

Military Service: Migration and a Path to Middle Class Status

RESEARCH BRIEF
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Issued November 2016
Centro RB2016-03

The role of military service in spreading the Puerto Rican diaspora is an understudied phenomenon of relevance for understanding the Puerto Rican migration and its settlement patterns in the U.S. Active duty military personnel, veterans, and their families have dispersed the Puerto Rican population beyond what has been considered as traditional centers of Puerto Rican migration.



New York, Florida, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts continue to host the largest populations of Puerto Ricans stateside. But large Puerto Rican communities have formed and are thriving around military bases in *el Nuevo South* (the former original confederate states), the Midwest, and Western states. Moreover, our findings show that military service also works as a pathway to middle class status for Puerto Ricans.

Two-thirds of the total Puerto Rican veteran population resides stateside. However, a full 60 percent of the total Puerto Rican veteran population, state- and island-based, enrolled in the military while residing on the island. They represent almost half of the total stateside Puerto Rican veteran population. Currently, Puerto Rico

provides 35 percent of the total Puerto Rican personnel in active duty (see table 1). New York follows as the second state of origin for Puerto Rican veterans and active duty personnel. As the next tables show, military service affects the migration patterns of both island-based and state-based Puerto Ricans.

Table 1. Puerto Rican Military and Veteran Population by Place of Origin, 2014

Top 10	Number	%	Top 10	Number	%
Puerto Rico	10,667	35	Puerto Rico	184,933	60
New York	6,739	22	New York	64,596	21
New Jersey	2,015	7	New Jersey	10,655	3
California	1,990	7	Illinois	5,759	2
Florida	1,302	4	Pennsylvania	5,713	2
Illinois	1,139	4	California	5,516	2
Pennsylvania	778	3	Florida	4,249	1
Connecticut	755	2	Connecticut	2,911	1
Massachusetts	681	2	Massachusetts	2,655	1
Texas	681	2	Hawaii	2,542	1
Ohio	558	2	Texas	2,109	1

Source: U.S. 2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Texas, North Carolina, Virginia, Florida and Georgia, in that order, are the top destinations for active duty personnel when only counting service members born in Puerto Rico (see table 2). When counting both island-born and stateside-born Puerto Ricans in active duty the order changes to Virginia, North Carolina, Texas, Florida, and California (with Georgia in sixth place). With the exception of Florida, none of these states had been considered a traditional destination for the Puerto Rican diaspora. At first glance, the difference in destinations for state-born and island-born active duty personnel may not look significant. However, it may point to socioeconomic and cultural differences between island and state-born Puerto Ricans. Some of the likely explanations for the discrepancies in active duty personnel's location may include level of English language proficiency, which will affect the applicants' Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test scores (ASVAB). It is likely that island-born soldiers and stateside-born soldiers obtain different ASVAB scores, which would determine their Military Occupational Skills (MOS) and thus their active duty posts. Beyond choosing among available MOS based on their ASVAB scores, active duty personnel have little say with regard to deciding where they will be stationed. This is an area that requires further exploration.

Florida, New York, California, Texas, and New Jersey are the top five destinations for stateside Puerto Rican veterans (see table 3). Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, and Illinois are towards the bottom in the top ten states hosting the Puerto Rican veteran population stateside (see table 3). This indicates that after completing their active duty service, Puerto Rican ex-military personnel stay in or return to places near the military bases where they were stationed. The following maps show dramatic increase in the Puerto Rican population between 2000 and 2014 in selected states, which seems to corroborate this thesis (see maps 1-3).

Even the non-military Puerto Rican population in these states is concentrating around military installations. Active duty assignment and the veterans' preference to settle near military installations is largely responsible for this phenomenon. Roughly a quarter of the total Puerto Rican veterans and active duty personnel report a household with four or more people (figure 1). When counting only island-born Puerto Rican active duty personnel, nearly a third lived in a household with four or more people (see figure 2). Service members and veterans' dependents and extended families

Table 2. Active Duty Island-Born Puerto Rican Personnel Stationed Stateside, 2014

Currently on Active Duty		
Top 20 States	Island Born	%
Texas	1,448	13.6
North Carolina	1,147	10.8
Virginia	1,139	10.7
Florida	867	8.1
Georgia	814	7.6
California	631	5.9
Hawaii	477	4.5
Washington	384	3.6
South Carolina	374	3.5
Tennessee	305	2.9
Maryland	259	2.4
Arizona	249	2.3
Kentucky	238	2.2
New York	222	2.1
Colorado	189	1.8
Nebraska	185	1.7
Louisiana	181	1.7
Kansas	142	1.3
North Dakota	88	0.8
Pennsylvania	88	0.8

Source: U.S. 2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

make for a large percentage of the Puerto Rican non-military population in these states.

Regulations for the number of dependents and civil status at the time of entry into the military leads to a prevalence of traditional households among the Puerto Rican veteran and active duty personnel. The Army and Marine Corps do not accept single parents or married applicants with more than two children. In exceptional cases, applicants with three or four children may be accepted into the Army with a waiver. The Air Force and Navy are even more strict and do not accept single parents, nor married applicants with more than one child.¹

Puerto Rican stateside active duty personnel and veterans are much more likely to live in a traditional household than Puerto Ricans with no military service (see figure 3). The difference is striking: 67.4 percent of active duty per-

sonnel and 61.4 percent of veterans live in a two-parent household whereas only 44.1 percent of Puerto civilians live in that type of household (see figure 3). Single females head 39 percent of total state-based Puerto Rican civilian households. For Puerto Ricans in active duty the percentage of single female household is just 12 percent, and 13.8 percent for veterans (see figure 3). As mentioned above military policies regarding number of children and civilian status at time of entry excludes single parents. However, there are no policies prohibiting single-parenting after entry. In view of the very low percentage of single parent households among Puerto Rican veterans and active duty, it seems likely that military service provides incentives and the socioeconomic stability needed to make two-parent households desirable and viable.

Numerically, service members and veterans may not represent a large percentage of the total state-based Puerto Rican population, but in states with large military installations they do. Nationwide Puerto Rican veterans represent 6.8 percent of the total Puerto Rican population while Puerto Rican service members represent 0.8 percent of the total Puerto Rican population (Franqui-Rivera 2014). As figure 4 shows, in states with military installations, Puerto Rican veterans as a percentage of the Puerto Rican population double or triple the national average. Moreover, when adding the active duty personnel, we find that some 20 to 29 percent of the Puerto Rican population in these states has served or is serving in the military. On the other hand, states considered as traditional centers for Puerto Rican population show the opposite trend (with the exception of Florida). These examples are strong evidence that these communities have formed due to military service and base locations.

A PATH TO MIDDLE CLASS STATUS

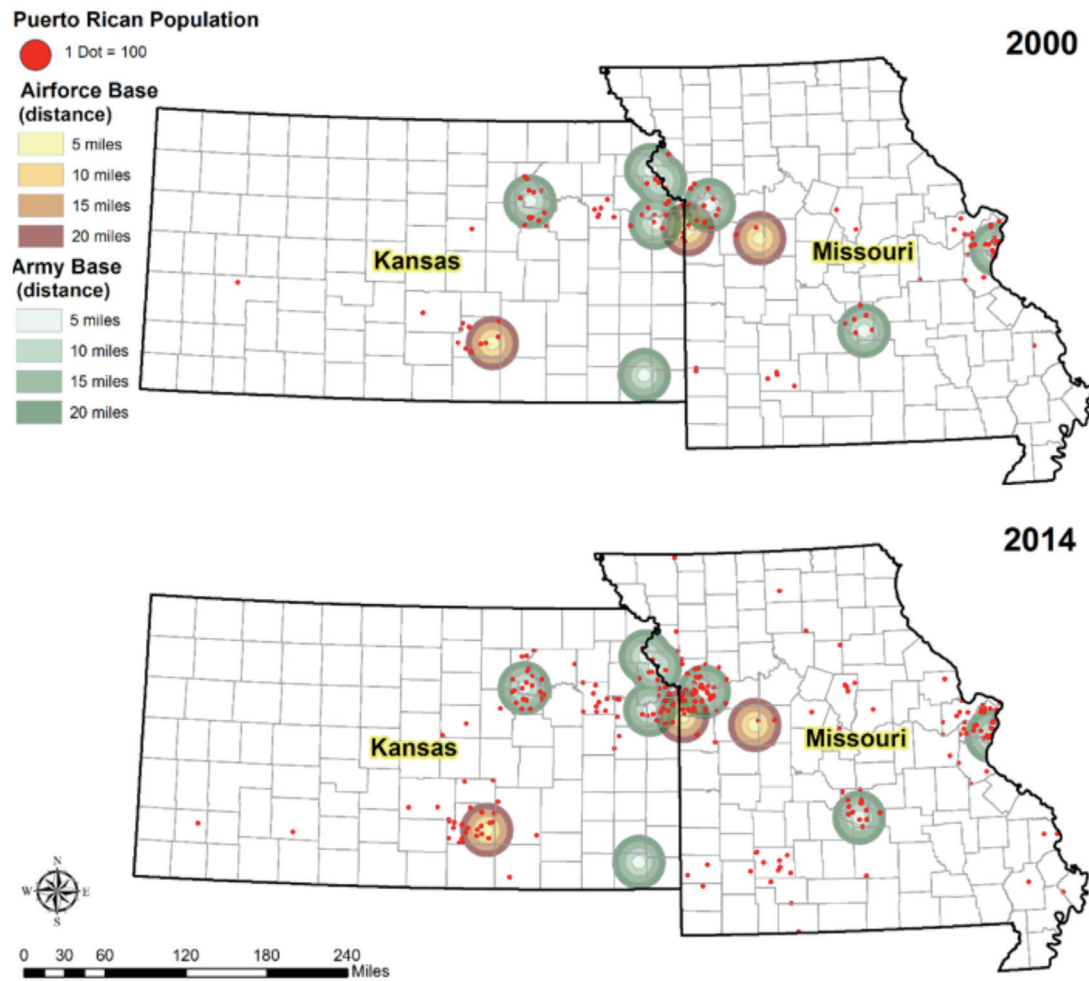
Military service works as a path toward middle-class status, as I have argued elsewhere. Overall, the veteran and military Puerto Rican population enjoys a higher quality of life in terms of income, education attainment, employment rate, and housing tenure than its non-veteran counterpart. In terms of median income, male island-based veterans have a clear advantage over male island-based non-veterans. Island-based female veterans, on the other hand, have a median income more than 50 percent higher than that of island-based non-veteran females, and have almost the same income as non-veteran Puerto Rican males in the United States (Franqui-Rivera, 2014).

Table 3. Top 10 States with Highest Puerto Rican Populations, 2014 (Civilians vs. Current Active Duty vs. Veterans)

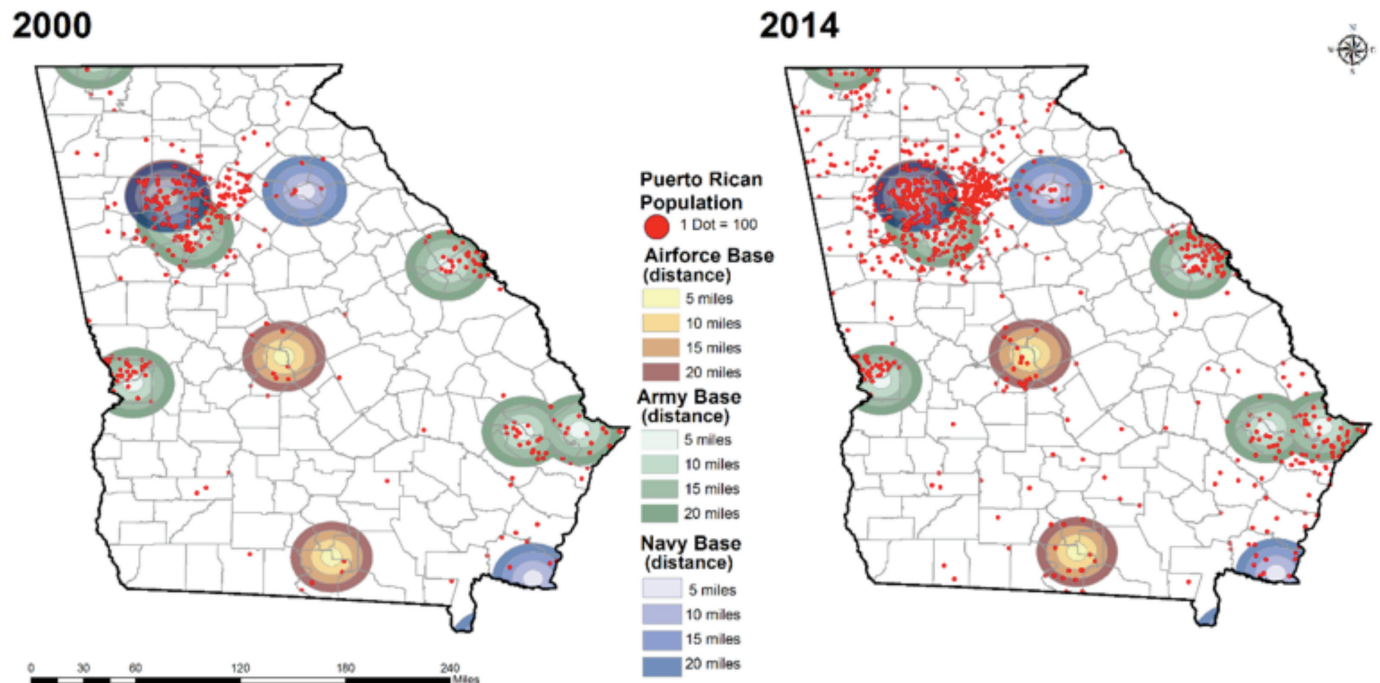
No Military Service			
	Top 10 State	Number	%
	Puerto Rico	2,598,133	45
1	New York	765,767	13
2	Florida	612,641	11
3	New Jersey	306,714	5
4	Pennsylvania	255,331	4
5	Massachusetts	180,062	3
6	Connecticut	175,815	3
7	California	134,147	2
8	Illinois	130,232	2
9	Texas	87,407	2
10	Ohio	63,215	1
Currently on Active Duty			
	Top 10 State	Number	%
	Puerto Rico	742	2
1	Virginia	3,660	12
2	North Carolina	3,501	11
3	Texas	3,376	11
4	California	3,025	10
5	Florida	2,516	8
6	Georgia	1,860	6
7	Washington	1,281	4
8	Hawaii	1,154	4
9	South Carolina	1,106	3
10	New York	1,091	3
Veterans			
	Top 10 State	Number	%
	Puerto Rico	96,902	31
1	Florida	50,042	16
2	New York	33,123	11
3	California	14,121	4
4	Texas	13,834	4
5	New Jersey	13,379	4
6	Pennsylvania	10,628	3
7	Virginia	9,409	3
8	North Carolina	7,019	2
9	Georgia	6,958	2
10	Illinois	5,625	2

Source: U.S. 2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Map 1. Puerto Rican Population in Kansas and Missouri, Years 2000 and 2014



Map 2. Puerto Rican Population in Georgia, Years 2000 and 2014



Map 3. Puerto Rican Population in Texas Years 2000 and 2014

2000

2014

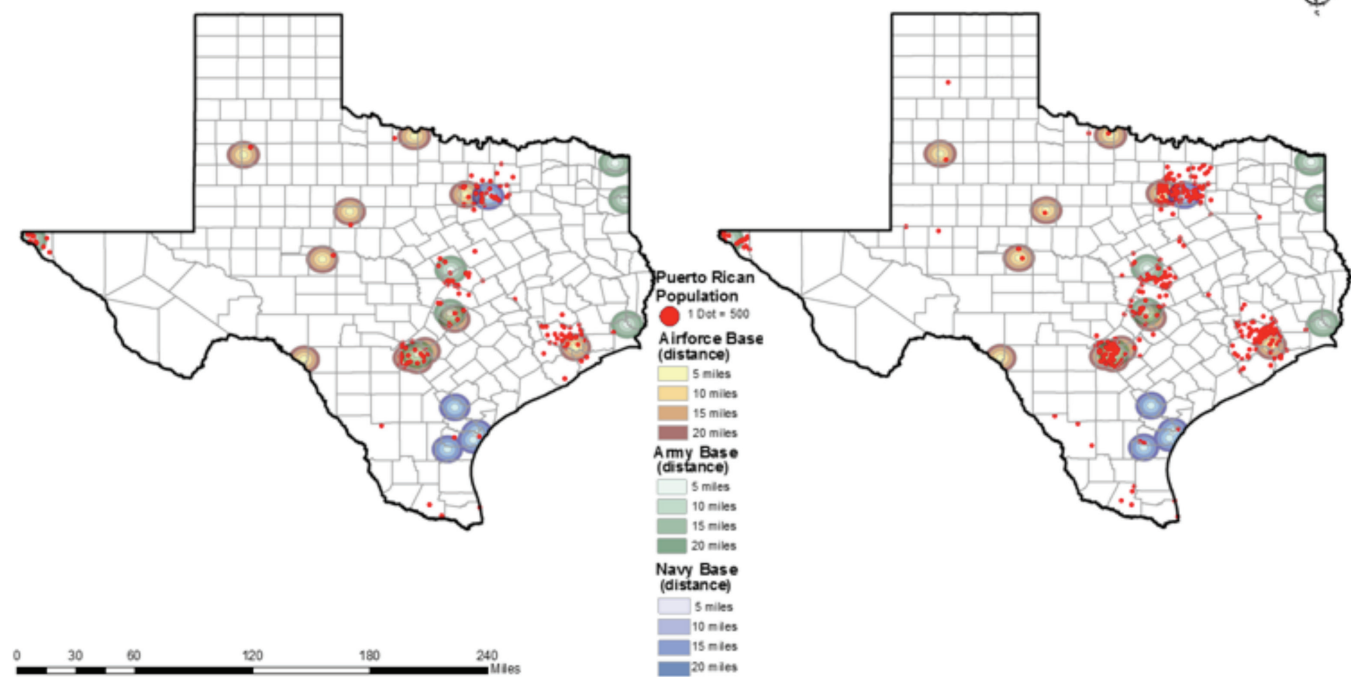
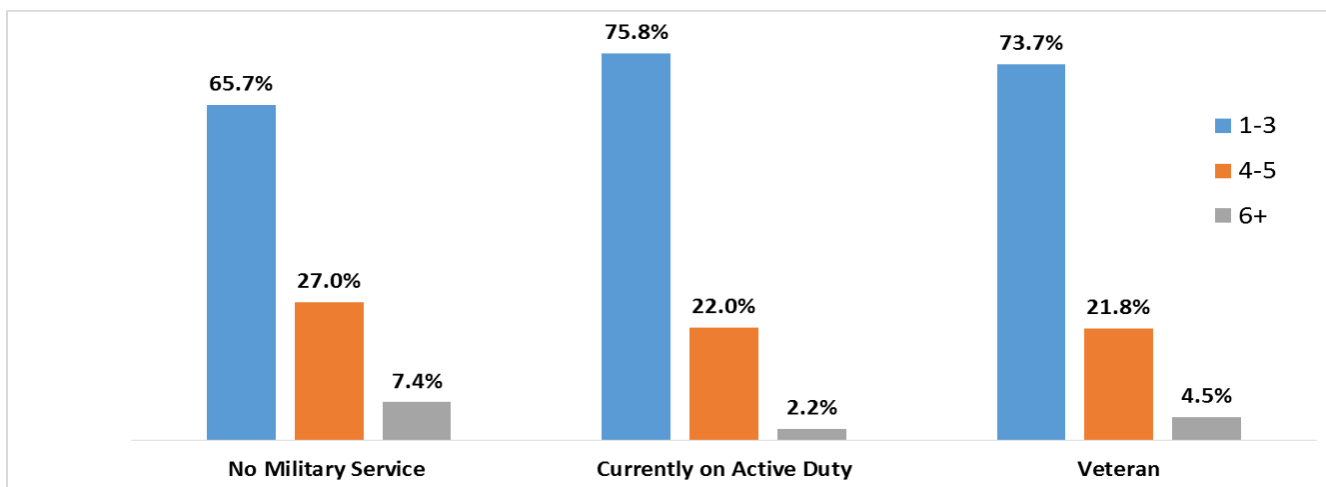


Figure 1. Number of Family Members in Stateside Puerto Rican Households, 2014



Source: U.S. 2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Thirty-eight percent of stateside Puerto Rican households headed by a civilian make less than that \$35,000 a year (see figure 5). Active Duty and Veterans' led households represent only 15 and 22 percent, respectively, in this category. Meanwhile, 66 percent of Active Duty, and 51 percent of veterans' households are in the \$35,000 to \$100,000 range (see figure 5). The largest percentage of Active Duty households (28%) falls in the \$50,000 to \$75,000 range. Veterans

have an ample advantage in the upper income brackets: 27 percent of veterans' households fall in the \$100,000 or higher categories. Military personnel and civilians both have a 19 percent representation in these brackets (see figure 5).

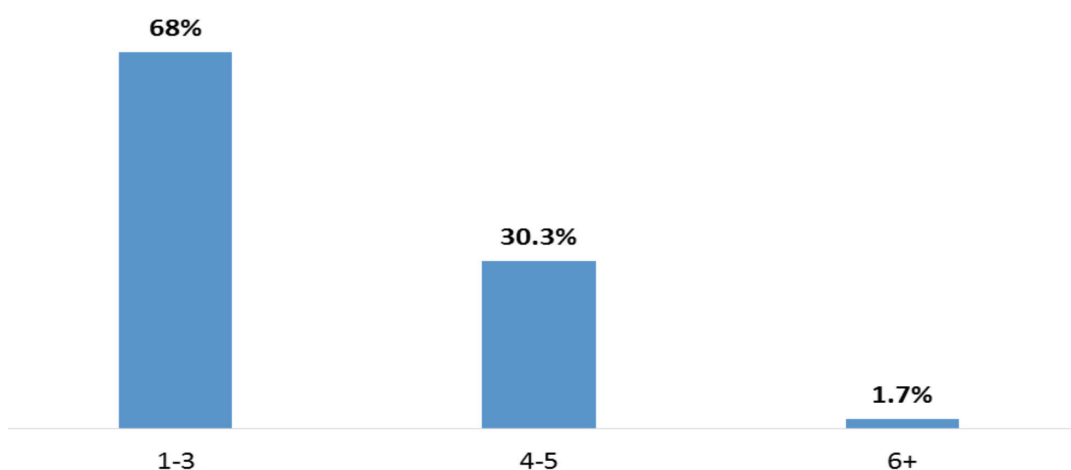
Unemployment rates also show veterans with a clear advantage over civilians. The unemployment rate for Puerto Rican veterans is lower than its non-veteran counterparts in *el Nuevo South* and the Mid-West, and much lower than

in the traditional centers of the Puerto Rican diaspora such as Massachusetts, New York, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Illinois (see figure 6). At the national level Puerto Rican veterans' unemployment is over 3 percentage points lower than the rate for Puerto Rican civilians (see figure 7). Missouri and South Carolina, present an anomaly as the Puerto Rican population in these states has a higher unemployment rate than non-veterans. These two states have a high number of Veteran Affairs medical facilities of all types. Missouri has 43, of which five are full medical centers (the

top VA health facility). South Carolina has 21 VA health facilities in total, two of which are medical centers.² These states also have large concentrations of veterans 65 years and older.³ It may be that these two factors—availability of VA health facilities and an aged veteran population account for the unemployment rate among veterans.

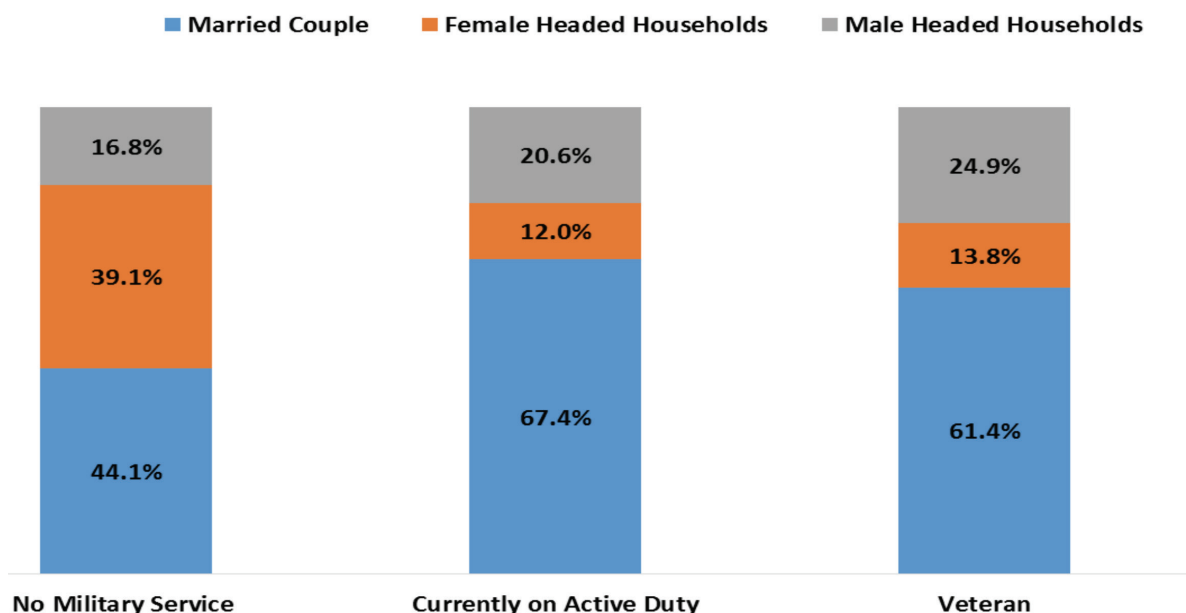
As shown in figure 8, the home ownership rate among the veteran population in these selected states (the original states of the southern Confederacy) is indeed high (compared with

Figure 2. Household Size Island-Born Puerto Rican in Stateside Active Duty, 2014



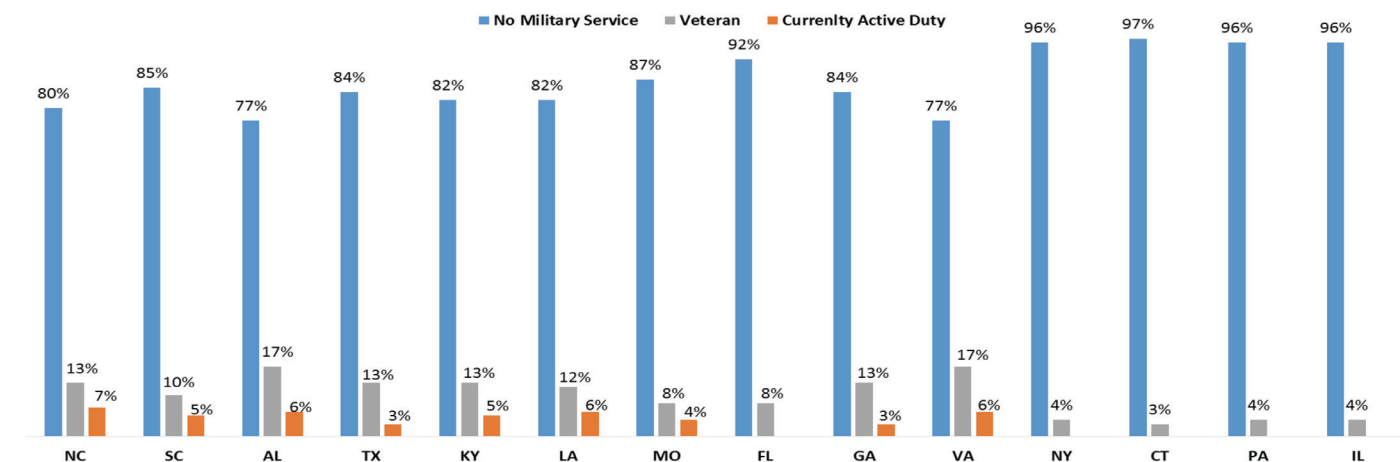
Source: U.S. 2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Figure 3. Household Size Island-Born Puerto Rican in Stateside Active Duty, 2014



Source: U.S. 2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Figure 4. Nuevo South and Traditional Centers for Puerto Rican Population by Status, 2014



Source: U.S. 2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

states traditionally associated with the Puerto Rican diaspora such as New York, Massachusetts, Illinois, Connecticut, and New Jersey). It goes from 57 percent in Missouri to 73 percent in South Carolina. Again, we are excluding military personnel from this discussion since this population has options not available to the civilian population (in-base housing) and because the nature of deployment and post reassignment makes home ownership impractical. It is noteworthy that the rate of home ownership for both veterans and civilians in these selected states is much higher than in traditional centers of the Puerto Rican diaspora.

When it comes to educational attainment Puerto Rican veterans and active duty personnel far surpass the Puerto Rican civilian population. Seventy-four percent of Puerto Rican Active Duty personnel have some college, a bachelor's degree, or graduate school; veterans follow with 65 percent and civilians trail with just 43 percent (see figure 9). Further, 26.5 percent of Puerto Rican civilians 25 years old and above have not completed high school or its equivalent. And the veteran population's percentage of graduate school attendees almost double that of the civilian population; 8.2 percent of the veteran population has not finished high school (see figure 9). This is the case because a large percentage of the veteran population served during WWII and the Korean War when the educational requirement for service was a fourth grade education.

The data, questions and discussion in this study point at the historical role of military service as an economic escape valve and path toward middle-class status for a disadvantaged population, and as a facilitator of spatial mobility. The

data show that Puerto Rican veterans and service members make socio-economic gains that put them more or less at par with the median for civilians in the U.S. as a whole. It would be unwise to ignore that all of these well-being measures, in which Puerto Rican service members and veterans seem to have the upper hand over the non-veteran population, respond to the structural disadvantages faced by the Puerto Rican population, both state- and island-based, when compared to the general population.

PROSPECTS OF THE MILITARY DIASPORA

It is worth considering that veterans and service members represent both human and financial capital. The migration of Puerto Rican veterans from the island to the mainland is not a new trend. The Vietnam War marks the point when for the first time a majority of Puerto Rican veterans returned or remained in the United States after completing their service. This trend explains why two-thirds of the Puerto Rican veteran population resides in the mainland even though two-thirds of them enrolled while on the island.

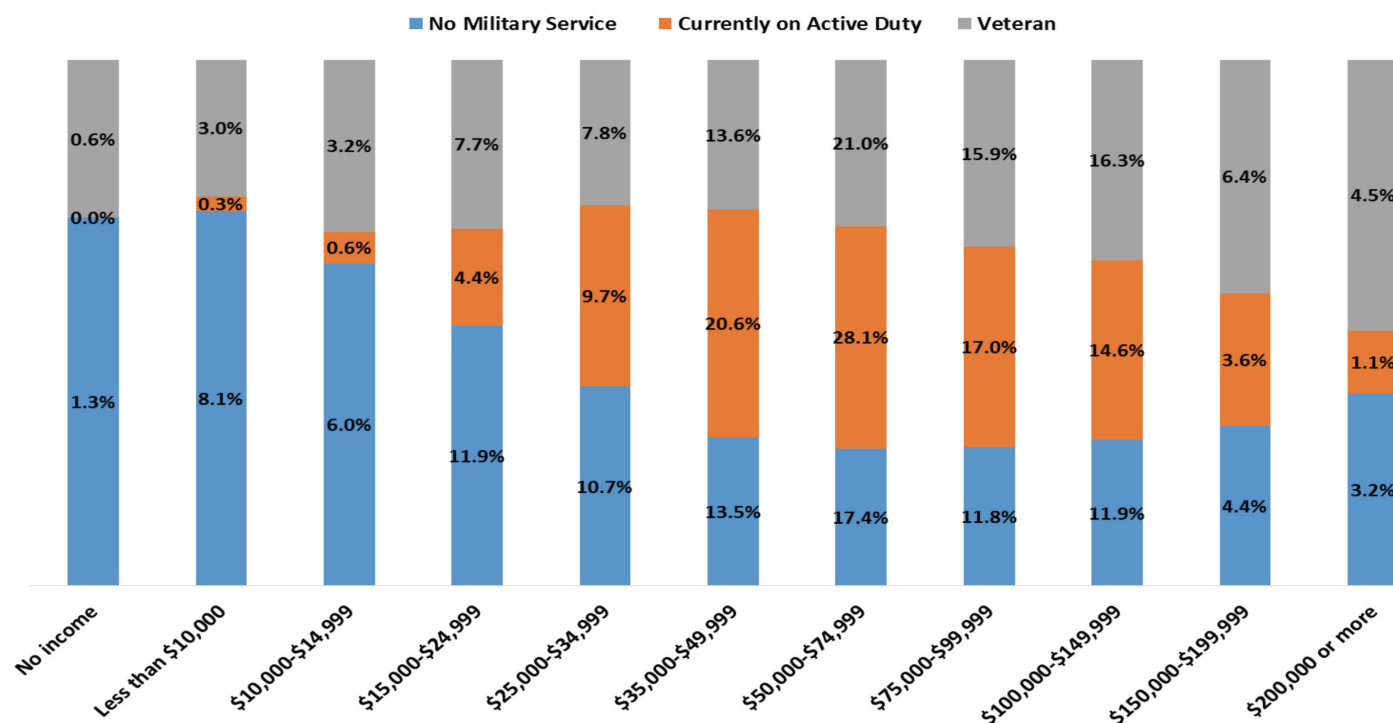
Almost 73 percent of the island-based veteran population are in the age brackets of 55 to 64, 65 to 74, and 75 years and over, while only 32 percent of the total island-based population is in those age brackets (see table 4). Almost 60 percent of the state-based veterans are in the age brackets of 35 to 54 and 18 to 34. In the case of island-based veterans these numbers could be taken as a well-being measure- longevity. But they also indicate that island-based veterans are mostly from the WWII and Korean War Era

while state-based Puerto Rican veterans participated in more recent conflicts.

Veteran migration from the island to the mainland has accelerated in recent years. A report from the Department of Veterans Affairs shows that over 40% of the veterans and beneficiaries represented by the Puerto Rico Public Advocate for Veterans Affairs (PRPAVA) were residing stateside by the time their awards were paid in January 2015.

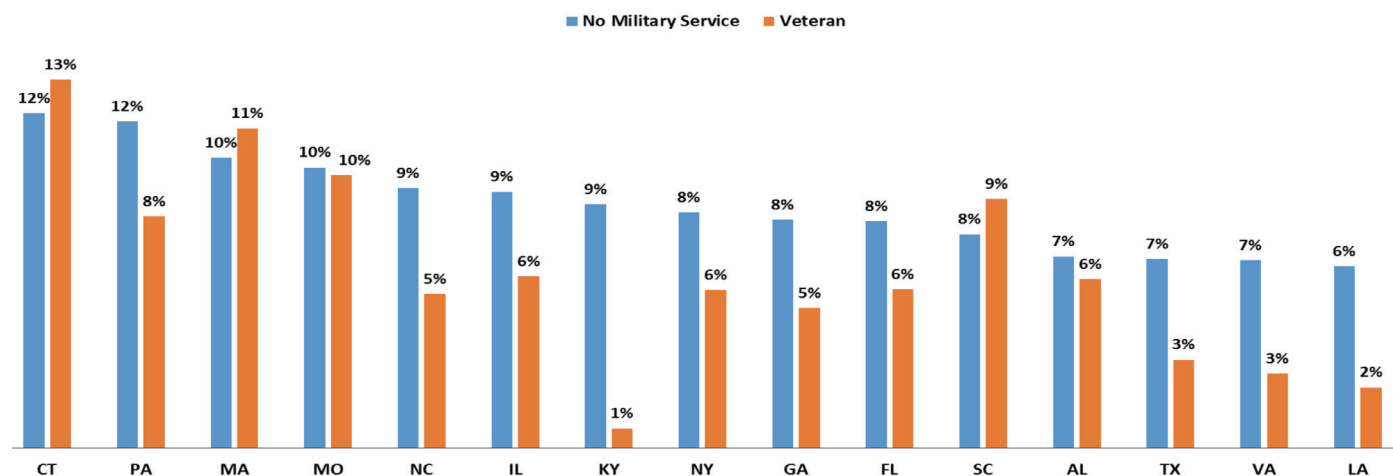
Roughly 75 percent of Puerto Ricans in Active Duty are under 34 years of age, which means we should witness a large increase of the Puerto Rican veteran population in the next decades (see figure 10). If settlement patterns continue as they are we shall see the state-based veteran population dwarf its island-based counterpart, which it already doubles. And there are no indications that Puerto Rican service members and veterans will change their migration trends. While the total veteran population in the United States and

Figure 5. Stateside Puerto Rican Median Household Income, 2014



Source: U.S. 2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Figure 6. Unemployment Rate for Stateside Puerto Ricans in Selected States, 2014

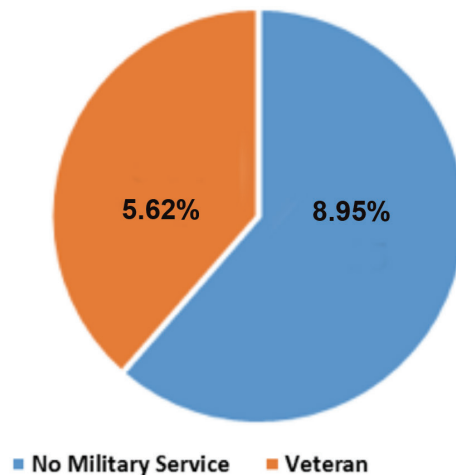


Source: U.S. 2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

its territories decreased 17 percent between 2000 and 2015 the veteran population in Puerto Rico decreased between 35.5 and 30.1 percent according to the Department of Veterans Affairs. These transfers represent a loss of financial and human capital for Puerto Rico.⁴

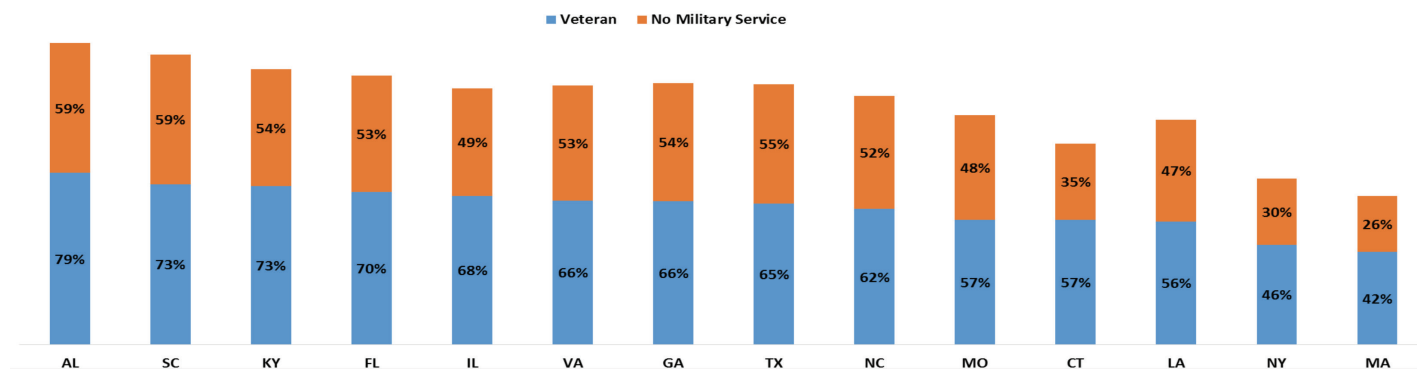
Puerto Rican military personnel and veterans are indeed changing the landscape of the U.S. mainland and opening new space, in terms of location and opportunities, for the Puerto Rican diaspora. What these changes will signify for the Puerto Rican, Latino, and overall U.S. population and society has yet to be seen and further studied. But one thing is certain, both veterans and active duty personnel will continue to spread the diaspora and military service will continue to be a path towards middle class status for stateside and island-based Puerto Ricans.

Figure 7. State-Based Puerto Ricans National Unemployment Rate, 2014



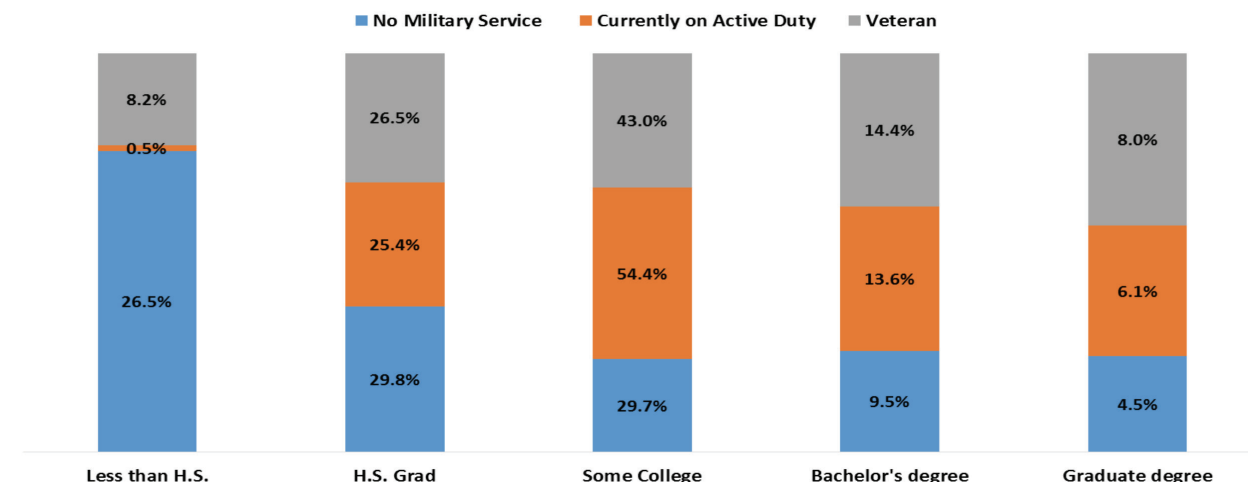
Source: U.S. 2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Figure 8. State-based Puerto Rican Homeownership, 2014



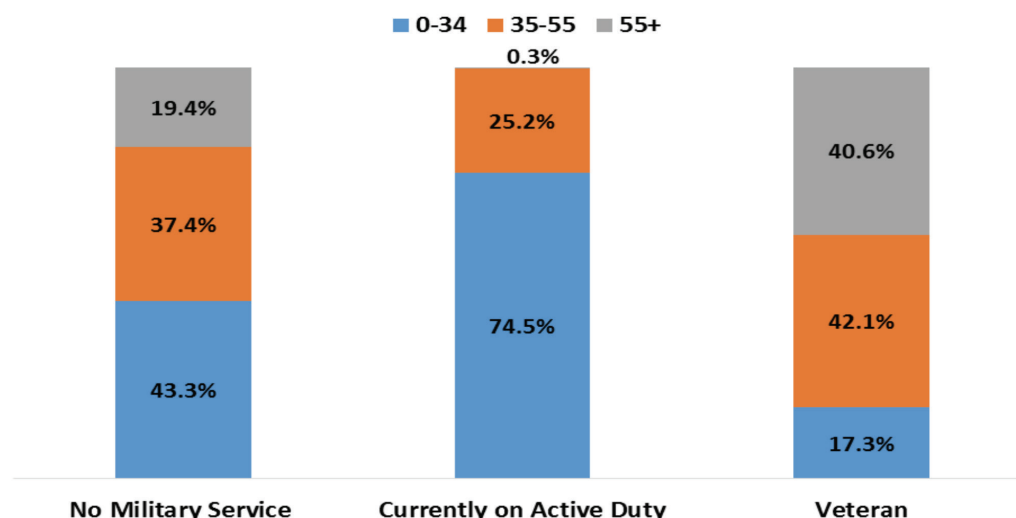
Source: U.S. 2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Figure 9. Educational Attainment State-Based Puerto Rican Population, 2014



Source: U.S. 2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Figure 10. Puerto Rican Population by Generational Group, 2014



Source: U.S. 2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

¹ http://www.apd.army.mil/pdffiles/r601_210.pdf

² U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Locations, Veterans Health Administration, <http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/division.asp?dnum=1>

³ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, <http://www.va.gov/vetdata/maps.asp>

⁴ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, <http://www.va.gov/vetdata/maps.asp>

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