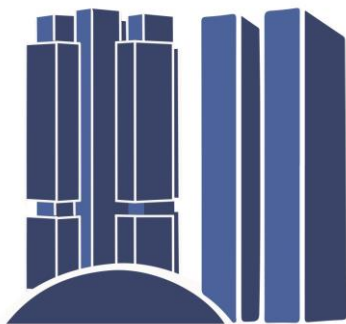




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Selective Conscription: Sequential Allocation under Incomplete Information in Brazil's Military Recruitment and Retention System

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Selective Conscription: Sequential Allocation under Incomplete Information in Brazil's Military Recruitment and Retention System*

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Abstract

The value of military service is often learned only through experience, yet initial selection into service must occur before that experience takes place. This creates a tension at the heart of every selective conscription system: the military must allocate positions among a large pool of potential recruits under imperfect information about both aptitude and preferences. Brazil, which registers over 1.5 million young men each year but incorporates only about 5 percent, is one of the largest selective systems in the world. Yet no formal framework models this process as a sequential allocation mechanism. This paper develops such a model, combining centralized screening, capacity-constrained selection by military organizations, and post-service learning through reenlistment. Two results follow. First, the interaction between screening and capacity constraints endogenously generates local quasi-random assignment at the selection margin, providing an institutional micro-foundation for regression-discontinuity identification without requiring an explicit lottery. Second, when preferences are learned through experience, conditioning initial selection on stated willingness to serve is suboptimal for the formation of a high-quality retained force. As hybrid voluntary-mandatory designs return to the European policy agenda, these results offer analytical building blocks for the reform of conscription systems under uncertainty.

JEL Codes: H56, D82, J24, J45, D86

Keywords: conscription; military manpower; screening; incomplete information; regression discontinuity; Brazil

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1 Introduction

In compulsory military service (CMS), the military must allocate a limited number of positions among a large pool of potential recruits under imperfect information about both aptitude and preferences. While individual ability can be partially assessed through observable signals, the valuation of military service is often learned only through experience. In such environments, recruitment is best understood not as a simple decision rule, but as a sequential allocation process in which screening, assignment, and learning interact over time. This paper studies how such mechanisms operate in selective conscription systems, where only a subset of eligible individuals is ultimately incorporated into service.

Brazil provides a particularly informative case. It operates one of the largest conscription systems in the world relative to its pool of potential recruits, with more than one million young men registering each year. Yet, only about 5 percent are actually incorporated. Although formally universal, the system functions as a highly selective allocation mechanism. Table 1 shows the magnitude of this gap between eligibility and incorporation, which motivates the analysis that follows.

Table 1: Military registration and conscription in Brazil, 2019–2024

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Registered	1,575,079	1,406,818	1,410,506	1,894,012	1,459,546	1,271,630
Inducted	80,464	72,880	77,491	77,932	86,017	82,717
<i>Inducted by branch</i>						
Navy	3,320	3,087	2,923	3,428	3,362	3,484
Army	71,084	65,635	70,436	68,073	75,980	73,430
Air Force	6,060	4,158	4,132	6,431	6,675	5,803
Conscription rate	5.1%	5.2%	5.5%	4.1%	5.9%	6.5%

Source: Brazil. Ministry of Defense (2025).

Within defense economics, manpower has received comparatively less attention than expenditures and equipment. Even within the manpower literature, no formal model represents selective conscription as a sequential allocation mechanism. This gap is particularly relevant in systems such as Brazil’s, where incorporation is not a mechanical consequence of eligibility but the outcome of screening, ranking, capacity constraints, and subsequent preference revelation. Selection therefore shapes not only who serves, but also the interpretation of observed outcomes.

This paper makes two main contributions. First, it models selective conscription as a sequential allocation mechanism under incomplete information, combining centralized screening, capacity-constrained selection, and a post-service stage in which both sides learn about

match quality. The model implies that, conditional on pre-selection, the final pools of candidates are relatively homogeneous in expected military aptitude, generating an endogenous quasi-random assignment result at the selection margin that provides a foundation for causal inference.

Second, the model rationalizes a distinctive institutional feature of the Brazilian system: initial induction does not rely on stated willingness to serve. Because preferences over military service are only revealed through experience, conditioning selection on ex-ante voluntariness is suboptimal. Deferring preference revelation to the reenlistment stage dominates conditioning on initial willingness to serve.

These results speak to a broader policy question. As conscription returns to the European agenda in the wake of the war in Ukraine, several countries are debating hybrid designs that combine voluntary enlistment with the option to reintroduce compulsory service (Lazarou & Lamprou, 2025; Sava, 2026). The model’s central mechanisms—selective incorporation, capacity-constrained allocation, and deferred preference revelation—are precisely the features that hybrid designs would need to formalize.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the related literature. Section 3 describes the Brazilian institutional setting as a sequential allocation mechanism. Section 4 develops the model and derives the main results. Section 5 discusses implications for empirical identification and policy design. Section 6 concludes.

2 Related Literature

This paper connects three strands of the literature. The first concerns the economics of military manpower and the labor-market effects of military service. The second relates to screening, signaling, and personnel economics under asymmetric information. The third concerns the political economy of conscription, including the renewed European debate on compulsory service and the Brazilian institutional context.

From a public economics perspective, the organization of military recruitment involves a trade-off between allocative efficiency and other public objectives. Voluntary enlistment allows individuals with lower opportunity costs to self-select into service, promoting allocative efficiency (Smith, 1776, bk. V ch. I). Warner and Asch (2001) document that transitions from conscription to all-volunteer forces have historically been justified on efficiency grounds, while Poutvaara and Wagener (2007) survey the political economy considerations that sustain conscription despite its efficiency costs, and Choulis et al. (2021) provide evidence that conscription systems generate broader public support for the armed forces.

2.1 Military manpower and labor-market effects

Military service may transmit effects to the labor market through several mechanisms, including the accumulation of work experience, the acquisition of vocational skills, improvements in physical health, and the development of noncognitive traits such as discipline, punctuality, and the ability to receive and transmit precise instructions (Benoit, 1973, p. 192). These traits play a central role in shaping labor-market outcomes (Heckman & Rubinstein, 2001), and from this perspective military service can be viewed as a structured environment for training and skill formation (Sandler & Hartley, 1995, p. 176). Compulsory service may also generate negative effects. Bethmann and Cho (2023) document persistent impacts on physical health and increased consumption of alcohol and tobacco after discharge in contexts of active combat exposure, suggesting that the costs of service may extend over the life cycle even after service ends.

International evidence on the labor-market effects of peacetime military service is mixed. Studies generally find negative or null effects on earnings in OECD contexts, though magnitudes and directions vary with institutional design (Angrist et al., 2011; Bauer et al., 2012; Cáceres Delpiano, 2025; Card & Cardoso, 2012; Galiani et al., 2011; Keller et al., 2009; Puhani & Sterrenberg, 2022). Impacts of related work documents on education (Torun & Tumen, 2016) and crime (Albæk et al., 2017). The common view that military experience enhances future employability is therefore not consistently supported.

2.2 Screening, signaling, and personnel economics

The paper draws on the classic literature on screening and signaling under asymmetric information. Spence (1973) introduced the idea that observable actions can serve as signals of unobservable types when parties have divergent information. Stiglitz (1975) formalized how principals design mechanisms to sort agents through observable characteristics, and Riley (2001) surveys the subsequent development of screening theory as a general framework for allocation under private information. This framework is a natural language for selective conscription: military authorities cannot observe aptitude, motivation, health, or outside opportunities directly, and must select candidates using observable signals and institutional filters. Selective conscription is therefore analytically closer to a screening mechanism than to a universal draft, and one in which the informational structure evolves over the different stages of selection and service.¹

¹The same framework has been used to interpret military service as a signal to civilian employers: Altonji and Pierret (2001) model employer learning about young workers as new signals become available, a mechanism relevant precisely at early labor-market entry. The present paper focuses on the informational problem faced by the Armed Forces, not by civilian employers.

The argument is also related to personnel economics. Lazear (1999) established personnel economics as a distinct field within labor economics, and Lazear and Oyer (2013) synthesize how firms design hiring, screening, and retention systems to attract, motivate, and retain workers under imperfect information. The Armed Forces face an analogous problem, embedded in public law and national-defense objectives rather than profit maximization. Initial service can be interpreted as an entry-level assignment that provides short-term manpower, screens candidates for future careers, and reveals information on match quality. Reenlistment then becomes a second-stage retention decision, shaped by updated beliefs on both sides. This dynamic structure mirrors a broader class of employment systems in which early assignments generate information that affects later retention decisions, and is precisely the structure formalized in Section 4.

2.3 Conscription and the renewed European debate

Once treated in many countries as a legacy institution of the twentieth century (Poutvaara & Wagener, 2007), conscription has returned to the policy agenda in Europe in the context of the war in Ukraine, military readiness and the resilience of defense systems. A 2025 briefing by the European Parliamentary Research Service explicitly frames conscription as part of the renewed debate on European preparedness and defense capacity (Lazarou & Lamprou, 2025). This debate underscores that the central policy question is not whether countries should adopt conscription or professional forces, but how systems of mobilization should be designed when governments face uncertainty about threats, budgets, manpower needs, and the composition of the eligible population.

These design questions are precisely those that a selective conscription system such as Brazil’s must confront in practice. Yet the institutional architecture of Brazilian conscription has not received a corresponding analytical treatment. The Brazilian literature on military service is predominantly historical, sociological, and legal. A first strand examines the institutionalization of compulsory service and its role in state formation, territorial integration, and the socialization of institutional values (Castro, 1990; Kuhlmann, 2001). A second strand addresses legal and constitutional dimensions, including the compatibility of compulsory service with individual rights (Santos, 2024). This literature lacks a formal economic framework capable of representing the sequential allocation mechanism through which a small fraction of eligible individuals is effectively incorporated. This gap has substantive consequences: as documented in Section 3, the military-service pathway supplies the majority of the Army’s junior enlisted personnel, so that the design of selection shapes the composition of a substantial portion of the Brazilian Armed Forces. Without such a

framework, it is difficult to characterize the institutional rationale for the observed selection design or to identify the conditions under which this design may generate quasi-random variation at the selection margin.

This paper fills this gap by combining the economics of military manpower with screening theory and personnel economics to represent Brazil’s compulsory military service as a selective, sequential allocation mechanism. This framing also offers a tractable analytical structure for the design questions now returning to the European policy agenda.

3 The Brazilian System as a Sequential Allocation Mechanism

Brazilian conscription provides a specific model-generating case: a system in which registration is broadly universal, incorporation is highly selective, screening is sequential, final assignment is capacity-constrained, and the relevant willingness to pursue a military career is revealed only after direct exposure to service.

This last feature is defining. The Brazilian system does not merely allocate individuals to a one-year compulsory service spell. It also creates the pool from which the Armed Forces² recruits its junior enlisted ranks through voluntary reenlistment. The model formalizes this institutional logic.

Five features discipline the model: registration is compulsory for men at age 18 and therefore broad; incorporation is limited by the personnel needs and geographic distribution of the Armed Forces; the selection process combines centralized administrative screening with decentralized final selection by military organizations; initial service functions as a period of observation and learning; and retention depends on voluntary reenlistment, after individuals have experienced military life and military organizations have observed performance and fit. Initial induction and reenlistment are therefore linked stages of a broader manpower mechanism under incomplete information about both aptitude and preferences.

3.1 Universal registration and selective induction

Brazil operates a formally compulsory military service system for male citizens at age 18, with an initial service period of approximately twelve months (Brazil, 1964, 1966). Individuals are required to register for military service, either online or through a local Military Service

²Although the CMS operates for all Armed Forces, it is the exclusive entry channel into junior enlisted ranks in the Army, and the main channel in the Air Force, where only a small specialty is recruited through competitive examinations. In the Navy, by contrast, conscripts are not incorporated into junior enlisted ranks, which are filled entirely through competitive examinations (see Table 2).

Board (*Junta de Serviço Militar*, JSM), and may indicate a preferred branch—the Navy, the Army, or the Air Force. Registration is therefore broad, while actual incorporation is limited.

This gap between registration and induction is the first modeling primitive. In Brazil, compulsory registration does not imply universal service. The Armed Forces select only a small fraction of the eligible cohort for incorporation. In the mid-2020s, approximately 1.5 million men belonged to the age cohort subject to compulsory registration each year (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), 2018). From 2025 onward, voluntary enlistment for women expanded the potential recruitment universe, although the compulsory component remains male (Brazil, 2024; Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), 2018).

The selective character of the system is evident in aggregate registration and induction data. Between 2019 and 2024, annual military registration ranged from approximately 1.27 million to 1.89 million individuals, while total induction remained between approximately 73,000 and 86,000 individuals. As reported in Table 1, the resulting conscription rate fluctuated around 5 percent.³ The relevant allocation problem is therefore not whether an entire cohort serves, but how the Armed Forces select a limited number of recruits from a much larger pool of potential candidates.

This structural asymmetry motivates the first modeling choice. The initial population is large relative to military demand, and the number of available positions is constrained by the operational needs of the Armed Forces. Selection is not a secondary institutional detail: it is the core mechanism through which compulsory military service operates in Brazil.

3.2 Geographic eligibility and centralized screening

The Brazilian selection process is geographically structured. The Armed Forces determine personnel needs according to the distribution and demand of military organizations. As a result, not all registered individuals face the same probability of reaching the final selection stage. Access to incorporation depends on whether the individual’s municipality, or a nearby municipality, is connected to military demand in a given recruitment cycle.

This feature motivates the local structure of the model. For each municipality, the relevant pool of potential recruits is not the national cohort as a whole, but the set of individuals who reside in municipalities that may supply recruits to the military organizations associated with that location. The model captures this through a geographically defined eligible pool.

³The conscription rate was reduced when compared to the average 8.8 percent rate between 1987 and 1991, which Kuhlmann (2001) interprets as the Army’s objective of professionalizing its forces.

Figure 1 illustrates this geographic structure. Municipal rates of advancement to final selection exhibit substantial spatial heterogeneity, with many municipalities showing zero advancement rates alongside others where a considerable share of registered individuals advances. This variation is present within states, reinforcing that access to incorporation is shaped by the location of military organizations and their capacity constraints rather than by broad regional characteristics alone.

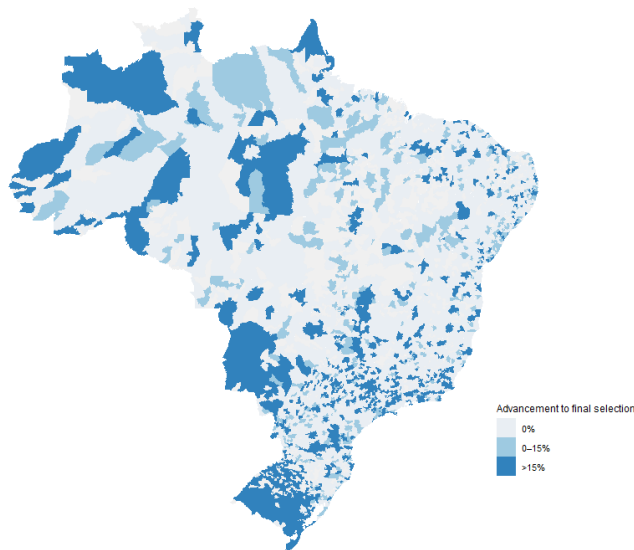


Figure 1: Spatial Variation in Advancement to Final Selection

Notes: Municipal rates, Brazil, 2016. The figure highlights substantial spatial heterogeneity in advancement outcomes within a formally compulsory system.

Source: SERMIL (Brazil. Brazilian Army Command, 2025).

Within municipalities that supply candidates, registered individuals undergo a sequence of screening procedures. These include document verification, medical and dental examinations, physical fitness assessments, and personal interviews. These procedures generate observable signals of suitability for military service. In the model, these signals are represented as imperfect measures of latent military aptitude.

The Brazilian system therefore separates two distinct informational stages. At registration, the authority observes administrative characteristics that may determine exemption or eligibility. During screening, it observes noisy signals related to physical, behavioral, and functional suitability. These signals allow the selection authority to form expectations about military aptitude, but they do not reveal the individual's full type. In particular, willingness to serve, opportunity costs, and future valuation of military life are not fully observed at this stage.

The centralized screening stage thus performs two functions. It excludes individuals who do not satisfy minimum institutional requirements, and it ranks or classifies remaining

candidates according to expected suitability. This does not mean that the screening process perfectly orders candidates. Rather, it narrows a large eligible population into a smaller and more homogeneous set of candidates who may be forwarded to military organizations for final selection.

3.3 Forwarding with excess and decentralized final selection

A distinctive feature of the Brazilian process is that centralized screening does not itself determine final incorporation. After the general selection stage, candidates deemed suitable are matched to the personnel needs of military organizations. Each receiving military organization obtains a list of pre-selected candidates, typically larger than the number of available positions. This list is typically on the order of three times the number of positions to be filled.

This deliberate over-provisioning is central to the allocation mechanism. It gives military organizations discretion to conduct a final selection among candidates who have already passed the centralized screening process. Effective incorporation therefore results from the interaction between two stages: a centralized stage that filters and forwards candidates, and a decentralized stage in which military organizations select recruits subject to binding capacity constraints.

The model represents this structure as a sequential screening problem. The centralized authority observes signals of general suitability and forwards a set of candidates larger than final demand. Military organizations then observe additional information, including task-specific suitability, behavioral impressions, and other local criteria, and select a subset of candidates for induction. Because the number of forwarded candidates exceeds the number of available positions, final selection is capacity-constrained.

The institutional features described above suggest that centralized screening is more effective at excluding clearly unsuitable candidates than at producing a perfectly precise ranking of all remaining individuals. Screening combines medical, physical, behavioral, and administrative assessments that generate informative but imperfect signals of military aptitude. As a result, the pool of candidates forwarded to military organizations is expected to be more homogeneous in observable suitability than the original population of eligible conscripts.

This feature is central to the analysis that follows. Conditional on having passed centralized screening and being forwarded to a military organization, candidates near the final selection margin are expected to be relatively homogeneous in observable and expected military aptitude. At the same time, final selection remains constrained by local capacity and influenced by information that may not be fully observed by the researcher. This institu-

tional structure provides the basis for modeling final induction as a capacity-constrained cutoff rule.

3.4 Initial service, reenlistment, and delayed preference revelation

Selected individuals are incorporated for an initial period of approximately twelve months of military service. At the end of this period, they may request voluntary reenlistment through annual renewals, subject to approval by the Armed Forces and to institutional limits on total service length. Reenlistment therefore requires a joint decision: the individual must be willing to remain, and the military organization must consider the individual suitable for retention.

This reenlistment stage is not a peripheral institutional detail. It is the second selection margin of the Brazilian manpower system. Initial induction determines who is exposed to military service; reenlistment determines which of those initially incorporated individuals may continue along the military-service pathway. The relevant objective of the Armed Forces is therefore not only to fill initial compulsory-service positions, but also to preserve the option of retaining high-aptitude individuals after their performance and fit have been observed.

This structure is reflected in the composition of lower-rank enlisted personnel. Table 2 reports personnel-composition measures for 2016. The same patterns are stable over the 2013–2024 period. Initial-service recruits account for a substantial share of active personnel in the Army and the Air Force, and the broader military-service pathway represents the majority of the Army’s enlisted force. The Navy differs markedly: most lower-rank enlisted personnel enter through competitive examinations.

The timing of preference revelation is crucial. At the time of registration and screening, individuals have not yet experienced military life. Their stated willingness to serve, when expressed, may reflect incomplete information, family expectations, short-term labor-market conditions, or strategic considerations. By contrast, after initial service, individuals have observed the military environment, their own fit with discipline and hierarchy, the non-pecuniary costs and benefits of service, and the relative attractiveness of civilian alternatives. Their willingness to remain is consequently more informative at reenlistment than at induction.

The Brazilian system can therefore be interpreted as separating two informational problems. Initial induction is based primarily on expected aptitude, as inferred from observable characteristics and imperfect signals. Preference revelation is deferred to the reenlistment stage, after service experience has generated information for both sides. This institutional sequencing is the object of Proposition 2: from the perspective of the Armed Forces, con-

Table 2: Military-service pathway in active personnel, by branch, 2016

Branch	Initial-service recruits as share of active personnel	Share of active personnel from the military-service pathway	Main lower-rank enlisted channel
Army	26%	61%	CMS
Air Force	25%	40%	CMS
Navy	4%	4%	Competitive exams
Armed Forces total	21%	45%	Mixed

Notes: Percentages refer to 2016. The same patterns are stable over the 2013–2024 period. “Initial-service recruits” refers to personnel serving the twelve-month compulsory military service period. “Military-service pathway” refers to active personnel whose entry into junior enlisted ranks originated in the induction and initial-service process; it includes enlisted personnel who initially entered as conscripts and remained in service through voluntary reenlistment. In the Navy, conscripts cannot voluntarily reenlist into career junior ranks: the Navy’s junior enlisted personnel are recruited through competitive examinations. *Source:* Calculations based on military personnel payroll records.

ditioning initial induction on stated voluntariness may be inferior to selecting on expected aptitude and allowing preferences to be revealed after experience.

The resulting structure is a sequential allocation mechanism under incomplete information. The Armed Forces first select from a large pool of potential recruits using imperfect signals of aptitude. Military organizations then make final capacity-constrained induction decisions among pre-screened candidates. Finally, after service experience has generated new information, individuals and military organizations jointly determine retention through reenlistment. The model in the next section formalizes this institutional logic.

4 The Sequential Allocation Model of Selective Conscription

This section develops a sequential allocation model of selective conscription under imperfect information. The model captures a process in which different institutional agents screen, select, and retain individuals at successive stages, each based on progressively richer information. Three key features of the Brazilian system motivate the framework. First, the pool of eligible individuals is geographically defined. Second, selection takes place in two stages: an initial centralized screening, followed by a final capacity-constrained selection by individual military organizations. Third, individuals are not asked to declare their willingness to serve at the time of compulsory enrollment. Taken together, these features imply that the conscription process operates simultaneously as a screening device, a constrained allocation

mechanism, and a setting for learning about individuals' suitability for military service.

4.1 Environment and types

Consider a set of individuals $i \in \mathcal{I}$, belonging to the same cohort subject to compulsory conscription. Each individual is characterized by a private type

$$\theta_i = (a_i, c_i, y_i, e_i, x_i) \quad (1)$$

where a_i denotes military aptitude, interpreted as a scalar index of expected productivity in military service, capturing relevant physical, cognitive, and behavioral traits; c_i represents the individual cost of serving; y_i denotes the return in the civilian labor market; e_i captures educational attainment; and x_i is a vector of other observable and institutionally relevant characteristics, such as marital status, presence of dependents, family conditions, legal restrictions, employment status, and other factors that may affect exemption from induction.

This parameterization of individual heterogeneity is consistent with the economic literature on military recruitment, particularly models of labor supply and selection in armed forces (Asch et al., 2007), in which entry and retention decisions are shaped by individual characteristics, opportunity costs, and relative returns between military service and civilian employment.

Types are drawn from a distribution $\theta_i \sim F(\theta)$, where $F(\cdot)$ is common knowledge to the Brazilian military selection authorities, hereafter referred to as the JSM for simplicity.⁴ The distribution is known to the authority, but individual realizations are not. This characterizes an environment of incomplete information with common beliefs, a plausible assumption given the authority's access to aggregate administrative and statistical data on the population.

The JSM does not observe θ_i directly. Instead, it observes two sets of information. First, a vector of observable characteristics $x_i \in X$, which are administratively verified at the time of registration. Second, it observes a vector of signals about latent traits,

$$s_i = (s_i^m, s_i^f, s_i^e) \sim P(s_i | \theta_i) \quad (2)$$

corresponding to medical and dental examinations, physical fitness assessments, and personal interviews.

Consistent with institutional practice, the JSM ranking uses signals of suitability (s_i)

⁴Throughout the paper, we refer to the centralized military selection authority as the JSM (*Junta de Serviço Militar*) as a notational simplification, since the JSM is the first institutional point of contact for registration. The institutional description of the selection process draws on cooperation with the Brazilian Army.

rather than self-reported willingness or opportunity costs (c_i, y_i) , which are not credibly observed at enrollment. The components c_i and y_i enter the type vector because they are relevant for the reenlistment decision (Subsection 4.5) and for labor market outcomes, even though they do not enter the selection criterion at induction.

The environment is geographically structured. In each municipality m , the demand for recruits arises from the operational needs of the military organizations (MOs) located in that municipality. While a given municipality may host multiple MOs—potentially with heterogeneous personnel requirements—the JSM does not observe individual characteristics at this stage. We therefore model this structure in aggregated form. Let total demand for recruits in municipality m be given by the sum of the demands of the MOs located in that municipality:

$$Q_m = \sum_{o \in \mathcal{O}_m} Q_{mo}, \quad (3)$$

where $\mathcal{O}_m$ denotes the set of MOs in municipality m , and Q_{mo} is the demand of MO o . Define the set of eligible municipalities as

$$\mathcal{M}_m = \{m\} \cup \text{Adj}(m), \quad (4)$$

where $\text{Adj}(m)$ denotes municipalities adjacent to m , defined based on the minimization of transportation costs. The corresponding set of eligible conscripts is

$$\mathcal{I}_m = \{i : i \text{ resides in } \mathcal{M}_m\}. \quad (5)$$

Geographic eligibility is treated as exogenous to individual behavior and reflects logistical and operational constraints of the personnel policy, determining the initial pool of candidates potentially available for induction.

4.2 Stage 1: Centralized screening

The initial screening conducted by the JSM proceeds in two steps. First, based on observable characteristics x_i , institutional eligibility criteria are applied, which may result in the automatic exemption of some individuals. Accordingly, define the set of eligible conscripts in municipality m as:

$$\tilde{\mathcal{I}}_m = \{i \in \mathcal{I}_m : x_i \in \mathcal{X}^{elig}\} \quad (6)$$

We assume that the eligible pool satisfies an oversupply condition relative to local demand:

$$|\tilde{\mathcal{I}}_m| \geq \kappa \cdot Q_m, \quad \kappa > 1. \quad (7)$$

From this pool, the JSM conducts a second step aimed at selecting a subset of individuals to be forwarded to the receiving military organizations (MOs) for final selection. We assume that the observable characteristics x_i do not provide additional information about military aptitude a_i beyond what is captured by the signals s_i . In this second stage, the JSM observes s_i and forms beliefs about individual types according to Bayes' rule:

$$\mu(\theta_i | s_i) = \frac{P(s_i | \theta_i) F(\theta_i)}{P(s_i)}. \quad (8)$$

Based on these beliefs, the JSM constructs a ranking score given by expected military aptitude:

$$S_i = \mathbb{E}[a_i | s_i]. \quad (9)$$

The JSM's selection rule can then be characterized as the solution to a problem of maximizing expected performance subject to a capacity constraint. The constraint deliberately over-provisions candidates to the MOs, on the order of three times the number of positions to be filled. Let Q_m denote the number of recruits demanded by the MOs in municipality m . The JSM selects a subset $\mathcal{C}_m \subset \tilde{\mathcal{I}}_m$ that solves

$$\begin{aligned} \max_{\mathcal{C}_m \subset \tilde{\mathcal{I}}_m} \quad & \sum_{i \in \mathcal{C}_m} \mathbb{E}[a_i | s_i] \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & |\mathcal{C}_m| = K_m \approx 3Q_m. \end{aligned} \quad (10)$$

Thus, the problem reduces to selecting individuals with the highest expected productivity based on available information. The solution is characterized by a cutoff rule τ_m , such that

$$\mathcal{C}_m = \{i \in \tilde{\mathcal{I}}_m : S_i \geq \tau_m\}, \quad (11)$$

where τ_m is determined so that $|\mathcal{C}_m| = K_m \approx 3Q_m$.

This selection rule implies that the distribution of types conditional on pre-selection,

$$\theta_i | i \in \mathcal{C}_m \sim F_m^*, \quad (12)$$

exhibits lower dispersion than in the original population. The variance of a_i conditional on $i \in \mathcal{C}_m$ is lower than its unconditional counterpart, reflecting the concentration of individuals with similar levels of expected military aptitude. Moreover, for individuals with scores

close to τ_m , differences in expected productivity are of second order, so that the subset of marginally selected conscripts is approximately homogeneous in productive characteristics.

4.3 Stage 2: Capacity-constrained final selection

Military organizations (MOs) receive the set of pre-screened conscripts $\mathcal{C}_m$ and select, at their discretion, the individuals who will be effectively inducted. This decision can be written as the solution to a problem of maximizing the expected performance of the inducted cohort, subject to a capacity constraint. Specifically, the MO chooses an indicator $d_i \in \{0, 1\}$ for each $i \in \mathcal{C}_m$ to solve

$$\begin{aligned} \max_{\{d_i\}_{i \in \mathcal{C}_m}} \quad & \sum_{i \in \mathcal{C}_m} d_i \mathbb{E}[a_i \mid s_i, z_i] \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & \sum_{i \in \mathcal{C}_m} d_i = Q_m \end{aligned} \tag{13}$$

where z_i represents additional information available to the MO at the time of selection, such as behavioral traits, task-specific suitability, or other discretionary criteria not fully captured by the signals observed by the JSM.

Equivalently, the induction decision can be represented by a selection rule

$$d_i = \sigma^{MO}(s_i, z_i) \tag{14}$$

where $\sigma^{MO}(\cdot)$ maps the information available at the time of final selection into induction decisions, subject to the capacity constraint. Define the MO selection index

$$R_i^{MO} = \mathbb{E}[a_i \mid s_i, z_i]. \tag{15}$$

Because of the prior screening conducted by the JSM, the forwarded set $\mathcal{C}_m$ consists of individuals who are relatively homogeneous in terms of the score $S_i = \mathbb{E}[a_i \mid s_i]$. Within this pre-screened pool, the additional information z_i becomes relatively more important for differentiating among candidates. However, z_i may include factors that are not perfectly observed by the researcher and are not fully informative about the underlying type θ_i . As a result, part of the MO's ranking reflects variation that is residual from the researcher's perspective, consistent with the institutional interpretation discussed in Section 3.3.

Lemma 1 (Capacity implies a cutoff rule within $\mathcal{C}_m$) *Consider the MO problem in (13). This is a standard linear assignment problem with a cardinality constraint. Assume that, within $\mathcal{C}_m$, the index $R_i^{MO} \equiv \mathbb{E}[a_i \mid s_i, z_i]$ is distinct across candidates (ties occur with probability zero). Then any solution to (13) selects the Q_m candidates with the highest values of R_i^{MO} . Equivalently, there exists a cutoff τ_m^{MO} such that*

$$d_i = \mathbf{1}\{R_i^{MO} \geq \tau_m^{MO}\}, \quad i \in \mathcal{C}_m. \quad (16)$$

Proof. The result follows from the standard exchange argument for linear-additive objectives. Suppose a feasible allocation $\{d_i\}$ with $\sum_{i \in \mathcal{C}_m} d_i = Q_m$ selects some j with $d_j = 1$ and excludes some k with $d_k = 0$, despite $R_k^{MO} > R_j^{MO}$. Swapping choices (set $d'_j = 0, d'_k = 1$, leaving all others unchanged) preserves feasibility and strictly increases the objective in (13) by $R_k^{MO} - R_j^{MO} > 0$, contradicting optimality. Hence any optimal solution must include all candidates with R_i^{MO} values above some threshold and exclude those below it, yielding a cutoff τ_m^{MO} that implements the selection. Since ties occur with probability zero, the cutoff τ_m^{MO} is well-defined. $\square$ ■

4.4 Local assignment at the margin

Local smoothness condition The key requirement for the local smoothness condition to hold is that the distribution of individual types varies smoothly around the MO cutoff. Let $F_\theta(\theta \mid R_i^{MO} = r, i \in \mathcal{C}_m)$ denote the conditional distribution of individual types among forwarded candidates with index r , with θ denoting a generic type. Local continuity requires:

$$\lim_{r \uparrow \tau_m^{MO}} F_\theta(\theta \mid R_i^{MO} = r, i \in \mathcal{C}_m) = \lim_{r \downarrow \tau_m^{MO}} F_\theta(\theta \mid R_i^{MO} = r, i \in \mathcal{C}_m) \quad (17)$$

or equivalently, for any bounded continuous function $\varphi(\theta_i)$,

$$\lim_{r \uparrow \tau_m^{MO}} \mathbb{E}[\varphi(\theta_i) \mid R_i^{MO} = r, i \in \mathcal{C}_m] = \lim_{r \downarrow \tau_m^{MO}} \mathbb{E}[\varphi(\theta_i) \mid R_i^{MO} = r, i \in \mathcal{C}_m] \quad (18)$$

This condition ensures that relevant characteristics derived from θ_i —such as aptitude, serving costs, or expected civilian returns—vary smoothly at the final selection margin.

Institutional Conditions

- (IC1) **Graded and noisy assessments.** The JSM assessments s_i and MO-specific assessments z_i are graded and contain idiosyncratic noise (evaluator heterogeneity, day-to-day variation), so the induced indices S_i and R_i^{MO} have continuous densities in neighborhoods of their respective cutoffs.
- (IC2) **Excess supply and binding capacity.** The JSM forwards with deliberate excess, $|\mathcal{C}_m| > Q_m$, so the MO capacity constraint binds and induces a well-defined cutoff τ_m^{MO} as in Lemma 1.

(IC3) **No precise sorting.** Individuals cannot precisely manipulate the multi-component evaluation to sort just above or below the cutoff. This rules out discontinuous bunching in S_i at τ_m and in R_i^{MO} at τ_m^{MO} conditional on $i \in \mathcal{C}_m$, consistent with the partly discretionary nature of assessments (Lee, 2008).

(IC4) **Regular joint density.** The joint density of (θ_i, s_i, z_i) conditional on $i \in \mathcal{C}_m$ is continuous. Since $R_i^{MO} = \mathbb{E}[a_i \mid s_i, z_i]$ is a continuous function of (s_i, z_i) , this implies that $\mathbb{E}[\varphi(\theta_i) \mid R_i^{MO} = r, i \in \mathcal{C}_m]$ varies continuously in r for any bounded continuous φ .

Proposition 1 (Endogenous local quasi-random assignment at the MO Margin)

Consider the conscription process defined in Subsections 4.1–4.3. Let the JSM forward

$$\mathcal{C}_m = \{i \in \tilde{\mathcal{I}}_m : S_i \geq \tau_m\}, \quad S_i = \mathbb{E}[a_i \mid s_i], \quad R_i^{MO} = \mathbb{E}[a_i \mid s_i, z_i].$$

Under IC1–IC4, assignment

$$d_i = \mathbf{1}\{R_i^{MO} \geq \tau_m^{MO}\}$$

is locally quasi-random in a neighborhood of τ_m^{MO} , conditional on $i \in \mathcal{C}_m$.

Proof. Local quasi-random assignment requires two conditions at the cutoff τ_m^{MO} (Hahn et al., 2001; Lee, 2008): (i) induction status changes discontinuously, and (ii) the conditional distribution of candidate types remains continuous. Condition (i) follows directly from Lemma 1: the MO assigns induction via the cutoff rule $d_i = \mathbf{1}\{R_i^{MO} \geq \tau_m^{MO}\}$, so induction jumps discretely at τ_m^{MO} .

For condition (ii), define $\Psi(r) \equiv \mathbb{E}[\varphi(\theta_i) \mid R_i^{MO} = r, i \in \mathcal{C}_m]$ for bounded continuous φ . Under IC1 and IC3, R_i^{MO} has a continuous density near τ_m^{MO} with no mass points. The conditioning event $i \in \mathcal{C}_m$ does not introduce a discontinuity at the MO margin, since S_i is also continuously distributed around τ_m under IC1 and IC3. Under IC4, the joint density of (θ_i, s_i, z_i) conditional on $i \in \mathcal{C}_m$ is continuous, and $R_i^{MO} = \mathbb{E}[a_i \mid s_i, z_i]$ is a continuous function of the underlying signals, so $\Psi(r)$ is continuous in r at $r = \tau_m^{MO}$. In particular, $\lim_{r \uparrow \tau_m^{MO}} \Psi(r) = \lim_{r \downarrow \tau_m^{MO}} \Psi(r)$, which establishes (18) and hence (17). Together, (i) and (ii) establish local quasi-random assignment at the MO margin. ■

Proposition 1 shows that the conscription mechanism itself can generate the conditions for causal identification. Unlike the seminal empirical literature on military service, which relies on explicit randomization devices such as the Vietnam-era draft lottery (Angrist, 1990), the Brazilian system combines centralized pre-screening with capacity-constrained selection. This institutional sequence endogenously produces the conditions required for a regression-discontinuity design (Hahn et al., 2001; Lee, 2008). More broadly, any conscription system

that combines centralized screening with capacity-constrained local selection may admit a similar identification strategy, regardless of whether an explicit lottery is present. Implications for empirical practice are developed in Section 5.1.

4.5 Stage 3: Service experience and preference updating

Having established the source of identifying variation, we now turn to the content of the treatment: the service period, the human capital formation it may generate, and the reenlistment decision that follows.

Initial military service and human capital formation Individuals inducted at the MO selection margin enter a period of initial military service of approximately twelve months, during which they may acquire skills, discipline, technical training, and other forms of human capital, as discussed in Section 3.1.

Military service may affect individual trajectories through the accumulation of human capital, represented by H , which depends on both individual characteristics and the service environment. We model this gain as

$$H = g(\theta_i, \eta_i), \quad (19)$$

where η_i captures unobserved heterogeneity in the service experience. As a result, individual types may be updated after the service period. Let $\tilde{\theta}_i$ denote the post-service type:

$$\tilde{\theta}_i = (\tilde{a}_i, \tilde{c}_i, \tilde{y}_i, \tilde{e}_i, x_i), \quad (20)$$

where x_i remains fixed—reflecting demographic and institutional characteristics that are exogenous to military service—while service may alter productivity in the military and civilian contexts $(\tilde{a}_i, \tilde{y}_i)$, the perceived cost of serving $(\tilde{c}_i)$, and effective educational attainment $(\tilde{e}_i)$, for instance through certifications acquired during service).

Focusing on labor market outcomes, the effect of military service, Γ , can be captured by the difference in expected outcomes with and without induction:

$$\Gamma \equiv \mathbb{E}[y_i \mid d_i = 1] - \mathbb{E}[y_i \mid d_i = 0] \quad (21)$$

reflecting the impact of human capital accumulated during service. This effect may be positive, negative, or null, depending on the nature of the skills acquired and their transferability to the civilian sector.

Reenlistment decision The reenlistment decision takes place after the completion of CMS and constitutes a distinct stage of the overall selection process. This process may repeat over time, as individuals can request successive reenlistments up to the maximum length of service permitted institutionally. Unlike earlier stages, individuals at this point have more precise information about military life, including its demands and benefits. This informational updating is central to the logic of the institutional mechanism.

In particular, the initial selection does not condition induction on voluntary participation, reflecting the view that ex-ante expectations do not incorporate sufficient information for individuals to reveal their preferences accurately. After completing the service period, however, direct experience allows for a more informed evaluation of military careers, so that the decision to remain reflects informed preferences. For tractability, we model reenlistment as a representative stage of this process.

From the individual's perspective, the decision is based on a comparison between the expected return to a military career and the return in the civilian labor market, both conditional on the updated post-service type:

$$r_i^{ind} = 1 \iff w_m(\tilde{\theta}_i) - \tilde{c}_i \geq \tilde{y}_i \quad (22)$$

where $r_i^{ind} \in \{0, 1\}$ indicates the individual's desire to reenlist, $w_m(\tilde{\theta}_i)$ denotes the expected return to a military career, and $\tilde{c}_i$ and $\tilde{y}_i$ correspond to the updated perceptions of the cost of serving and civilian returns, respectively.

From the military organization's perspective, retention depends on the evaluation of individual performance and institutional fit:

$$d_i^{ret} = \sigma^{ret}(\tilde{\theta}_i, z_i), \quad d_i^{ret} \in \{0, 1\} \quad (23)$$

where $\sigma^{ret}(\cdot)$ represents a retention rule based on information accumulated during the service period, including observed performance and organizational criteria. Effective reenlistment requires mutual agreement between the individual and the military organization:

$$R_i = r_i^{ind} \cdot d_i^{ret}. \quad (24)$$

The formal condition is derived below after introducing the payoff structure.

Payoffs Individual payoffs reflect the different trajectories that may arise along the selection and retention process. They are evaluated at the time of registration ($t = 0$) and expressed as expected present values of future outcomes. For notational simplicity, individual

subscripts are omitted whenever no confusion arises. Let $\beta \in (0, 1)$ denote the intertemporal discount factor.

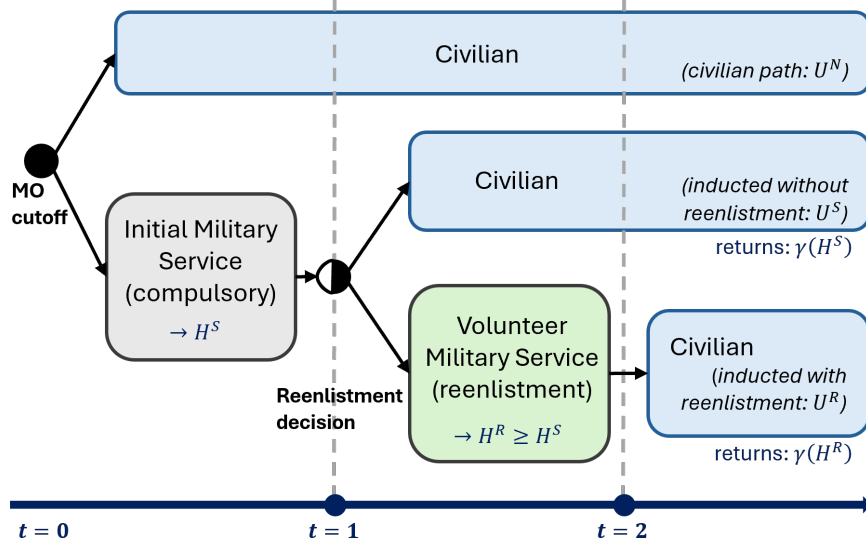


Figure 2: Possible life trajectories under the conscription process

Notes: Possible life trajectories under the conscription process. At $t = 0$, the MO selection rule $d_i = \mathbf{1}\{R_i^{MO} \geq \tau_m^{MO}\}$ determines whether an individual is inducted or follows the civilian path (U^N), as established in Proposition 1. The filled node ($\bullet$) denotes the institutional decision governed by the MO cutoff; the half-filled node denotes an individual reenlistment decision at $t = 1$. Inducted individuals accumulate human capital, H^S , during compulsory service. Those who return to civilian life at $t = 1$ earn post-service returns, $\gamma(H^S)$; those who reenlist accumulate $H^R \geq H^S$ and earn $\gamma(H^R)$ upon returning to the civilian sector at $t = 2$ (U^R). Payoffs are defined in equations (25)–(27).

Figure 2 summarizes the timing of the allocation problem and the individual i 's three possible life trajectories generated by the selection and retention process. The corresponding expected payoffs follow below.

(i) not inducted (civilian path):

$$U^N = \mathbb{E}[y_0] + \beta \cdot \mathbb{E}[y_1] + \beta^2 \cdot \mathbb{E}[y_2] \quad (25)$$

(ii) inducted without reenlistment:

$$U^S = \mathbb{E}[\bar{y}_0 + \xi(H^S) - c] + \beta \cdot \mathbb{E}[y_1 + \gamma(H^S)] + \beta^2 \cdot \mathbb{E}[y_2 + \gamma(H^S)] \quad (26)$$

(iii) inducted with reenlistment:

$$U^R = \mathbb{E}[\bar{y}_0 + \xi(H^S) - c] + \beta \cdot \mathbb{E}[\bar{y}_1 + \xi(H^R) - \tilde{c}] + \beta^2 \cdot \mathbb{E}[y_2 + \gamma(H^R)] \quad (27)$$

In this formulation, y_t denotes civilian returns and $\bar{y}_t$ military returns. Let H^S and H^R denote the human capital accumulated during initial service and reenlistment, with $H^R \geq H^S$. The functions $\xi(\cdot)$ and $\gamma(\cdot)$ map this accumulated human capital into military-specific non-pecuniary benefits and civilian labor-market returns. For simplicity, we assume that the civilian wage return after military service is the same across post-service civilian periods.

Reenlistment condition The individual's desire to reenlist is determined by comparing the continuation value in the military with the civilian alternative after the initial service period. Formally, the individual prefers reenlistment if

$$d^1 = 1 \iff U^R \geq U^S. \quad (28)$$

Since both trajectories share the same payoff in period $t = 0$, the reenlistment decision depends only on continuation values from $t = 1$ onward. Substituting from equations (26) and (27), and using the fact that $\bar{y}_1$ is known at the time of the decision, the reenlistment condition can be rearranged as:

$$\mathbb{E}[y_1] - \bar{y}_1 + \tilde{c} \leq \mathbb{E}[\xi(H^R) - \gamma(H^S)] + \beta \cdot \mathbb{E}[\gamma(H^R) - \gamma(H^S)]. \quad (29)$$

This expression provides a transparent characterization of the reenlistment decision as a comparison between the opportunity cost of remaining in the military and the net value of reenlistment. The left-hand side, $\mathbb{E}[y_1] - \bar{y}_1 + \tilde{c}$, captures the opportunity cost of continued service. It combines the expected civilian wage premium over the known military wage with the updated perceived cost of serving. Therefore, individuals with higher expected civilian returns or higher perceived costs of military life are less likely to reenlist. The right-hand side captures the net value of reenlistment. The first term, $\mathbb{E}[\xi(H^R) - \gamma(H^S)]$, represents the current net gain from remaining in the military, comparing the non-pecuniary value of military life with the civilian return to skills already acquired. The second, $\beta \cdot \mathbb{E}[\gamma(H^R) - \gamma(H^S)]$, captures the discounted future gain from additional human capital accumulated under reenlistment. Reenlistment is therefore more likely when the individual expects military service to generate higher non-pecuniary benefits or greater future labor-market returns, and less likely when expected civilian wages or the perceived cost of serving are high.

Preference updating after initial service During initial military service, individuals observe their realized fit with the military environment. Let $\varepsilon = c - \tilde{c}$ denote the revision

in the perceived cost of serving after the initial service period. Using (28), the reenlistment condition can be written as:

$$\mathbb{E}[y_1] - \bar{y}_1 + c - \varepsilon \leq \mathbb{E}[\xi(H^R) - \gamma(H^S)] + \beta \cdot \mathbb{E}[\gamma(H^R) - \gamma(H^S)]. \quad (30)$$

The reenlistment decision thus depends not only on expected wages and accumulated human capital, but also on how individuals update their valuation of military service after direct experience. The term ε captures this updating, reflecting factors that are not fully known prior to service—such as non-pecuniary aspects of military life, individual fit with the organization, and subjective perceptions of discipline and working conditions. By construction, ε may be positive (the individual finds service less costly than expected) or negative (more costly).

Crucially, ε is not observed at the time of induction. At $t = 0$, individuals form expectations about the value of military service without having experienced it, so any stated willingness to serve reflects preferences formed under imperfect information. The reenlistment decision, by contrast, is taken after this uncertainty has been resolved, when individuals have observed their realized ε .

This distinction raises a natural design question: should the initial selection mechanism condition on stated willingness to serve, given that preferences will be revised after service? From the perspective of the Armed Forces, the following subsection shows that the answer is no.

4.6 Retention and optimal induction

The Armed Forces' strategic objective is not merely to fill initial positions but to maximize the expected aptitude of those who will compose the effective force through reenlistment. Formally, define

$$W(\mathcal{D}) = \mathbb{E} \left[\sum_{i \in \mathcal{D}, v_i^1=1} a_i \right]. \quad (31)$$

Proposition 2 (Optimal Induction and Non-Elicitation) *Let the Armed Forces induct Q_m recruits from a pre-screened pool $\mathcal{C}_m$ at $t = 0$ to maximize the expected sum of military aptitude among those who reenlist voluntarily at $t = 1$. The Armed Forces observe signals (s_i, z_i) and rank candidates according to $R_i^{MO} = \mathbb{E}[a_i \mid s_i, z_i]$, while aptitude a_i is not directly observed at $t = 0$. Each individual faces a service cost c_i at $t = 0$, which is revised after initial service to $\tilde{c}_i = c_i - \varepsilon_i$, where ε_i is realized only during initial service and has an absolutely continuous distribution $G(\cdot)$ with full support on $\mathbb{R}$, and is independent of (s_i, z_i, v_i^0) . Then*

the optimal induction mechanism ranks candidates according to R_i^{MO} and is independent of any stated voluntariness at $t = 0$, v_i^0 .⁵

Proof. Consider two competing induction rules, both selecting Q_m individuals from $\mathcal{C}_m$:

(a) inducts $\mathcal{D}^a$, selecting the top- Q_m by aptitude, ignoring v_i^0 : $d_i^a = \mathbf{1}[S_i \geq \tau_m]$;

(b) inducts $\mathcal{D}^b$, selecting the top- Q_m by aptitude among the volunteers: $d_i^b = \mathbf{1}[S_i \geq \tau_m^b \wedge v_i^0 = 1]$.

Since (b) imposes an additional restriction $v_i^0 = 1$, it excludes some individuals with higher $R_i^{MO} \geq \tau_m$ and $v_i^0 = 0$ who would be selected under rule (a), implying $\tau_m^b \leq \tau_m$ to fill all Q_m positions.

At $t = 1$, the objective of the Armed Forces is the expected total aptitude among those who reenlist voluntarily, (31). As $R_i^{MO} = \mathbb{E}[a_i | s_i, z_i]$ is the Armed Forces' best predictor of a_i , ranking by R_i^{MO} is equivalent to ranking by expected aptitude.

Voluntariness to reenlist v_i^1 may differ from voluntariness to serve v_i^0 , as each recruit realizes ε_i during CMS, updating their cost of service to $\tilde{c}_i = c_i - \varepsilon_i$. Two cases are relevant.

Case 1 (conversion). Suppose recruit j , who has $R_j^{MO} > \tau_m$ and $v_j^0 = 0$ and who would be excluded under rule (b) but included under rule (a). For such an individual j , a sufficiently large ε_j leads to $v_j^1 = 1$. In this case, $j \in \mathcal{D}^a$ but $j \notin \mathcal{D}^b$. So individual j contributes to $W(\mathcal{D}^a)$ but is permanently excluded from $W(\mathcal{D}^b)$.

Case 2 (dropout). Suppose recruit k , with lower R_k^{MO} and $v_k^0 = 1$, who would be included under rule (b) but not under (a). For such an individual k , a realization of ε_k may lead to $v_k^1 = 0$ and he drops out. Then, k does not reenlist under either rule: k 's presence in $\mathcal{D}^b$ gives no advantage over $\mathcal{D}^a$, since k 's contribution to $W(\mathcal{D}^b) = 0$ regardless.

At least one occurrence of Case 1 implies $W(\mathcal{D}^a) > W(\mathcal{D}^b)$. Case 2 does not contribute to compensate, so $\mathcal{D}^b$ does not offer an advantage.

Since $\tilde{c}_j = c_j - \varepsilon_j$ and c_j is finite, a sufficiently large realization of ε_j makes $\tilde{c}_j$ arbitrarily small, satisfying the voluntariness-to-reenlist condition at $t = 1$. Since G has full support on $\mathbb{R}$, this event has a positive probability, so Case 1 occurs with positive probability.

Therefore $W(\mathcal{D}^a) > W(\mathcal{D}^b)$ in expectation and rule (a) strictly dominates rule (b). It follows that ranking by R_i^{MO} alone at $t = 0$ and deferring preference elicitation to $t = 1$ strictly dominates conditioning on stated voluntariness at induction. $\square$ ■

This proposition rationalizes an institutional feature observed in practice: initial induction does not rely on stated willingness to serve. Instead, the system separates selection

⁵In this setting, any signal v_i provided by the agent is uninformative regarding the realization of ε . While individuals may hold ex ante expectations about their fit with military service, stated voluntariness reflects preferences formed under limited information and potential strategic considerations. By contrast, ε_i captures dimensions of experience—such as unit-specific environment, discipline, and realized match—that are only learned during service and are not systematically predictable from pre-service signals or declarations.

based on expected aptitude from preference revelation, which occurs later through reenlistment. The logic is not that preferences are irrelevant, but that the relevant preferences for retention are formed and revealed only through exposure to military service.

Even if stated willingness at induction may contain some information about future reenlistment, conditioning induction on it would remain suboptimal whenever the resulting gain in expected retention is outweighed by the loss in expected military aptitude. The observed institutional practice of deferring preference revelation to the reenlistment stage thus admits a theoretical foundation: it is the outcome of an optimal selection rule under imperfect information.

The optimal induction rule established in Proposition 2—ranking by R_i^{MO} without conditioning on v_i^0 —is precisely the selection mechanism whose properties are characterized in Proposition 1. The two results are therefore mutually reinforcing: the observed institutional practice is both optimal from the Armed Forces’ perspective and generates local quasi-random assignment for causal identification.

5 Discussion

The model provides a unified framework for three distinctive features of Brazil’s conscription system: geographic eligibility constraints, sequential screening with deliberate overprovisioning, and deferred preference revelation through reenlistment. Two implications follow, one for empirical identification and one for institutional design.

5.1 Implications for Empirical Identification

Proposition 1 shows that the sequential screening structure of selective conscription endogenously generates the conditions required for regression-discontinuity identification at the final selection margin, without requiring an explicit lottery. The seminal empirical literature on the effects of military service relies on explicit randomization devices—most notably the Vietnam-era draft lottery (Angrist, 1990). The Brazilian system contains no such device. Instead, the interaction between centralized pre-screening and capacity-constrained local selection produces the continuity and no-manipulation conditions typically imposed as maintained assumptions in RD applications: local smoothness emerges from the allocation mechanism itself, rather than from exogenous randomization. This provides a microfoundation for RD strategies in institutionally structured selection environments and clarifies when such strategies are likely to be credible. The prediction is empirically testable through standard density and balance checks at the cutoff, and applies to any conscription system

that combines centralized pre-screening with capacity-constrained local selection⁶.

5.2 Implications for Policy Design

Proposition 2 shows that, when the value of military service is learned only through experience, early elicitation of preferences may be informationally inefficient. Conditioning initial selection on stated willingness to serve can reduce the expected quality of the retained force. The model instead supports a sequential design in which initial selection is based on observable signals of aptitude and preference revelation is deferred to a post-service reenlistment stage. This design separates learning from allocation, improving both the informational content of preferences and the quality of retained personnel. As hybrid voluntary-mandatory designs return to the European policy agenda (Lazarou & Lamprou, 2025; Sava, 2026), the model suggests that recruitment and retention should be viewed as distinct informational stages. When preferences are learned through military experience, the timing of preference revelation becomes an important design choice.

The result is conditional on the objective assumed for the Armed Forces: maximizing expected aptitude in the retained force. The optimality in Proposition 2 is therefore military optimality, not social optimality nor individual optimality. Balancing these competing objectives, though, lies beyond the scope of the present framework.

5.3 Limitations and Extensions

Three simplifications point to natural extensions. First, the model does not incorporate heterogeneity across military organizations in selection criteria or training environments; introducing such heterogeneity would allow for competition for recruits and variation in training quality. Second, reenlistment is modeled as a single decision, whereas in practice individuals reenlist repeatedly and update their preferences dynamically; a fully dynamic version would connect the initial conscription stage to subsequent military careers, including transitions into professional service. Third, geographic eligibility is treated as exogenous. Endogenous residential responses are unlikely to be quantitatively important in the Brazilian setting given the young age at registration, but they may be relevant in other institutional contexts and could be modeled as anticipatory human capital investment decisions prior to registration.

⁶Empirical implementation requires access to administrative records on individual screening scores and selection outcomes, which in Brazil are held by the Army’s Directorate of Military Service.

6 Final remarks

This paper develops a theoretical framework for conscription systems in which selection is sequential, capacity-constrained, and based on imperfect information about both aptitude and preferences. Two results follow. First, the structure of selection endogenously generates local quasi-random assignment at the final selection margin, providing a micro-foundation for regression-discontinuity identification without requiring an explicit lottery. Second, when preferences are learned through experience, conditioning initial selection on stated willingness to serve is suboptimal for the formation of a retained high-quality force.

More broadly, the analysis shows that the allocation of individuals to military service cannot be understood independently of the information generated through that process. Screening, assignment, and learning are jointly determined, and the timing of preference revelation is itself a design variable. Selective conscription systems provide a natural environment for studying allocation problems in which participation itself generates information—a class of problems that extends beyond military manpower to any sequential mechanism in which agents discover their suitability only after selection.

Extending the framework to dynamic career paths, heterogeneity across military organizations, and hybrid voluntary-mandatory designs that combine elements of professional forces with the option to reintroduce compulsory service are natural directions for future research.

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A Brazilian conscription process

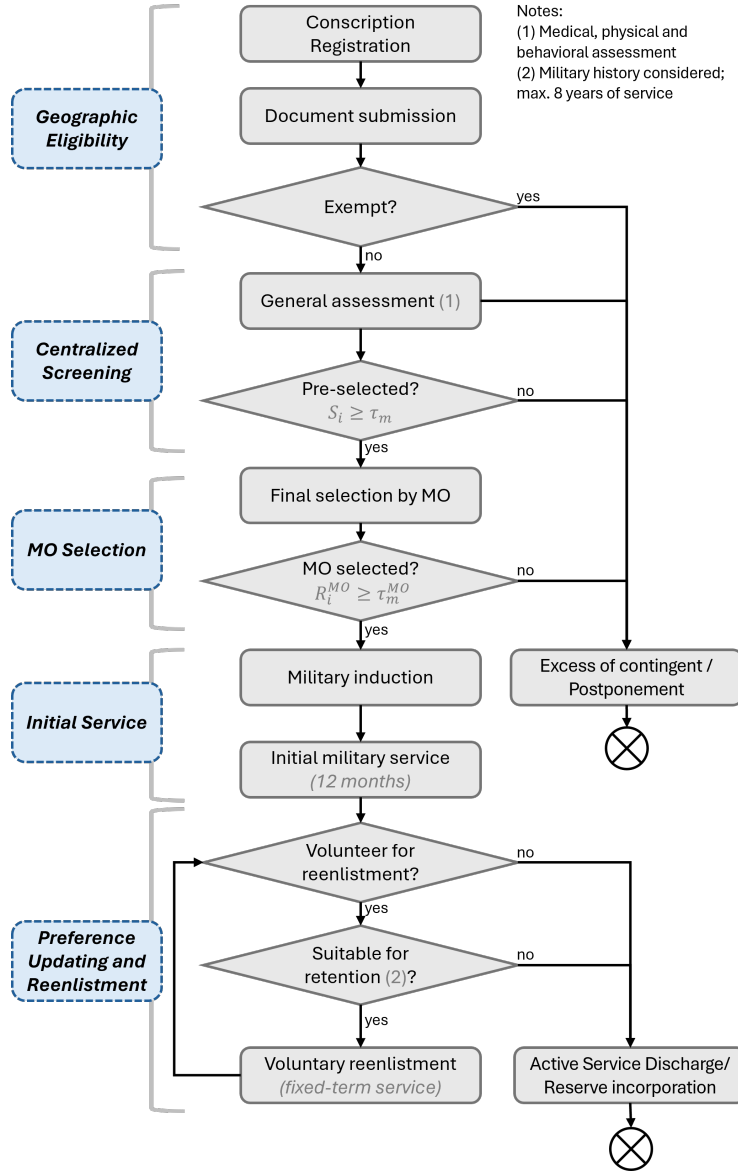


Figure 3: The Brazilian conscription process as a sequential allocation mechanism

Notes: The process begins with compulsory registration and document submission (the environment described in Section 4.1). Non-exempt individuals undergo a general assessment (1). Candidates whose expected military aptitude exceeds the centralized screening threshold ($S_i \geq \tau_m$) are pre-selected and forwarded to military organizations (MOs), corresponding to Stage 1 (Section 4.2). MOs then conduct a final capacity-constrained selection, represented by the cutoff rule ($R_i^{MO} \geq \tau_m^{MO}$), corresponding to Stage 2 (Section 4.3). Selected individuals complete approximately 12 months of initial military service (Stage 3, Section 4.5). After service, individuals may volunteer for reenlistment, and MOs evaluate suitability for retention (2). Those approved enter fixed-term voluntary service. Individuals not selected at any stage are classified as excess of contingent, postponed, or discharged to the reserve.

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