



Female Marine Corps recruits take part in a training exercise in South Carolina.

Should Women Have to Register for the Draft?

▶ WOMEN IN THE MILITARY

have come a long way. Today, they can take part in special missions and lead soldiers into battle. But if the U.S. suddenly needed a massive number of combat troops, women wouldn't be forced to serve. Only men ages 18 to 25 must register for the draft—the system for selecting people who must serve in the armed forces.

The U.S. military has been an all-volunteer force since 1973, and there are no current plans to revive

the draft. Yet mandatory enlistment could return if the U.S. faced a grave threat. The Supreme Court ruled in 1981 that only men could be drafted. At the time, women weren't allowed to fight on the front lines, so drafting them made little sense. But in 2015, the U.S. made a historic move by opening combat roles to women.

Now some people say that women should also be required to register for the draft. They contend that female troops have proved that they're just as capable as their male

counterparts. Plus, supporters say, women have the same responsibility as men to protect their country.

But others disagree. They point out that most women in the military still serve in support roles, such as medics and helicopter pilots—not in combat. Drafted troops would need to be capable of fighting on the front lines, performing tasks that most women couldn't physically handle, opponents say.

Should women have to register for the draft? Two experts weigh in.

YES

Women should have the same obligation as men to register for the draft.

If we want equality for women, we must recognize that our rights come with responsibilities.

Currently, all men ages 18 to 25 must register with the Selective Service, the federal agency responsible for implementing a draft.

Women have no such requirement. This makes little sense, since women have served in key military roles for decades. It has been particularly unfair since 2015, when combat roles in the U.S. military were officially opened to anyone who could meet the physical requirements, regardless of gender. Since then, women have shown that gender is not a barrier to military combat service.

In recent years, lawmakers tried to pass a bill that, among other things, would have required women to register for the draft. Unfortunately, the version of the bill that passed did not include this change. But lawmakers like myself will continue to propose it.

In my opinion, we need to make the Selective Service not only more fair but also more meaningful. To that end, we should have a national service requirement for all young men and women, not just a system for drafting them into the military. Such a requirement could include a few years of working in public schools or rebuilding our nation's **infrastructure**. It would be a worthy investment both in young people and in our country.

As women have proved for generations, the desire and willingness to serve in our nation's military is not limited by gender. Women are equal citizens of this country, and we should have an equal responsibility to answer the call to military service in times of great national need.

—CONGRESSWOMAN JACKIE SPEIER
Democrat of California

Women should have the same obligation as men to protect their country.

NO

The Selective Service is about national security in a time of catastrophic emergency.

It's not about women's rights. Our current draft system is a relatively low-cost insurance policy that serves as a backup to our all-volunteer military. If there were a devastating attack on our country, the need to fight back might exceed the capability of our all-volunteer forces.

If Congress approves legislation to register women for the draft, then any call for draftees would have to include men and women in equal numbers. This would be counterproductive. Most women who serve in the U.S. military are not on the front lines of combat. Instead, they serve mostly in support roles. But the purpose of a draft, which would be put into effect only during a national emergency, isn't to add support troops. It's to replace people killed or wounded in battle.

While men can be rapidly trained to fight in combat, a draft that included women would simply jam up the process. The government would have to spend its already limited time and scarce resources to evaluate and train thousands of women just to find the small percentage who might be qualified for fighting units. Even though some exceptional women might qualify, the fact remains that most women cannot meet the physical standards for combat units.

Patriotic women have always served their country in times of great need—and they always will. But requiring women to register for the draft would create a political crisis and a paralyzing administrative overload. It would weaken, not strengthen, our armed forces at the worst possible time. We shouldn't do it.

—ELAINE DONNELLY
President, Center for Military Readiness

Many women aren't physically capable of fighting on the front lines.



WRITE ABOUT IT! What do you think? Should women be required to register for the draft? Write a one-page argument essay explaining your answer, using facts from the article as supporting evidence.