Bowling with Veterans: The Impact of Military Service on Subsequent Civic Engagement

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From Tocqueville's assertion that Americans' propensity for civic association was the key to sustaining a vibrant democracy ([1835, 1840] 1990), to Tönnies' concern over a shift from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* (Tönnies [1887] 1957), to Putnam's (1995; 1996; 2000) claims that declines in such activities as bowling league participation represent a threat to our civic life; an interest in the impact of individual civic engagement on society has played a prominent role in sociological thought and debate.

Recent scholarly and public treatment of the topic of civic engagement in the United States has focused primarily on macro level forces associated with aggregate trends in civic engagement. At this level, the scholarly debate on civic engagement is exemplified by Putnam's provocative "Bowling alone..." thesis (1995; 1996; 2000), in which he argues that America's social capital has declined precipitously over the last several decades. As evidence of the "strange disappearance of social capital and civic engagement in America", he cites declines in such civic activities as voting, PTA membership, and bowling league membership (Putnam 1996, pp. 34). Putnam's ideas have generated much debate and publicity, but little consensus.

The majority of research inspired by Putnam's claims focuses on aggregate level issues and trends. Relatively little research has examined the mediating processes that affect individual levels of civic engagement. For example, little is known about the social psychological processes that might contribute to individual variation in civic

engagement. In this paper, I attempt to fill that gap by developing and testing a social psychological model of individual civic engagement. Taking a life course perspective, I examine how the specific life experience of serving in the military affects individual attitudes toward civic activities as well as subsequent civic involvement. I first review some of the recent literature related to macro level trends in civic engagement and then discuss the social psychological issues related to the processes that generate civic engagement. I draw on work in social movements and military sociology to develop the argument that serving in the military will affect individual civic attitudes and engagement.

THE DECLINING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT DEBATE

Putnam's assertion that Americans have become less civically engaged over the past several decades has generated much scholarly attention and criticism. Some critics of Putnam's work argue that his conceptualization of social capital, which is drawn explicitly from James Coleman's work, is under-theorized, vague, and actually inconsistent with Coleman's use of the concept (Edwards and Foley 1997). Coleman (1988) defines social capital as a property of social structure and relationships. According to his critics, Putnam defines and measures social capital in terms of individual level attributes. In addition, Putnam and others fail to clearly and consistently distinguish between the sources, indicators, and outcomes of social capital. For example, membership in voluntary organizations has been conceptualized by various researchers as either a source, an indicator or an outcome of social capital (for review of these criticisms, see Edwards and Foley 1998; Paxton 1999). Still other researchers have

presented data suggesting that civic engagement has not declined (Ladd 1999), or that the forms of civic engagement have simply changed (see, for example, Skocpol 1999).

Using a multiple indicator model of social capital that includes both a trust component and an association component, Paxton (1999) finds little support for Putnam's general claim of declining U.S. social capital. Her results indicate some decline in a general measure of social capital and a decline in trust in individuals, but little change in either association membership or trust in institutions.

Whatever the truth may be, Putnam's work has revitalized interest in a provocative and important topic. Putnam's concern over declining civic engagement and the subsequent work inspired by his thesis represent the most recent version of the classic sociological debate about the potential impact of trends toward a decline in community on the vibrancy of democratic society.

THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

One reason that the issue of declining civic engagement generates so much attention is that few dispute the connection between civic engagement and the overall political and social health of a society. If individual civic engagement plays an important role in sustaining a healthy democracy, then as we monitor aggregate trends, we should also be concerned with understanding the processes that produce civic engagement at the individual level. Yet little scholarly attention has been given to this issue. We know a fair amount about the demographic factors associated with high levels of volunteering and community involvement, as well as the characteristics of those individuals most likely to engage in particular kinds of civic activities, such as voting (see, for example,

Baumgartner and Walker 1988; Cutler 1976; Curry 1980; Youniss, Mclellan and Yates 1997). Much less is known about the processes and life experiences that contribute to individual civic involvement. This gap is particularly glaring given the social psychological assumptions embedded in much of the civic engagement literature.

Tocqueville's arguments contain explicit social psychological claims about how individual civic engagement is produced. He argues that "by dint of working for one's fellow citizens, the habit and taste for serving them is at length acquired" ([1835, 1840] 1990, pp. 197). In other words, individuals who perform some form of civic service develop positive attitudes toward civic engagement and become likely to engage in civic activities in the future. Even recent scholars who explicitly focus on aggregate level trends often turn to micro level processes to bolster their argument about the connections between social capital, civic engagement, and the maintenance of democracy. Both Putnam (1995; 1997) and Paxton (1999) cite the connection between voluntary association membership and political participation at the individual level as evidence that social capital is related to the maintenance of democracy.

Moreover, as public attention focuses on waning civic engagement, most policy proscriptions are aimed at inducing individuals to become more civically active. For example, the Tocquevillian notion that serving one's country fosters civic attitudes at the individual and societal level is one of the primary justifications given for the need for some form of national service program. Similar justifications are offered at local levels to support programs of mandatory community service for high school students.

The idea that certain types of life experiences and transitions might lead to a subsequent change in attitude and behavior is a classic issue in social psychology. It is

most closely related to a life course perspective on adult lives and development (Elder 1975; O’Rand and Elder 1995). Research in this tradition examines how various events and transitions throughout the life course contribute to continuity and/or change in individual attitudes, value orientations, motives and behaviors. While some research in this area has considered the enduring impacts of military service, it has focused primarily on health and aging outcomes, rather than on attitudes or civic involvement (see, for example, Elder and Clipp 1994).

In his search for an explanation for declining civic engagement, Putnam (1996; 2000) implicitly adopts a life course perspective by focusing on differences in life experiences across cohorts. Putnam notes that Americans who came of age after World War II are significantly less active in civic affairs and associations than earlier generations. Putnam specifically highlights the impact of “the war time *Zeitgeist* of national unity and patriotism” (2000, pp. 267) as a major factor in fostering social solidarity and high levels of civic-mindedness among the group he calls the “long civic generation”—those individuals who reached adulthood before or during World War II. Putnam is so convinced of the powerful positive impact of the war time experience, that he argues that the difficult task of creating (or re-creating) social capital “would be eased by a palpable national crisis, like *war* or depression or natural disaster...” (2000, pp. 402, *italics mine*). While Putnam focuses on the general notion that the shared adversity of war affected the civic values and habits of *all* Americans, certainly those whose lives are most directly affected by war are likely to get the largest civic boost from the war experience. Military service, particularly when performed as during wartime represents

the quintessential life experience that Putnam and others expect to produce civically engaged citizens.

In this paper, I provide an empirical test of the effects of military service on the civic attitudes and activities of American men. The general causal argument that I present and test is that of Tocqueville—namely that performing some civic service leads to more positive attitudes toward civic involvement, which in turn leads to higher levels of future civic activity. The specific argument that military service affects civic attitudes and engagement is echoed in a parallel body of work on the biographical consequences of social movement participation.

SOCIAL MOVEMENT PARTICIPATION

Like recent studies of civic engagement, the sociological study of social movements has largely focused on aggregate level issues. However, a growing literature has emerged on the issue of the short and long term individual consequences of participating in a social movement. Although much of this work has been criticized for numerous methodological flaws (for a review of the methodological issues, see McAdam 1989), some consistent findings emerge regarding the effects of movement participation on the attitudes and activities of participants.

In a review of the research on the personal consequences of social movement participation, McAdam (1989) notes that former activists tend to maintain more leftist political views and identifications than non-activists and to remain active in contemporary social movements and other forms of political activity. Unfortunately,

much of this research focuses on “high risk” activists and fails to control for self-selection to activism.

Studies that employ representative sampling techniques and include “before” and “after” measures of attitudes and behaviors are particularly relevant to an analysis of the impact of particular life experiences on subsequent attitudes and behaviors. Sherkat and Blocker (1994; 1997) use nationally representative, longitudinal survey data to examine the long-term impacts of “run of the mill” activism. McAdam and colleagues (McAdam 1998; McAdam et al. 1999) likewise analyze survey data collected from a random national sample to examine the impacts of social movement participation. Results of both studies indicate that social movement activity has enduring effects on the political and civic attitudes and activities of participants.

In sum, social movement research suggests that certain types of life experiences can indeed serve as vehicles for encouraging and producing enduring citizen involvement in politics and civic affairs. What remains to be seen, however, is whether these effects are limited to those individuals involved in liberal/leftist activities. A more ecumenical approach to civic engagement requires an examination of the potential impact of involvement in other, less explicitly political, activities and organizations. For example, military sociologists and others have long argued that military service may have long term effects on the attitudes and behaviors of those who serve.

THE MILITARY SOCIOLOGY ARGUMENT

Military sociologists’ concern with declining civic engagement actually predates the recently revived interest in the issue within the broader sociological community. In

fact, a prominent theme in the military sociology literature of the last two decades is that the advent of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) in 1973 is closely connected to an overall loss of civic responsibility among Americans (see, for example, Janowitz 1983; Moskos 1988; Moskos and Wood 1988; Segal 1989). The general argument is that the rights inherent in American citizenship have historically been connected to some set of obligations of citizenship, with military service being the most important of these obligations (Segal 1989). The 1973 decision by the Gates Commission to eliminate the military draft in favor of raising military forces on an all-volunteer basis through economic incentives is seen as stripping away the last vestiges of civic responsibility. Because citizens are no longer expected to fulfill even the obligation of military duty to earn citizenship rights, the notion that citizenship entails basic obligations is endangered. An important component of this argument is the idea that fulfilling some civic obligation, particularly obligatory military service, leads to the development of a sense of civic attitudes or responsibility, which then leads to subsequent involvement in future civic activities.

At the macro level, the argument is about societal values and norms. Janowitz (1978; 1983), Moskos (1988), and Segal (1989) all argue that Americans felt a greater sense of civic responsibility when the rights of citizenship were contingent on fulfilling basic obligations of citizenship, the hallmark of which was military service. As national policies and norms changed to emphasize the rights of citizenship and de-emphasize responsibilities of citizenship, civic service became less normative, less expected and less valued. In his quest for culprits to explain differences in civic engagement, Putnam (2000) specifically highlights generational differences in military service by noting that

nearly 80 percent of men born in the 1920s (the core cohort of the long civic generation) served in the military, while only 10 percent of men born in the 1960s served.

Not only are there generational differences in the proportion of young people who serve in the military, but there are also differences in the nature of that service. By ending military conscription in 1973 in favor of maintaining a large peacetime military through voluntary enlistment, “the nation implicitly substituted a market place philosophy of military manpower for previously accepted notions of citizenship obligations” (Bachman et al. 1998, pp. 59). Under the market place model of the current AVF, military service becomes “just a job” (Moskos and Wood 1988). If military service is “just a job”, those who serve may be no more likely to develop civic attitudes than those who work in the civilian sector.

At the micro level, the argument is that individuals who perform some societal or civic service as part of an obligation of citizenship will develop civic values. Both Moskos and Segal advocate some form of national service (Moskos 1988; Moskos and Wood 1988; Segal 1989; 1993) in the hope that if masses of young people perform some national service, then the fulfillment of civic obligations will become normative again. Segal (1989, pp. 176) notes that his support for a program of national service stems from his conviction about “the importance of communicating to the ascending generation that service to the nation is expected, is valued, and is rewarded.” Moskos (1988) likewise claims that civic values can be transmitted to today’s youth through civic service, just as such values were presumably transmitted to previous generations through obligatory civic service, as symbolized by the military draft. One of the cornerstones of their argument is

that prior to the advent of the AVF, serving in the military led to positive civic attitudes, which in turn led to increased civic engagement.

This argument is consistent with a life course perspective, which focuses on the variable meaning and impact of important adult life events and transitions on individual lives. It also mirrors recent work in the study of social movement participation, which indicates that the experience of participation in a social movement or protest activity has enduring impacts on the political and civic attitudes and behaviors of participants. One key difference between social movement participation and military service is that the military argument is based on a model of obligatory participation. Both models, however, imply that the experience of participating has long term positive effects on individual civic involvement. An advantage of examining a model based on obligatory participation is that such a model eliminates the self-selection problems inherent in much of the work on the enduring effects of social movement participation.

Given the theoretical and policy implications of the military argument, surprisingly little empirical evidence exists to support the claim that participating in particular forms of civic service produces positive civic attitudes and increased civic engagement. In this paper, I provide an empirical test of the effects of military service on attitudes toward civic obligations and on civic engagement.

HYPOTHESES:

The following hypotheses are derived from the arguments summarized above.

Hypothesis 1: Military service has a positive, direct effect on civic attitudes.

Hypothesis 2: Civic attitudes have a positive, direct effect on civic engagement.

Hypothesis 3: Military service has a positive, direct effect on civic engagement.

Hypothesis 4: Military service has a positive, indirect effect on civic engagement through civic attitudes.

DATA

I use data from the General Social Survey (GSS), an almost annual survey of approximately 1,500 U.S. adults conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC). The survey began in 1972 and has been repeated almost annually. I use the 1984 GSS results, because it is the only year in respondents were asked questions about their beliefs in the importance of various civic obligations. Women have not yet been subject to obligatory military service, so I restrict my sample to the 585 male respondents who were asked about both their military service and their beliefs in the importance of civic obligations. Respondents with missing values for any of the variables used (fewer than 10% of respondents) were eliminated from the analysis, for a final sample of 551 cases.

MEASURES:

Exogenous Variables:

The main exogenous variable indicates whether the respondent served in the military. Since the military sociology argument implies that military service prior to the advent of the AVF was particularly effective at instilling positive civic attitudes and behaviors, I focus on military service performed under a draft system. I use age to estimate the type of system under which the respondent served, because the GSS data do not include dates of military service. The United States ended the draft and switched to

an All-Volunteer Force (AVF) in 1973. Respondents who were 30 years old or older in 1973 exceeded the upper age limit requirement for joining the AVF, so all respondents who served in the military *and* are older than 41 in 1984 performed military service under the draft system. In reality, the majority of service members enter the military between the ages of 17-22. Respondent who were over 22 in 1973 and served in the military most likely also entered the military before the end of conscription.

Using the more conservative cut-off of age 30, only 20 of the 230 veterans in the sample would be classified as having served in the military in the AVF era. Using the more realistic cut off of 22 years old, only 2 of 230 veterans would be classified as having served in the AVF. Based on these assessments of the number of respondents likely to have served in the AVF era, I simply use a dummy variable for military service for this analysis (1 = ever served). Even those veterans who themselves were not drafted most likely served during a time when military service was obligatory for those called through the selective service system.

I also include several control variables: age, education, race-ethnicity, and marital status. Age and education are included because both have been shown to be related to a variety of attitudes and to membership in voluntary associations (Baumgartner and Walker 1988; Cutler 1976). Race-ethnicity is likewise related to various attitudes and behaviors and to participation in voluntary associations (Curry 1980). Race-ethnicity is measured by 2 dummy variables indicating Black (1 = Black) and Other (1 = Other), with White as the reference category. Military personnel are more likely to marry and to marry at younger ages than civilians do (Segal and Harris 1993), and marital status is

related to both attitudes and participation in voluntary groups. Marital status is measured by a dummy variable coded “1” for married respondents.

Endogenous Variables:

Civic attitudes: For the purposes of this paper, Civic attitudes refers to the importance individuals attach to various obligations of citizenship. As indicators of the latent variable of Civic attitudes, I used 3 scales constructed from responses to a series of questions regarding the importance of various civic obligations (see Appendix 1 for their exact wording). The first indicator variable, community obligations, consists of the sum of responses to 4 items measuring the importance of: 1) voting in elections, 2) volunteering in community service, 3) keeping informed about news and public issues, and 4) speaking and understanding English. The second indicator variable, military obligations, consists of the sum of responses to items measuring the importance of: 1) peacetime military service for men, 2) wartime military service for men, 3) peacetime military service for women, and 4) wartime military service for women. The third indicator of Civic attitudes, civil justice obligations, consists of the sum of responses to questions about the importance of: 1) serving on a jury, and 2) reporting a crime.

All of the individual items included in the community obligations variable, the military obligations variable, and the civil justice obligations variable were scored on a 3 point Likert scale coded as 0 = Not an obligation, 1 = Somewhat important, and 2 = Very important. For each variable, responses to the included items were summed, so that the range for the community obligations variable and the military obligation variable is 0 to 8. The range for the civil justice obligation variable is 0 to 4. Table 1 shows correlations

and confirmatory factor loadings for the three variables, which indicate that the three variables measure the same underlying concept.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Civic Engagement: Civic engagement involves a broad range of activities that might be seen as manifestations of one's civic obligations. These might range from activities at the national level (e.g., voting in national elections), to more local actions (e.g., participating in local school service groups). To capture the latent variable of civic engagement, I use variables measuring the number of various voluntary associations a respondent belongs to, as well as whether or not the respondent voted in the 1980 presidential election (for exact wording of all items, see Appendix 2). This measure of civic engagement is consistent with Putnam's measure (1995), and with the association component of Paxton's (1999) measure of social capital.

The first indicator variable is community activities. This variable consists of the total number of "yes" answers to the question of whether or not the respondent was a member of each of the following types of groups: sports groups; youth groups; school service groups; hobby or garden clubs; literary, art, discussion or study groups; professional or academic societies; and church-affiliated groups. Since this item is the sum of participation in the 7 activities, the range for the community activities variable is 0 to 7. The service activities variable consists of total memberships in fraternal groups, service groups, and school fraternities or sororities; with a range of 0 to 3. The political activities variable also has a range of 0 to 3, and measures membership in political groups and labor unions, as well as whether the respondent voted in the 1980 presidential election.

Correlations among these three indicator variables of civic engagement and confirmatory factor loadings for each indicator are also shown in Table 1.

METHOD:

I use structural equation modeling with latent variables to estimate the effects of military experience on civic attitudes and civic engagement. Structural equation modeling (SEM) is especially useful because it allows me to concentrate on civic attitudes and engagement as latent constructs rather than on the manifest variables used to measure these constructs. In addition, because measurement error is explicitly modeled in SEMs, estimates of the relations between latent constructs are unbiased when error terms are normally distributed. Finally, SEM techniques allow me to model and estimate the indirect effect of military experience on civic engagement through civic attitudes.

RESULTS:

Before proceeding to the estimation of the structural equation model, I examine the bivariate relationships between the main explanatory variable (military experience) and the other variables included in the analysis. The results are shown in Table 2.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

As expected, veterans are significantly older ($p < .01$) and significantly more likely to be married ($p < .01$) than non-veterans. The finding that veterans have significantly more positive civic attitudes ($p < .01$) than non-veterans seems to provide preliminary support for Hypothesis 1 regarding the positive direct effect of military service on civic attitudes. On the other hand, the finding of no significant difference

between veterans and non-veterans on Civic engagement appears to be contrary to the expectations stated in Hypotheses 3 and 4 regarding the positive direct and indirect effects of military experience on Civic engagement.

Figure 1 shows the structural equation model, including all control variables and the latent variables of civic attitudes and civic engagement.¹

[Insert Figure 1 here]

The Goodness of Fit Indicator (GFI) is .97, and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is .05 indicating a reasonably good overall fit for the model as specified.

Turning to estimation of specific model parameters, Table 3 shows estimated regression coefficients for each of the independent variables on the two endogenous latent variables. Looking at the control variables first, the results indicate that age has a significant positive effect on civic attitudes (.02, $p < .01$). Being married likewise has a significant positive effect on civic attitudes (.32, $p < .01$). Neither education nor either of the race-ethnicity measures (Black or Other) has significant effects on Civic attitudes. Age and education both have significant positive effects on Civic engagement (.01, $p < .05$, and .14, $p < .01$, respectively). Being married has a negative effect on Civic engagement, but the effect is not significant. Race-ethnicity again has no significant effect.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

The results in Table 3 provide very limited support for the substantive hypotheses regarding the effects of military experience on Civic attitudes and engagement. Military experience has no significant effect on Civic attitudes, indicating that Hypothesis 1 is not

supported. Civic attitudes does have a significant positive effect on Civic engagement (.20, $p < .05$), which indicates support for Hypothesis 2. Contrary to the prediction presented in Hypothesis 3, military experience has a significant *negative* effect on Civic engagement. Hypothesis 4 is likewise not supported, as military experience has no significant direct effect on Civic attitudes, meaning that the indirect effect on Civic engagement is also not significant.

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSIONS

These findings run counter to not only the arguments of military sociologists, but also to the basic Tocquevillian argument that those who serve the citizenry in some capacity develop a habit and taste for continued service. They also stand in stark contrast to the available research on the long-term consequences of social movement participation. One potential explanation for these surprising findings may lie in the context of the service performed by the veterans in this sample. Although the military sociology argument focuses on service under a draft system, a life course perspective suggests that the effects of serving in the military may be dependent on the specific historical and social context of that service (Elder and O’Rand 1995). It is certainly possible that the impact of military service on veterans who served in the World War II era might be different from the impact on those who served in Korea or Vietnam.

In order to investigate whether the effect of military service on civic attitudes and engagement might differ by cohort, I split the sample into two groups based on birth cohort. I then estimated the model of civic attitudes and engagement separately for the cohort that came of age during World War II, labeled by Putnam (1997) as the “long

civic generation”, and those who reached adulthood after the 1940s. To test for a difference in the strength of the effect of military experience on civic attitudes and engagement, I constrained the two coefficients to be equal, and then compared the fit of this constrained model with the fit of the earlier, unconstrained model. The chi-square test comparing the fit of the two models indicates that the more constrained model cannot be rejected. In other words, these data do not allow us to reject the claim that the effect of military service on civic attitudes and engagement is the same for these two cohorts.

We are left, then, with some surprising and important findings. Although military sociologists have long pointed to the advent of the AVF as a watershed event in severing the connection between citizenship and civic engagement, these results suggest that serving in the military through the final years of the draft system had no significant effect on the civic attitudes of American men. Simply performing an important obligatory service to the nation did not significantly increase a man’s sense of the importance of fulfilling various civic duties and responsibilities.

Moreover, those men who served in the military were actually less active in civic life than those who had never served. This finding of a negative effect of military service on subsequent civic engagement suggests that performing obligatory civic service may decrease the likelihood of participating in subsequent civic activities and associations. This directly contradicts the military sociology argument, calls into question Tocqueville’s model of civic engagement, and casts doubt on the social psychological assumptions embedded in much of the academic and public rhetoric regarding concerns over waning civic engagement.

These findings represent an especially powerful challenge to the notion that civic participation begets more civic participation. The fact that serving the citizenry through military duty actually decreases one's subsequent civic involvement indicates that we cannot assume that all forms of civic activity are equally effective at inculcating their participants with civic values and habits. In fact, these findings indicate a need for a more refined conceptualization of the relationships between civic activity and future civic involvement.

How can we reconcile these findings with research that indicates that individuals who participate in various forms of activism and volunteer activities remain more active in political and civic life than non-participants? Perhaps some of the unique features of military service provide clues as to the crucial dimensions that distinguish activities which foster future civic engagement and those that do not.

Military sociologists (Janowitz 1983; Moskos 1988; and Segal 1989) have held up military service as the exemplar of civic duty, and others (Eberly and Sherraden 1990; and Putnam 2000) make strong assumptions about the positive effects of military service on civic engagement. There are, however, a number of potentially important features of military service which distinguish it from other types of civic obligations and activities, and may help account for the potentially counterproductive effects of military service on civic engagement.

National vs. Local

In the United States, active duty military service takes place at the national level. Those who serve in the active duty military, especially during a wartime draft, typically do so far from home, and with individuals who are initially strangers to them. In

addition, when their term of service is over, veterans typically return to their hometowns, and resume a life physically separated from their military comrades. Perhaps these features of military service partially and indirectly account for the negative effect of military service on subsequent civic involvement. Putnam (2000) suggests that the social networks of friends one acquires is a primary means through which volunteering fosters future civic engagement. McAdam (1989) likewise notes that the personal networks formed during Freedom Summer participation played a critical role in the sustained activism of participants. Local civic activities would certainly seem to be better suited to producing the kinds of network ties which would result in future civic involvement than would national service programs where participants are less likely to live near one another once the service is completed.

Obligatory vs. Voluntary

Another important distinction between military service, as performed by the veterans in this sample, and other forms of civic participation is the obligatory nature of the service. Janowitz (1983), Moskos (1988), and Segal (1989) all support the general argument that policies that tie citizenship to some obligation to serve the citizenry, most notably through military service, foster norms of civic service throughout the society. Additionally, Putnam (2000, pp. 405) notes with some surprise that voluntary youth service programs are as effective at encouraging future civic involvement as are mandatory programs

While these arguments may have merits at the macro level; at the individual level, the notion that the act of fulfilling some civic obligation engenders positive attitudes towards other forms of civic activity and generates future civic involvement simply does

not hold up to empirical investigation. Perhaps individuals who perform obligatory military service come to believe that they have already fulfilled their basic civic duties through military service, and therefore do not feel compelled or motivated to engage in subsequent civic activity. In other words, they may feel that they have paid their civic dues.

Hierarchical vs. Egalitarian

Another feature of the military that distinguishes it from other forums for civic participation and from social movement activities is the military's hierarchical organizational structure. Social psychological literature indicates that individual commitment to group goals is generally enhanced through participation in decision-making (see Vroom and Yetton 1973). Individuals who participate in social movements, those who join voluntary associations, and those who perform non-military civic service all experience a more egalitarian and participatory organization than do members of the military organization. It is possible that the hierarchical, non-participatory nature of military service partially accounts for the fact that veterans do not seem to emerge from military service with significantly greater commitment to civic obligations and activities than non-veterans.

In sum, these findings may indicate that individual civic engagement is better produced through the voluntary participation in local, egalitarian service activities than through fulfilling a national civic obligation. My results may be especially pertinent to policies regarding mandatory civic service programs, such as those adopted by a number of high schools throughout the country. It appears that requiring individuals to perform some civic service may backfire, leading to decreased subsequent civic involvement.

In terms of voluntary service programs, it is possible that civic-minded people might be more likely to participate, and that for them participation leads to even more positive civic attitudes and increased civic engagement. However these results indicate that the relationship between the performance of civic service and subsequent civic attitudes and participation is quite complex. While programs of national or local civic service (or even a return to a military draft) may be justified on many other grounds, the results of this research indicate that we should be cautious in assuming that such programs alone will produce an ascending generation of civic-minded citizens. From both a policy and an academic standpoint, it is clear that more research is needed to advance our understanding of the social psychological processes that produce civically active citizens.

Endnotes

1. Of special interest is the specification of a correlation between the error term for the second indicator of civic attitudes (community obligations, e_2) and the error term for the third indicator of civic engagement (political activities, e_6). Including this correlation reduces the model Chi-square by 11.7 with 1 degree of freedom ($p < .01$). Community obligations includes a measure of how important the respondent believes it is to vote in elections. The measure of political activities includes a measure of actual voting engagement. The assumption of a correlation between the error terms for these variables is substantively quite plausible. It would be reasonable to assume, for example, that respondents who overstate their actual belief in the importance of voting are also likely to overstate their actual voting behavior, resulting in correlated error terms for the two measures. The significant reduction in the Chi-square value provides empirical support for this specification as well.

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Table 1. Correlations and confirmatory factor loadings for indicators of civic attitudes and of civic engagement

Indicators of civic attitudes			
Variable	Military Obligations	Civil Justice Obligations	Factor Loading
Community Obligations	.32 ***	.35 **	.87
Military Obligations		.17 ***	.41
Civil Justice Obligations			.37
Indicators of civic engagement			
Variable	Service Activities	Political Activities	Factor Loading
Community Activities	.39 ***	.20 ***	.66
Service Activities		.11 ***	.56
Political Activities			.30

* = $p < .10$, ** = $p < .05$, *** = $p < .01$

Source: 1984 General Social Survey

N = 551

Table 2. Means (and standard deviations) of variables used in the analysis

Variable	Total Sample (N = 551)	Non-Veterans (N = 329)	Veterans (N = 222)
Exogenous variables			
Age in years	42.6 (16.86)	38.5 (17.6)	48.7 +++ (13.6)
Years of education	12.4 (3.4)	12.5 (3.5)	12.7 (3.3)
Married	.60	.53	.70 ***
Black	.09	.08	.10
Other racial-ethnic group	.04	.05	.03
Endogenous Variables			
Civic attitudes	14.9 (3.1)	14.4 (3.3)	15.7 *** (2.7)
Civic engagement	2.5 (2.0)	2.6 (2.2)	2.4 (1.7)

+++ = $p < .01$, 2-tailed t-test for difference in means

*** = $p < .01$, Chi-square test for independence

Source: 1984 General Social Survey

Table 3. Maximum likelihood estimates of unstandardized effects of selected variables on Civic attitudes and Civic engagement

	Dependent variable	
	Civic attitudes	Civic engagement
Independent variables		
Civic attitudes		.20 **
Military experience	.14	-.19 *
Age in years	.02 ***	.01 **
Years of education	-.01	.14 ***
Married	.32 ***	-.16
Black	-.06	-.22
Other racial-ethnic group	.11	-.10

* = $p < .10$, ** = $p < .05$, *** = $p < .01$

Source: 1984 General Social Survey

N = 551

Figure 1. Structural equation model of the effects of military service on civic attitudes and engagement (1984 GSS, N = 551)

Appendix 1. Items included in indicator variables of civic attitudes

A. We all know that American citizens have certain rights. For example, they have the right to free public education and to police protection, the right to attend religious services of their choice, and the right to elect public officials.

I'd like to ask now about certain obligations that some people feel American citizens owe their country. I just want your own opinion on these--whether you feel it is a very important obligation, a somewhat important obligation, or not an obligation that a citizen owes to the country:

1. First, to vote in elections?
2. How about volunteering some time to community services?
3. How about serving on a jury if called?
4. Reporting a crime that he or she may have witnessed?
5. How about being able to speak and understand English?
6. Keeping fully informed about news and public issues?
7. For young men, serving in the military when the country is at war?
8. How about, for young men, serving in the military during peacetime?
9. For young women, serving in the military during peacetime?
10. For young women, serving in the military when the country is at war?

The variable community obligations consists of the sum of responses to items 1, 2, 5, and 6. The variable civil justice obligations consists of summed responses to items 3 and 4. The military obligations variable is the sum of responses to items 7 - 10.

Appendix 2. Items included in indicator variables of civic engagement

A. Now we would like to know something about the groups or organizations to which individuals belong. Here is a list of various organizations. Could you tell me whether or not you are a member of each type?

1. Fraternal groups
2. Service clubs
3. Political clubs
4. Labor unions
5. Sports groups
6. Youth groups
7. School service groups
8. Hobby or garden clubs
9. School fraternities or sororities
10. Literary, art, discussion or study groups
11. Professional or academic societies
12. Church-affiliated groups

B. In 1980, you remember that Carter ran for President on the Democratic ticket against Reagan for the Republicans, and Anderson as an Independent. Do you remember for sure whether or not you voted in that election?

The variable community activities includes the following items: A5-A8, and A10-A12. The service activities variable includes items A1, A2, and A9. The political activities variable includes items A3, A4, and B.