

# Conscription and Nation-Building: Lessons from Argentina

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## 1. Introduction

Conscription has been an institutional feature across modern nations since their historical emergence. Aimed at ensuring an active force capable of securing the nation's defense, conscription has been present across the globe for the past three centuries. By design, this policy has fostered national affiliation and national identity among those recruited to serve the nation while leveraging rule-following as a key value among those conscripted. Despite its geographical and historical prevalence, there is little empirical evidence on how conscription affects views related to nation-building, national cohesion, national identity, and civic values.

This study examines whether conscription affected values related with/conducive to nation-building among those who were mandated by law to serve in the military. To that end, we leverage a natural experiment in Argentina, where conscription was historically determined by a lottery based on the last three digits of the national identity number. A number was assigned via lottery for each ID ending between 000 and 999. Argentinian men who turned 19 (21 before 1956) and whose lottery number was above a certain cutoff were conscripted. Conversely, those who were below the cutoff were exempt from mandatory military service.

With the assistance of Netquest, an online survey platform, we will collect responses from 2500 Argentinian men exposed to the lottery that determined who was called to serve and who was not. We will use the random nature of the lottery as an exogenous source of variation for conscription status, which will allow us to estimate the long-run effects of being conscripted on various attitudes and beliefs. We intend to collect multiple survey responses pertaining to national affiliation and pride, civic values, and potential outcomes that can shed light on mechanisms.

There will be an experiment embedded in the survey, which will exploit the order in which participants answer the questions. Participants will answer an open-ended question about the values and lessons that military service instills on conscripted people. Half of the participants will answer this question before providing their views on national and civic values, while the other half will answer the questions after sharing these views. Our intention is to determine whether, for those who were conscripted, thinking about the values they were taught in the military exacerbates, placates, or has no effect on the views they express about the nation and civic values. Moreover, by directly asking those who were conscripted what they were taught in the military, this information will allow us to examine whether these participants explicitly claim that the military is where they learned the values they display in the survey.

## 2. Key questions

- Does conscription have durable effects on views and behaviors related to nation-building, national affiliation, and civic values?
- Are there heterogeneous effects based on the type of experiences lived during the military service (e.g., type of military service, being conscripted during a military government, or being conscripted during wartime)?
- Are there heterogeneous effects based on region of origin, region of ancestry, or parents' experiences?
- Are the effects exacerbated, placated, or unaffected by being reminded of the lessons and values that the military instills on those who were drafted?
- What possible mechanisms explain the long-run results?

## 3. Outcomes

As this analysis focuses on the effects of conscription on different views and attitudes, we will use the (random) lottery that determined being called to serve or not as an instrument for serving in the military. This will allow us to estimate the effects of the latter on multiple outcomes. We will also examine the heterogeneity of these baseline patterns based on several dimensions, including being conscripted during a military government or during a military conflict, type of conscription (army vs. navy), region of origin, parents' education, and region of origin of ancestors, among others. Finally, we will inquire whether our intervention has heterogeneous treatment effects based on having served in the military. We expect to cluster the standard errors of our instrumental-variable regressions at the ID-cohort level, which is the level at which the instrument (drafted) was historically determined. However, due to the nature of our study, there is a chance that

there may be some notable differences in the size of the clusters, with some clusters possibly containing several participants while others being singletons. If this turns out to be the structure of the data that we collect, we intend to focus on heteroskedastic-robust standard errors for inference.

### 3.1 Baseline Results and Outcomes

The baseline results refer to those for which we intend to estimate the effects of conscription on various outcomes with an instrumental-variables approach. As previewed above, we will use the random lottery numbers (which vary at the ID-cohort level) as an instrument for conscription. The outcomes that we will examine with this strategy are:

- National values and national cohesion: These correspond to answers about participants' sense of national pride, as well as values/views/beliefs that are conducive to nation-building (e.g., measures of social capital, perceptions of social cleavages, beliefs about the behavior of fellow nationals). Moreover, we will collect responses pertaining to views about other nationalities and other socioeconomic groups. These dimensions will allow us to examine whether conscription has contributed to nation-building, broadly understood.
- Civic values: Civic values correspond to behaviors and attitudes that are consistent with and conducive to a democratic nation governed by laws. Hence, these outcomes correspond to views and attitudes related to voting, corruption, rule-following, civic engagement, trust in legal channels as means of solving disputes (as opposed to taking matters into one's own hands). These dimensions will allow us to examine whether conscription left a durable mark on values and beliefs consistent with rule-following and/or with behaviors that contribute to a democratic nation governed by laws.
- Centrality of religion: In the context of Latin America and Argentina in particular, religion has played a historical central role in public administration and the public sphere more broadly. We will thus examine whether conscription may have crowded out religion and religiosity, or whether instead it could have reinforced these outcomes by accentuating a conservative behavior among troops.

### 3.2 Heterogeneous Effects

The following is a non-exhaustive list of plausible dimensions of heterogeneity that we expect to examine once we collect the data:

- Military Government/Military Conflict: As stated above, we intend to examine possible heterogeneity based on whether the participant was conscripted during a military government or not, and based on whether he was conscripted during a period of military conflict or tensions with a foreign entity (e.g., the United Kingdom or Chile). These are both episodes where indoctrination was plausibly stronger, and thus the effects could be exacerbated. On the other hand, these events are also ones where either adversity during military service or an ex-post reckoning of things that went wrong with the institution of the military could placate the baseline effects. We are thus not committed to any specific direction of these dimensions of heterogeneity, as both alternatives are plausible (and it may even be possible for the indoctrination effect to be present in some outcomes while the reckoning one to be present in others).
- Region of Origin/Region of Ancestry: We will examine whether there are patterns that stem from participants' regions of origin. Analogously, we will examine whether there are heterogeneous treatment effects based on the region of ancestry (ie., where the participant's ancestors came from). Given the historical relevance of immigration in Argentina, this last dimension is potentially an important source of heterogeneity. There are no specific hypotheses that we expect to observe in the data. Instead, we are interested in determining whether a clear pattern emerges from this dimension of (plausible) heterogeneity.
- Parents' Education: We will examine whether the level of educational attainment of parents exacerbates or placates the effects of conscription on attitudes pertaining to the nation and to civic values. This dimension of heterogeneity may provide suggestive evidence about the plausible mechanism that is at play.
- Type of military service (Army/Navy): The type of military service experienced by the individual may have also accentuated or attenuated the effects of conscription. This would be informative of differences across army forces, which may add nuance to the findings we will discuss.
- Number of conscripted people in the cohort: the patterns may have been reinforced in cohorts in which a large number of people were conscripted.

### 3.3 Effects of our intervention

Our intervention is designed to test whether inducing participants to think about the values instilled by the military changes their proclivity to support views related to nation-building (listed above), particularly for those participants who served in the military. We are thus mostly interested in the heterogeneous treatment effects of our intervention based on having served in the military or not. In conjunction with an analysis of the content of what participants answer, as well as about the frequency with which they speak about these issues and to whom, this intervention will allow us to examine if the values they display in the survey were directly learned in the military or if instead they came about due to other conditions that followed conscription.

### 3.4 Mechanisms

We will collect outcomes that will allow us to examine the plausibility of multiple channels that could explain any long-run effects deriving from conscription. The following list contains some of the channels that we will explore empirically:

- **Network structure:** It is possible that conscription altered the social network in which those who were drafted were later embedded. This could be the reason why they are more likely to display views and values that could have originated during the military. To that end, we will examine the network of respondents, determining how wide it is, as well as the under- or over- representation of different demographics in such networks.
- **Beliefs:** Conscription could have altered the beliefs of those who served in the military about the values and characteristics of a typical Argentinian. This could directly alter national and civic values, either because of conformity (the desire to conform to the perceived values of others) or because of a higher proclivity to cooperate with others who are perceived to be similar.
- **Occupational structure:** It is likely that conscription changed the likelihood of working in public entities. If this is the case, it is possible that such an occupational legacy is part of the reason why respondents display a higher or lower support for national and civic values. To examine the plausibility of this channel, we will ask participants to share details about their work experience (i.e., whether they entered public service right after military service), as well as about their views of such occupational choices.
- **Education:** Conscription could have altered the level of education acquired by those who were drafted, the type of education received (e.g., lower likelihood of social sciences), or both. These could be plausible channels that could explain why those who were drafted exhibit higher or lower support for national and civic values. To address this possibility, we will ask about the type of post-secondary education that participants received, and the reasons behind such choices.
- **Conformity:** Conscription may have affected the tendency to conform to the opinion of superiors or neighbors. This channel could have increased the proclivity of those who were conscripted to behave in a way that conforms to what is expected from a citizen.

It is important to emphasize that we are not committed to one of these channels, and it is likely that some of them coexist and reinforce one another (as is possible that none are present).