in 2004 was 150,000 personnel of all ranks and grades from Private through General. Utilizing the statistic of total U.S. enlisted Armed Forces in 2004 to be 1,179,570, the approximate percentage of military personnel in the combat zones of Afghanistan and Iraq, based on the number of 150,000 in 2004 was 7.8%. Considering that 28.25% of Army personnel held the SPC rank, the approximate amount of Specialists in both combat zones out of 150,000 total troops is 42,000. From this we will assume there were 42,000 members of the military in both combat zones from the Army aged 20–24 utilizing November 2004 data, which is used due to the month and year that the 2004 presidential election was held (U.S. Department of Defense, 2004).

The U.S. Census data from the 2004 Presidential election shows that 41.9% of 18–24 year olds voted out of the total U.S. civilian population of 27,808,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Using our previous numbers and assuming that participation percentages are consistent between the military and civilian population, approximately 18,000 Specialists would have been expected to vote from the combat zone of Afghanistan and Iraq out of the estimated total population of 42,000 Specialists in both combat zones within the 20–24 age group. Assuming once again that soldiers at the rank of Specialist are at least a high school graduate or a GED holder, the number of SPCs that
would have voted would jump to 56.4% of 42,000, or approximately 24,000—an additional 6,000 soldiers. Those 6,000 ballots, if spread out over at least half of the 50 states may have given an advantage to either candidate. More than likely this group would have voted for Bush because statistically, of all voters, those who had at least a H.S. education voted for Bush 52% to 47%, thereby showing that based on education alone, and combined with military service, Bush would have retained that increase in votes (CNN, 2005).

Based on exit polls conducted by CNN during the 2004 U.S. presidential election; in the age group of 18–29, 45% voted for George W. Bush (R) while 54% voted for John Kerry (D) (CNN, 2005). The total number of respondents was 13,660. Based on this percentage in the variable of age group alone, our age group of Specialists (approximately 18,000) may have voted the following way: 9,700 for John Kerry and 8,100 for George W. Bush. However, if asked by the poll, “Have you ever served in the military?” and if the answer was, “Yes,” the percentages shifted to Bush with 57% and Kerry with 40%. If the respondent answered, “No,” the percentage was less for Bush at 48% compared to Kerry at 51% (CNN 2005). The preceding exit poll statistics show that if one is in the military or has ever served in the military (may currently be serving) in 2004 he or she voted overwhelmingly for George W. Bush. If the respondents had not been in the military, then the percentage was closer to almost 50/50 for each candidate (CNN 2005). Clearly, based on military service alone, voters chose a candidate who never went to war over one that had served in the Vietnam War. This would have remained constant among education alone as well, as previously stated.

In terms of predicting the outcome of the 2008 U.S. presidential election, using 2004 election exit poll data, it may be the case that those who have served in the military
or are currently serving, may be somewhat more likely to vote for a Republican candidate. Using the 2004 exit poll data, if age is a factor alone, then a Democratic candidate may be preferred. What is not certain is how the current President George W. Bush’s approval rating will influence Republican voters or military voters who may be on their third, fourth, or perhaps even fifth tour of duty in either combat zone. After 7 years of war, the military voters deployed in a combat zone may vote with their families in mind, and elect a Democrat for President (who has never served in the military) over a Republican candidate (who served honorably during the Vietnam War).

In looking at our statistics to locate the age group of 18 to 24 year old Specialists who vote, the notion that 18,000 Specialists voted may be too high considering the costs and barriers to voting for those in Iraq and Afghanistan. While no formula has been devised to predict how many service members vote from combat zones compared to those not in a combat zone, given the increase of costs and barriers in the combat zone, it can be said that if one has higher costs and barriers to voting, then they will possibly not register at all, or abstain altogether if registered. This may drop our number of approximately 18,000 down even further. Since the restrictions set forth may cause our reconstructed number to go down from 18,000, it is only proper for the political science community to delve deeper into this possible problem, and offer solutions based on empirical research. While the combat zone may be hazardous, it is important to capture these members of the American electorate as they are important to the United States, and offer the hard thread of the nation that binds us together on so many issues.

When political participation is stifled by regulations designed to protect the military institution, the voter who is a part of that institution will suffer to varying degrees. The military voter in a combat zone such as Afghanistan or Iraq will suffer more
than a military voter in a combat zone like Kuwait, due to not only to connectivity problems, but sometimes spartan conditions. Overall, enemy action is generally lower in places outside of Afghanistan and Iraq. Locations like Kuwait also have eased restrictions on uniform wear and civilian clothes. Most members in Kuwait do not wear body armor when they leave their base, whereas in Iraq, a few kilometers to the north, soldiers would never consider leaving their base without body armor being worn. Also, since civilian clothing restrictions are relaxed in places outside of Afghanistan and Iraq, it is conceivable that military members may wear political items of clothing such as t-shirts and political buttons in their off time, thereby increasing their political participation.

In our findings approximately 18,000 Specialists voted in 2004 out of our reconstructed number of 42,000. What policies, if enacted at the time, could have increased their potential to vote for either candidate? Was it the fault of the unit for the service member not voting? Was it the unit’s fault for not getting the ballot to service member in time for the election? Did the unit have a Unit Voting Officer? Was he or she capable? There are many questions beyond the policies that are hard to answer, especially when those answers involve an ever changing evolving place such as a combat zone where almost nothing is certain. It may be the case that there is no one singular policy that will bring military voters to cast their ballot. Are the policies of the Armed Forces too strict in allowing military members to conduct themselves in a political manner that they may have been used to prior to entering the combat zone? To be sure, the DOD will not relax polices that will make it easier for military members to practice political craft, especially from a combat zone.
The age of instant television spots due to the “YouTube”-type video era would be a problem for the military and would be hard to control if allowed to flourish. Standards should not be relaxed just for the sake of increased voter participation. The military therefore will have to find other ways to increase voter turnout numbers, and, at the same time, not change policies designed to keep good order and discipline. The military will have to ask Congress for help developing more innovative ways to speed up ballot delivery from the combat zone to the county official who accepts the ballot. However, even if other ways are found, soldiers will still have to deal with daily life in the combat zone. Therefore, the innovation must be tied primarily to the harsh conditions of the combat zone which will make any change easier on the whole electorate. By focusing on the worst conditions in which an American has to vote, the rest of the electorate will benefit.
CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF EXISTING CONDITIONS AT A
FORWARD OPERATING BASE (FOB)

The Armed Services must enact policies that are not only designed to keep it afloat, but also to keep it away from partisan politics. These policies, while important, may actually be restricting the military voter in terms of casting a ballot. As individual state laws evolve and military policies evolve, the combat zone where service members fight also evolves over time. The combat zone has evolved over previous conflicts where Americans have been engaged. During World War I, letters from home took the route of the steam ship as air mail had not been invented yet. Telegrams were used to communicate overseas between cities. World War II began the age of air mail, however most military mail was processed via sea-going vessels. Information was a commodity, as it was valuable to know what was going on back home. Often during this period, service members were shown previously recorded films about news and happenings in the United States and abroad. Personal mail was the primary method of communication between family members and service members. As the U.S. military finished World War II victoriously, and became engaged in Korea and Vietnam, information flow became quicker and almost necessary to win battles. This information flow was both of a military and civilian nature due to increased technological advances, often spurred by the space race between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.
Evolving Conditions in Combat Zones

When the 1991 Persian Gulf War came upon the U.S. Military, faxes, at least in theory, could be used to transmit information in a rather quick manner between families and service members. While service members did not generally have the privy of using a fax machine to gather information from home, it began the electronic era of personal information sharing from home in a rather speedy manner versus using the telegram. (A telegram was not considered a personal message because the transmission method involved actually going to a facility to send it.) Although a fax is not personal either, it can be pinpointed to a specific phone number and person, and is relatively quicker than transmitting a telegram.

As information flow began to increase, the combat zone information flow evolved. In terms of an all volunteer military—as the United States has had for over 30 years—soldiers began to expect more in terms of information flow between family members. There is a saying in the military: “You enlist the soldier, but you reenlist a family.” As families began to become more important to an all-volunteer military, the military adapted and made the internet available to military members, not only to communicate with home, but also with friends and the rest of the world in terms of world news and entertainment. Communicating became almost instant; there would no longer be a wait to see welcome words from family members. As a political side benefit, information costs began to dwindle between candidates and the electorate at large.

As the combat zone evolved, allowing increased information availability, security procedures had to come into play to protect the military from not only rogue elements outside the bases in the combat zones, but from service members unknowingly giving
away military operations, plans, or specifics such a troop strength. Certain restrictions were put in place to combat attempts to subvert operational security, such as increased internet operational security training, and the power of the commander to restrict not only the information into the base, but also out of the base. This leads to an information bottleneck which may contribute to the lack of information flow to military voters who already are subject to restrictive policies as previously mentioned. As logic and geography dictate, it takes longer for mail to get to a combat zone than places inside the United States, even with the advent of air mail. The mail delay of a combat zone further contributes to barriers to voting from afar. Because of this, there is a maelstrom of costs, barriers, and restrictions that a military member must endure in a combat zone.

DOD Definition of a Combat Zone

In order to show some of the barriers and costs that military voters encounter compared to other sets of voters, not including civilian absentee voters overseas, it is important to define a combat zone. Combat zone service by military members is ambiguous, as there are many different types of combat zone definitions: “A Combat Zone (CZ) is an area that the President has designated by Executive Order (EO) as an area where U.S. forces are engaged in combat; it remains in effect until terminated by EO” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2007a, 6). In addition, the IRS for tax purposes solidifies where actual combat zones are: “Arabian Peninsula Areas, beginning Jan. 17, 1991, the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, Gulf of Oman, the part of the Arabian Sea north of 10° North latitude and west of 68° East longitude, the Gulf of Aden, and the countries of Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, Kosovo area, beginning Mar. 24, 1999—Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and

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Montenegro), Albania, the Adriatic Sea and the Ionian Sea north of the 39th Parallel and Afghanistan, beginning Sept. 19, 2001” (Internal Revenue Service, 2007). For the purposes of this thesis, I will define the combat zone as encompassing U.S. Military service members serving in Afghanistan and Iraq, as most United States Armed Forces currently overseas are engaged in these two areas of operation, named Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Iraqi Freedom, respectively. Iraq has been considered an active combat zone since the inception of the 1991 Gulf War as previously stated, and Afghanistan has been an active combat zone since 2001, shortly after the September 11th attacks on the United States.

As stated in the previous chapter, not all combat zones are the same. Kosovo, although considered by the IRS to be a combat zone, is not the same as the combat zone in Afghanistan or Iraq in terms of relative dangers, geography, and daily conditions. Kosovo is nestled in the lower section of Serbia on the European continent just north of Greece. Kosovo has easy access to air transportation to Germany which is home to many American personnel who are permanently stationed in Europe. Additionally, the geography and culture of Europe abound in Kosovo, as well as the relatively friendly indifference towards Americans deployed there, making conditions different than Iraq or Afghanistan where improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are a part of daily life for soldiers. There is even a term for the bases is Iraq and Afghanistan called Forward Operating Bases (FOB).
Life on Bases in Combat Zones

Inside these FOBs is where a majority of American service members of each respective service conduct operations against the enemy in Iraq and Afghanistan. Wong and Gerras write, “the FOB has become the home away from home for the American soldier...Because of advances in communication technology, however, soldiers are also experiencing competition between the institutions of the family and the military for a limited amount of time, attention and emotional capital” (2006, 1). The FOB has become a safe haven defining two worlds that soldiers of past wars did not have: the world of combat and the world of leisure. Wong and Gerras state that soldiers have these two worlds of life, one of which is spent out patrolling Iraqi neighborhoods under adrenaline pumping situations, and the other being spent back on the FOB catching up on sleep and surfing the internet. Most of these FOBs have at least a Morale, Welfare and Reserve (MWR) location which contains phone lines and internet connections as well as a PX (Post Exchange) which sells various types of items. Compared to wars of the past, as one Army general put it, “FOBs are little oases in the middle of a dangerous and confusing world” (Wong and Gerras 2006, 2).

Connectivity in a Combat Zone

Connectivity is important to receiving the information required to make a decision on whether to vote or abstain (Downs 1957). Connectivity is also apparently one way to cope with the stress of combat operations. In other times and other war zones, the letter and the care package sent through the U.S. mail system were the primary means of communication between the fighting soldier and his family. However, as technology

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grew, so too did the ease in which a serviceman was able to keep in touch with his family. During the Gulf War and operations in the Balkans (Bosnia, Kosovo), e-mail emerged as a means of communication for deployed soldiers (Wong and Gerras 2006, 9). As the FOBs grew, so too did the ability to communicate. Wong and Gerras write, “Amazingly, many soldiers reported that they were not just ‘keeping in touch’ with families with e-mails, but were instead communicating real time several times a day” (2006, 9). This would lead one to believe that communications are very good coming out of a combat zone.

According to the Wong and Gerras article, soldiers are keeping in contact with their families at rates unheard of in wars past. Officially, soldiers are restricted to a thirty minute internet session at the MWR facility to send an e-mail, use instant messenger software or make an internet call, and that is after having to wait in line (Wong & Gerras 2006). However, service members have begun either installing their own internet or having local Iraqi entrepreneurs install internet on the FOB via satellite connection, usually for about $300 for equipment and $30 a month (Wong & Gerras 2006). Most of the time, the cost is split among unit members. This enables servicemen and women to communicate with the family more often. However, I believe it is not under widespread use, due to cost as well as commander policies against such unfettered information flow on his or her FOB. I will focus on official use of the internet provided by MWR facilities.

When the service members do get their thirty minutes allotted to them, do they spend the time talking about voting and elections? This is a question that does not have a concrete statistical answer. I am willing to say that although there are definitely political savvy service members deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, most probably do not talk about politics or issues unless they are impacted directly, beyond being deployed to
Afghanistan or Iraq. This is not to say that it does not happen outright. First off, not all military members have the capabilities that Wong and Gerras portray, such as access to the internet in their rooms. Most, I contend, would rather wait in line and use the thirty minutes provided by the MWR facilities and conduct family business there. In terms of family business, some talk about children, while others talk about financial issues; “soldiers are handling problems, dealing with issues, and getting emotionally involved in real time” (Wong & Gerras 2006, 10). This leads me to believe that although family members may talk about politics like any other family, military members probably do not talk politics due to a limited amount of time allotted to them. In fact, there may be far more pressing issues to deal with, such as school problems, marital issues or family business. On the practical level, due to the violent nature of these areas, family members and service members may want to concentrate on personal matters, as the telephone and e-mail contacts may unfortunately, in some cases, be their last.

In addition to the above reasons, there are other command driven responsibilities that are undertaken to restrict information going out from the MWR internet kiosks. The primary reason to have internet kiosks is for members of the military to communicate back to loved ones. However, the command may also initiate a stop to communications whenever the need arises, including MWR facility communications. Wong and Gerras (2006) write that it is standard procedure to kill the switch when casualties are known. This killing of the switch is intended to prevent premature unsubstantiated communications about casualties getting to family members of the fallen or injured. The Department of Defense would rather do the notification officially through casualty assistance officers, rather than have a soldier instant message a family member or friend from the MWR network. Although sporadic for sure, this element of the communication
process would lead one to believe that a soldier would want to talk about the most
important things first, such as family and friends, and leave the politics for last, although
the topic may come up in passing.

Although the FOB has gained in prominence in both Iraq and Afghanistan in
terms of communication ability between service members who are deployed and family
and friends at home, it must be said that officially, there are time limits to
communication. Some would see it as a cost versus benefit analysis, given that it costs
the service member startup capital to get online and then payment of $30 per month for
service, whereas at the MWR, he or she can get it for free. Although there are time limits,
soldiers more likely than not will catch up with family and friends, rather than talk about
politics or surf political information websites.

Chronic Mail Delays in a Combat Zone

Mail is important to service members wherever they go; from their base at Ft.
Bragg, North Carolina to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii service members expect mail. Mail is as
important as the paycheck, and is customarily as important as food. In a combat zone,
mail becomes increasingly important due to it being the physical lifeline to the rest of the
world. If the internet is the cyber lifeline to the family and friends, the mail is his or her
“real life” lifeline. Mail is important to the morale of a unit which can be a combat
multiplier in terms of a service member being able to focus on the mission due to
everything being well at home, because he or she read it in a letter. Mail however, is a
two way street; it has traditionally been said that in order to get a letter, you must write a
letter. The same is true for requesting absentee ballots; a service member must send out
for a ballot to receive a ballot. This is not always the case however, and will be explained
later. Sending the absentee ballot in the mail is part of the process that a service member must do in order to cast his or her vote. With very few exceptions, a ballot may be cast via the internet.

Historically, the military has always been riddled with mail delays. This is an inherent part of life in the military, which unfortunately can be magnified when thousands of miles are placed between the service member and where the mail needs to go. According to the GAO report of April 2006, *Absentee Voting Assistance to Military and Overseas Citizens Increased for the 2004 General Election, But Challenges Remain*, the government found that:

> As we reported in 2004, deployed military service members face numerous problems with mail delivery, such as military postal personnel were inadequately trained and initially scarce because of late deployments, as well as inadequate postal facilities, material handling equipment and transportation assets to handle the mail surge...service members cited problems with the mail, such as it being a low priority when a unit is moving from one location to another; susceptibility of mail shipments to attack while in theatre, and the absence of daily mail service on some military ships.

(U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2006, 20)

In addition to mail delays, getting the mail out and back to the service member, he or she may be personally disenfranchised due to the mail delivery problem. This factor may contribute to a lack of efficacy in the overall democratic process.

If the ballot that is requested by the service member does not arrive in time to cast the vote, the service member may use a Federal write-in ballot which may be used for Federal elections only; no state or local elections are allowed on the ballot. This provision, designed to protect the right of service members to vote is prescribed in the *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act*, abbreviated UOCAVA (*Federal Voting Assistance Program*, 2005). The section reads, “the Presidential designee shall
prescribe a Federal write-in absentee ballot (including secrecy envelope and mailing envelope for such ballot) for use in the general elections for Federal office by absent uniformed service voters and overseas voters who make timely application for, and do not receive, State, absentee ballots” (Federal Voting Assistance Program, 2005).

Special steps must be followed in order for the U.S. Mail to accept the Federal Write-in ballot, or any other state ballot. U.S. Mail regulations state that, “to be mailable without prepayment of postage, the balloting materials must be deposited at a U.S. post office, an overseas U.S. military post office, or an American Embassy or American Consulate” (U.S. Postal Service, 2007, 8.1). This is clearly a barrier to voting for the military service member stationed in a combat zone. Along with mail delays, not every service member can go to the American Embassy in Baghdad, Iraq or the American Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan to cast his or her ballot for free. More than likely, the service member either goes to a military post office (if he or she has the means and transportation in a combat zone) to cast a ballot. If the service member cannot do so, a few choices can be made: the service member can trust the ballot to other unit members and make a special trip to the nearest military post office (which may require hazardous travel), the military post office can go to the individual units to receive the ballots, the service member can entrust the Unit Voting Officer to take the ballot, or they can mail it themselves through normal mail with proper postage. Whichever way the military member chooses, they have inherently larger, difficult barriers than what a citizen in the U.S. faces.

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Voter Registration Difficulties

In terms of voter registration difficulties, there are many reasons why a citizen, let alone a service member stationed in a combat zone, would have registration difficulties. If a service member has registered prior to leaving his or her home, he or she may be fine. However, with the military on the go, and many military members registered in their home of record (where the military member joined from), getting registered in a new state often requires one to get a new driver license or make a change of address that might not be advantageous for tax reasons as Sondheimer wrote (Sondheimer et al. 2008).

Voting from anywhere other than a polling location in the United States has four steps. The GAO writes, “The current absentee voting process requires the potential voter to take the following four steps: (1) register and request an absentee ballot, (2) receive the ballot from the local election office, (3) correctly complete the ballot, and (4) return it (generally through the mail) in time to be counted for the election” (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2006b, 19). To help service members in navigating the above steps, the DOD created Unit Voting Officers (UVO). Although the UVO is required to be available, many service members do not have unfettered access to their Unit Voting Officer (UVO). Many, if not all service members, need the assistance of the VAO to navigate the red tape of the absentee voter process. Here is an excerpt from the GAO report to showcase the red tape that service members face:

For example, according to the Voting Assistance Guide, Montana requires a voter that has not previously registered to submit an FPCA at least 30 days prior to the election. A voter who is already registered must ensure that the FPCA is received by the County Election Administrator by noon on the day before the election. For Idaho voters, the FPCA must be postmarked by the 25th day before the election, if they are not currently
registered. If they are registered, the County Clerk must receive the FPCA by 5:00 p.m. on the 6th day before the election. For Virginia uniformed services voters, the FPCA must arrive not later than 5 days before the election, whether already registered or not. However, overseas citizens that are not already registered must submit an FPCA to the General Registrar not later than 29 days before the election. Those overseas voters who are already registered must ensure that the FPCA arrives to the General Registrar not later than 5 days before the election.”

(U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2006, 19)

As one can see, voting absentee is hard work by itself.

In addition to being hard work, requesting a ballot can be a difficult process as well. The service member may either write to state officials to request a ballot, e-mail officials to request a ballot, or fax the officials to request a ballot. Table 2 shows the differing methods that service members of the same unit, many of whom are not from the same state, let alone registered in the same state, must go through.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of transmission</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Electronic Transmissions Allowed</td>
<td>AL, NY, WY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only Fax Transmissions Allowed</td>
<td>AZ, AR, CA, CT, DE, GA, HI, ID, IA, KS, KY, LA, ME, MD, MA, MI, NE, NV, NH, NJ, NM, OH, OK, OR, PA, RI, TN, TX, UT, VT, WV, AK, CO, FL, IL, IN, MN, MS, MO, MT, NC, ND, SC, SD, VA, WA, W1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email and Fax Transmissions Allowed</td>
<td>Source: Cunningham (2008).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 illustrates the different methods of requesting an absentee ballot electronically, which includes requesting via fax machine. Once the soldier has registered, he or she may contact state officials via any of the above means for receipt of the ballot. As this may seem to ease the barrier to receiving absentee balloting materials, it can still be quite taxing to figure out which option to use from abroad, especially from
a combat zone (Cunningham 2008). Each state has a different method. As seen in Table 2, only Alabama, New York and Wyoming do not allow any kind of electronic transmission.

Table 3 illustrates the varying populations of active duty members by state. As is expected, the larger states in the union have larger populations with few exceptions. This table is designed to be used in tandem with Table 2 to show that some states that have more active duty members, like California, only allow fax transmissions, whereas a relatively small state like Indiana, with less than 1,000 active duty military members, allows both e-mail and fax transmission of balloting materials. This is surprising, since the active duty military population of New York (as shown in Table 3) is between 25,000 and 50,000 personnel, the highest number of the three states that do not allow electronic submission. Another reason this is surprising is that New York is home to the 10th Mountain Division, one of the Army’s oldest and most deployed infantry divisions which has seen service in the last 15 years in Somalia, Kuwait, Afghanistan and Iraq.
In analyzing why states with large military populations do not allow any electronic correspondence for balloting materials, it may be that a state in the category like New York does not currently have the capability to handle large electronic requests—not only from its military members, but its civilian population as well. New York is a state which borders Canada and may have a large population living outside of its borders. In addition to Canada, New York City is home to a diverse workforce which may be part of an increasing absentee population. In the age if increasing individual state budgetary constraints, many states may choose not to look at their electorate population as important since less than half permit the e-mailing of absentee documents from military voters overseas (and civilian overseas voters). Yet even within these states, there is a significant range of constraints.

To put it into perspective, checking e-mail can be expensive in terms of hiring additional staff as well as training the staff properly in the rules of votes cast by the UOCAVA. Some require scanned signatures; others require a mailed hard copy of the application to follow the electronic submission, while others will allow for e-mailed ballot requests but not e-mailed voting (Cunningham 2008). A state such as Indiana, which has such a low percentage of people that are active duty military and people overseas in general, may have budgeted for the possibility that only half of those 1,000 people on active duty will become military overseas voters in addition to any amount that are civilians overseas that may want to vote. Money may be an issue in hiring enough qualified personnel to count the votes that are cast by overseas members.

Constraints must be overcome, and service members do have a resource to look to for help in navigating the red tape and differing rules: the Voting Assistance Officer. The VAO may be a commissioned officer of the United States Military and must be at least
an O-4 or higher grade, or as an alternative if no officer is available to fill the billet, an
enlisted person in the E-8 grade or higher. The VAO may also be a civilian employee of
the Federal government in the GS-12 or higher grade. The DOD civilian will carry out
the duties of the VAO as a primary duty and will be trained to navigate the red tape that
is associated with voting absentee overseas. In addition to the VAO, there is also a Unit
Voting Officer who is assigned to units which have 25 or so members; an additional Unit
Voting Officer may be assigned for each additional 50 members (U.S. Department of
Defense, 2007b). One of the most important duties as a VAO or UVO is written in the
Department of Defense Directive that states, “They also shall provide training and voting
assistance for units preparing for deployment where voting materials and accessibility to
register may be limited due to at-sea or remote area deployment” (U.S. Department of
Defense, 2007b, 7).

According to the GAO report of military absentee balloting (2004), training
among the VAO and the UVO is not standardized and is somewhat lacking. The GAO
wrote, “At four of the installations we visited, none of the VAOs we met with had
attended an FVAP workshop, and VAOs at one of these installations said they had not
received any training. A Voting Action Officer from one service stated that travel to a
workshop location was a problem because there was no specific funding for VAO
training. At one installation, VAOs cited time constraints and high turnover as reasons
for not being trained to provide voting assistance” (U.S. Government Accountability
Office, 2006a, 10).

While this data is over 7 years old, before a long protracted war was to be waged,
I believe that the situation is the same now as it was then, given the current operational
tempo of the United States military. Additionally, in terms of the VAO training, if the
training is offered online, it currently does not give an in depth look into some of the problems combat zone voters may face. Usually, at least in the Unit Voting Officer case, the UVO duty is in addition to the otherwise tasking duties as a soldier. In an infantry unit, the Infantry Officer role of UVO may actually be at the bottom of the list of “things to do” regarding missions outside the relative comfort of the FOB. The GAO even mentions this phenomenon in its report:

The command’s mobilization status also affected the level of voting assistance provided by VAOs. Specifically, one location we visited had many ground units deployed or preparing to deploy during the 2004 election and absentee voting was not a priority. Officials stated that voting was mentioned but was not a top priority when compared with other deployment issues, such as preparing powers-of-attorney and wills and concentrating on troop movements while in theater.

(U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2006, 17)

This lack of attention to the voting process by command leadership in the United States more than likely transfers over to the battlefield upon arrival in country, and continues throughout the duration of the deployment. Once this climate is put together with mail delays and the red tape of the process, it is easy to see that military members stationed in a combat zone have more barriers and costs associated with voting than their civilian stateside counterparts.

Daily Threat of Enemy Action

What certainly does need mentioning is why the combat troops of the United States Military are stationed in combat zones; they are there to fight a war where there are casualties and deaths. The daily threat of enemy action can be seen as a barrier to the military voter stationed in a combat zone. While each military member faces a different set of threats; threats that are not always the same at all times, there is a general sense of
being attacked at a moments notice by an enemy which remains unseen and has the ability to melt into the local populace. There will be no notice of casualty figures in this thesis; empirical data of casualties is not needed to convey the daily threat that each service member faces. Instead, each member has an overall threat, a threat that is commonplace amongst all members stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan, and to be truthful, all over the world. In Iraq and Afghanistan, where the majority of combat operations are being waged, the daily threat of enemy action definitely impacts the minds of military voters.

In addition to the daily threat of enemy action, the mission itself might be one to blame for not thinking about voting, or not becoming better informed. An article by Kevin Sites sums up the tense night before the 2004 U.S. presidential election as Marines were about to conduct Operation Phantom Fury, the second battle for Fallujah, Iraq. Kevin writes, “Although many Marines here profess a deep interest in the outcome of the U.S. presidential race, most don’t have time to pay close attention. A squad from Weapons Company assembles their 81-millimeter mortar tubes while the heavy ‘whoomp’ retorts of a 0.50-caliber sniper rifle pulsate across the firing range 1,000 meters away” (Sites 2004). As one can imagine, the main thoughts on the minds of the Marines about to assault Fallujah, were to accomplish the mission’s objectives. Fallujah, a searing hotbed of anti-Americanism at the time of the 2004 election, would turn out to be one of the most significant battles the Marine Corps would wage in Iraq. While on the front lines, especially in the case of the Marines and Army, service members do not receive voting materials, either due to constant on the move operations or mail delays; usually it is a nexus of both. An example of this was written by Sites that reads in part,
The military usually takes an active role in helping soldiers and Marines exercise their civic responsibilities when it comes to voting, providing non-partisan classes on the candidates and assistance in requesting absentee ballots for those deployed overseas. But because of problems in getting mail to frontline units combined with slow response from service member’s home states there are still some serious snafus. Cpl. Elton King, 25, of Battle Creek, Mich., requested an absentee ballot two months ago. It arrived three days ago two weeks past the final deadline for mail-in ballots.”

(Sites 2004).

This is one barrier and cost put together that cannot be put off on any other entity. If engaged in combat operations, service to the unit and fellow servicemen and women must come first. Although the DOD guarantees everyone may have the materials to vote, the DOD cannot guarantee when those materials will be delivered, and more often than not, would care about the mission at hand rather than the individual service members’ right to vote.

It is important to note that while not every day in a combat zone is a day full of combat, there are certain restrictions on uniforms that may be worn when in an off duty status. Off duty status is not to be taken lightly; one is never off duty in a combat zone. Civilian clothes may not usually be worn when off duty. Usually the physical fitness uniform must be worn when in an off duty status which is to maintain the good order and discipline of the United States Armed Forces by not having members wear eccentric civilian clothes. While in civilian clothes in the United States, it would be fair to say that wearing a button of a candidate would not be against regulations of the DOD in terms of supporting a candidate, if one did so off base and was not in military t-shirts that reflect unit affiliation or the like. This is not possible in a combat zone off of duty. The mail delays, different state laws regarding registration, individual circumstances regarding home of record, coupled with the daily threat of enemy action stationed on a forward
operating base, make voting increasingly difficult for members of the U.S. Military in a combat zone. Solutions in the form of better state laws regarding registration from overseas, or the actual transmission of the ballot should be addressed by both the individual state and U.S. government, as well as academic partners who choose to enlist their resources and knowledge of voting behavior to allow better access to the ballot for the military member.

There must be concrete solutions to the problem of military voters not getting their chance to cast a ballot. Although some of the problems cannot be mitigated due to operating tempo, others can. During election season, perhaps the military can send a surge of trained Unit Voting Officers to units that are forward deployed to many of the worst places to be in Iraq and Afghanistan. By having the UVOs available to the units at least 120 days before the general election, this may be the number of days needed to make sure that those who want to register can register, and those who want to request a ballot can do so. In the near future the internet will not be a viable option for the military to use to cast ballots from afar; in the meantime it may be up to the military to have the administrative foresight to get UVOs to the units to enable the soldiers who want to participate to receive balloting materials in a timely manner.

Background on Previous Solutions

Given the maelstrom of voting difficulties expressed in government reports and by journalists as well as academics, it is no wonder why this is a problem for the United States. Solutions are needed to combat this problem given the upcoming 2008 election. The 2008 presidential election year may be one that surpasses many empirical categories to include people interested in politics, registration, and voter turnout. Although the
150,000 approximate voters in the combat zones of Afghanistan and Iraq are not a large number on the whole, they are an important aspect of the electorate in the United States.

As described previously, many of the largest barriers to voters in a combat zone are not because of the military, or because of election officials' lack of adherence to details. Many of the barriers are due to distance, and the individual state laws in relation to the military voter overseas. Alabama, a state that does not allow any type of electronic transmission of absentee balloting materials, does so because it does not have a law that says it can electronically transmit balloting materials (Cunningham, 2008). In addition, the distance factor comes into play due to the amount of time required to not only request absentee balloting material (either by mail, fax or e-mail), but to accommodate delivery back and forth of said materials to be counted. The use of the internet should be used to cast a vote. If a citizen can check loans, financial statements, buy a car, trade stocks and even chat with his or her family online, why can't he or she vote online?

When answering why military members cannot vote via the internet, is important to note that the Department of Defense did have a plan for the 2004 election votes to be cast via the internet, but it was not used due to security concerns. The 2002 National Defense Authorization Act directed the Department of Defense to develop a secure way to cast a ballot. In reaction to the requirement, the Secure Electronic Registration and Voting Experiment (SERVE) was born (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2006b, 18). One of the primary reasons for its failure was stated in the GAO report of September 2006—technology in 2004 could not protect against the possibility of malicious hackers. It concluded that the internet must be more secure.

In terms of information access by service members overseas, one of the hurdles was the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) website that was to be used to
transmit election information. Prior to 2004, it used the “.mil” domain and certain overseas internet service providers (ISP) were denied access due to the threat of outside foreign hackers from accessing the DOD system (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2006b). After this was found to be a problem, FVAP moved out of the “.mil” domain into a less secure one. This then allowed easier access to information for the election to be provided.

**New Electronic Solutions**

What electronic method may be used then to connect the overseas voter in a combat zone to his or her respective voting precinct? As was stated in September 2006 GAO report, the internet cannot be used to cast a ballot due to hacker and cyber security concerns. One solution to this problem may be the use of the Secret Internet Protocol Router Network (SIPRNET). The SIPRNET is widely used to pass information, up to the U.S. Government Secret level, throughout the world on the Defense Information System Network (DISN) which supports the Command, Control, Communications and Intelligence requirement for the Department of Defense. This network allows the Department of Defense to communicate in a secure fashion over traditional internet connections. According to the Federation of American Scientists’ (FAS) Intelligence Resource Program, “This SECRET router layer of the DISN is intended to support national defense C3I requirements, to include the issuing of COMSEC keys used with the STU-III to make secure dial-up SIPRNET comm server connections” (Pike 2000). One of the barriers to the use of SIPRNET for transmitting ballot information would be the need for a user of the SIPRNET to have a United States Government secret clearance. This potential roadblock could be mitigated by having cleared personnel monitor not the
elections per se, but the equipment used to cast a ballot. One could still vote behind a
shade or partition, but no keyboards, outside devices, etc. could be attached to the device
that would allow one to cast a ballot much like any other voter who casts a ballot
electronically in the United States.

To account for the safety of soldiers during balloting on Election Day, the
balloting devices could be held inside a bunker facility or an air hangar in more remote
areas. One of the problems of this plan may be actually getting soldiers to the electronic
locations. This could be overcome by allowing early voting by members of the military,
since they must cast a ballot earlier than Election Day from afar in order for it to count.
In addition to casting a ballot from a designated polling location in a bunker, one day
service members may be able to cast a ballot from their online “.mil” domain accounts.

Other electronic methods beyond the internet must be explored as solutions to the
military voting problem. Some of the methods that have been put into play have been
faxing and e-mailing ballots. Fax balloting, while not private due to others having to see
the choice, also has a problem with local jurisdictions not being able to take the ballot
because of not having a fax machine in the first place (Alvarez et al. 2007). Some states,
such as California, allow a faxed ballot to be cast, but a voter must sign a waiver
acknowledging that the ballot will not be secret in its transmission (Alvarez et al. 2007).
E-mail voting is another method for sending balloting materials. However, one of the
problems may be that the file containing the ballot may be too large for older computers
in a combat zone to handle. Other problems may arise with incompatible existing
software, or the service member ultimately may never receive the ballot due to illegible
or incomplete e-mail addresses (Alvarez et al. 2007). In addition, privacy and security of
the file remain a concern.
New State Laws

Individual state laws also should be looked at to streamline the process for military voters overseas, especially those members of the military deployed to combat zones. The state should allow easier transmission of balloting materials as well as the actual ballot. According to the GAO report from September 2006 titled, *DOD Expands Voting Assistance to Military Absentee Voters, but Challenges Remain*, “The election process within the United States is primarily the responsibility of the individual states and their election jurisdictions” (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2006b, 20). According to Alvarez, Hall, and Roberts, “states must accept all absentee ballot requests, even if they are received before the state typically accepts them” (2007, 30).

However, with that said by the UOCAVA, Alvarez, Hall, and Roberts contend that it is the many logistical problems previously noted that are the source of serious problems in voting from afar. This translates into a ballot transit time problem. The many state laws that affect ballot transit time are ones that the individual states must overcome. The UOCAVA as currently written says that states are required to designate a single state office to serve UOCAVA voters in the registration and ballot application process, collect and publish statistics on UOCAVA registration and balloting, and a single absentee ballot request is now valid for two federal elections. In addition, there is a standard oath for all voting documents (Alvarez et al. 2007, 30).

Alvarez, Hall, and Roberts shift away from state laws in terms of pointing the blame for the ballot transit problem to a shared one with the U.S. mail service, as well as each states’ set of laws, which designate the different times for ballot preparation as well as mailing out ballots. Many court battles have been fought over the nexus of when the
mailing of balloting materials goes out and when the states say the materials can go out. Alvarez, Hall, and Roberts profess, “despite years of efforts and multiple litigations, states continue to give short shrift to overseas and military voters in how they handle election deadlines, ballot transmission and absentee deadlines” (2007, 38). Even though Congress created the FVAP to offer solutions to states to streamline individual state laws to facilitate voting by citizens that vote absentee, individual state legislatures often have larger, more pressing issues that will take up precious time in their individual state sessions.

Each governor has in effect a state militia: a state National Guard. Even the territories of Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands have a National Guard contingent. It is widely said that politicians steer policies that will keep them in office. If a state lawmaker or governor proposes increased cooperation with other states at the same level to increase military voter access to balloting materials with electronic solutions, the politician may be able to garner military votes from those policies. More often than not however, military members are not included in state legislation to increase their participation rates. Ultimately it will be up to lawmakers to enact changes. Military voter trust may be an important asset to have when running an election against an opponent who proposes legislation to bring more military members into the political fold. One way of doing so would be to propose and ultimately enact policies that enable easier timely access to the ballot.

Conclusion

The fact that problems remain with military voting by overseas citizens in addition to military service members has generated the subject matter of this thesis. The
history of the United States shows that over time, enfranchisement of all citizens is a goal that should be undertaken. To address the nebulous concepts of information costs, barriers to voting, as well as real world combat zone circumstances, it was necessary to utilize a variety of sources as well as methods to come to a consensus that in fact, there are increased barriers to voting for military members stationed overseas, but more so for those deployed to combat zones.

Chapter II effectively showed that it was necessary to utilize a portion of Anthony Downs’ Rational Choice Theory to begin a framework for the basis of casting a ballot which is based on information. By showing that when information is constrained, choice is constrained, it illustrates a framework for how important information is to the combat zone voter, and that the lack of information can hamper his or her voting experience. Based upon the literature review showing the current state of the political science discipline, the reader will gain an appreciation of current issues that are being discussed inside the discipline. By showing that information is constrained, that the global electorate is increasingly growing larger, and that the absentee voter is becoming a voice to be reckoned with in regards to Election Day turnout, all of these issues make the idea of improving the current system of voting even more important.

Chapter III, which examined political participation among the various services, showed that there is in fact a problem regarding each service having rules differing from one another. These problems should be addressed by the services, since service members should not have to play by a mixed bag approach to rules in regards to political participation. Chapter IV showed the problems of living on a military installation in a combat zone, as well as offering solutions to help combat the problem of mail delays that service members suffer while deployed to such installations. Chapter IV also went into
detail about how living on a Forward Operating Base can have its ups and downs, and while connectivity may not be an overarching issue, it is in fact an issue in regards to how the individual service member spends a limited amount of time connected to friends and family back home. The chapter also examined the daily rigors of combat and showed that due to operational tempo and real world missions, one can be conditioned to not even know that Election Day is approaching, and that in a combat zone there is no Election Day per se.

The end of chapter IV addressed possible solutions to not only the ballot transit problem, but also the ballot request problem, as each is almost one and the same. The primary problem currently facing military members in a combat zone is the transit issue in regards to ballots coming for voters to use, and then for voters to send out in time to have their votes counted. E-mail and fax balloting are permitted, but only in a few states. The problem lies not only in the individual laws of the state, but also with the mail service which traditionally has always been a problem with overseas mail. The transit problem is further hampered by mail having to catch up with an individual who is constantly on the move due to operational tempo. While the problem of operational tempo in conducting military operations will not go away, a look at casting ballots earlier may alleviate this problem.

The topic of military voting behavior as well as the problems facing military members in casting their ballot from a combat zone cannot be captured fully in one thesis. Further work on this issue should investigate the role of individual states to come together to streamline voting for members of the military. There is very little information in terms of research into this particular subset of the American electorate. It is possible to collect data from overseas combat zones due to the battlefields of today having both
NGOs and governmental civilians. Although it may be dangerous for political scientists to dare go into a combat zone to capture a small set of individuals, the payoff would be enormous in capturing the full scope of the problem. Perhaps the upcoming election of 2008 will offer insight into the challenges that face military voters.

Where do we go from here? The military is not the only institution that that question can be put to. The Federal government and individual states also share in answering that question. With the ever increasing importance of the absentee voter, the question may be one that is increasingly hard to ignore. Most of the solutions can be prepared at the state level due to the varying degrees that each state has multiple ways of registering to vote. Although this definitely is a state right issue, it can be one that is overcome from the state level with the federal government possibly offering financial support to those that do streamline with registration and balloting procedure for members of the military. The Federal government must understand that for a state to count more people and to make the registration process easier it will cost money; it will make the process run smoother. The Federal government usually does not bestow money to state driven initiatives without a plan for its use. By starting with individual states, all of the remaining proposed solutions may become easier.

Next, the military must modify its practice of allowing troops easy access to balloting materials from the Unit Voting Officer. Having untrained UVOs and VAOs definitely impacts the minds of voters who may be casting a ballot from afar for the very first time. Each service currently has a billet that assists the service member wanting to reenlist in the Armed Forces. This person is trained in all regulations pertaining to reenlistment and would have a primary duty: to get people to reenlist. If the military dedicated a Corps of DOD civilians to this task, and deployed the Corps alongside the
military this would do two things. First, it would free the military personnel currently conducting voting operations and get them back into the fight. Second, these civilians would be trained in nothing more than getting people registered to vote and ultimately casting their ballot. This position may have a term of up to a year in length, and it would be cost effective since the military would get a non-tax-paying person onto the battlefield for the price of a tax-paying civilian who was never trained to fight. Since the regulation calls for civilian government members anyway, this policy would not be hard to implement since no personnel changes would be required.

These military voters that cast ballots from the combat zone will no doubt face many of the hurdles written about in this thesis. When adding the human element of combat, and seeing your friends die to the mix of an already tough process, the act of voting may seem futile at the time. By giving the service members the tools they need, whether that is increased funding from Congress or from private donations, to researching solutions to the ballot transit problem, or individual states streamlining cumbersome absentee voting laws, something must be done. In addition, I call on political scientists to capture voting habits of service members who are in combat zones to get an accurate picture of how the individual service member casts a ballot, and how the individual receives the information needed to cast his or her ballot. Such data sets about members of the military in combat zones would be a treasure trove for new theories to be written that could shape policies for years to come, perhaps policies that escape our borders as a nation. Although it is entrusted to the service member to protect the right to vote, it will be up to the citizens of our country to protect the service member’s ability to vote from afar.
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