It Could Be You! Military Conscription and Selection Bias in Rural Honduras

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The declining role of the armed forces in civil society within Latin America has been paralleled by the emergence of structural adjustment programmes oriented to resolving problems of internal and external balance through the application of a cocktail of trade reforms, deregulation and expenditure cuts. Defence expenditures have not been exempted from this budget-driven downsizing (Franko 1994), despite military attempts to stress the importance of basing defence expenditures on demand, whether to combat an external threat or to curb the prospect of rising domestic delinquency. Dix (1994:448) has nevertheless highlighted the fact that Latin American generals are begrudgingly accepting the arguments for military restructuring on condition that investigation into past human rights violations are either toned down or halted. These self-same tensions have emerged in Honduras as the transition towards civilian control has gathered pace (Ruhl 1996:37ff).

In the not so distant past (1996), almost three-quarters of the Honduran armed forces’ manpower were composed of conscripted recruits (ISS 1996). However, although military manpower requirements can be fulfilled through voluntary induction or conscription, research on contemporary conscription procedures relates exclusively to recruitment processes in either the US or Europe (Friedman 1982; Angrist 1989, 1990; Dewey 1984; Mellors and McKean 1984). Yet in Honduras and many other Third World economies enforced military recruitment has been a key occupational hazard for males within the requisite age-bracket. This paper helps to redress the anomaly, deploying survey data from Honduras so as to examine the historic likelihood of being forcibly inducted into the country’s armed forces. In particular it postulates that certain societal groupings – defined by economic orientation, political allegiance and department of residence – were more likely to be drafted than others.

The Military Draft in Latin America

Coercion functions in contracts for military service to replace voluntary participation. Force becomes a decisive factor when the cultural, political and economic disincentives to self-enlistment outweigh the possible benefits in the eyes of potential recruits. Recruitment relies on physical force – as opposed to the administrative authority of a compulsory draft lottery – when national geopolitical dynamics render it the most economically viable system of manning.

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the ranks of the military machine. This style of recruitment is relatively unaccountable, however, and there have been many documented cases of abuse.

Following the logic of this argument, one would expect voluntary enlistment to be slight, and coercive methods more common, in countries where the military functions to serve the interests of an elite, where social and political cohesion is partial, and where the military is rigidly stratified with little or no mobility between tiers. Force is particularly likely where cultural and ethnic differentiation is acute and the economic base allows some degree of independence, on two counts. First, when potential recruits are not party to the ideology of the dominant culture, then the concept of patriotism will not be such a persuasive motivational factor in encouraging voluntary recruitment. Second, social and economic commitments and rituals within the potential recruits’ own communities are likely to be incompatible with periods of absence, serving the interests of an alien and often hostile political and economic body. The brutal rupture with established existence that recruitment represents is ably illustrated by Graham’s account of enlistment practices in nineteenth century Brazil:

…the authorities can legally and at their wish order any non-exempt citizen grabbed; stick him in a dungeon; make him walk to the provincial capital with the necessary care to make sure he does not run away; install him as a soldier in the Army; place him on a steamship; send him from there to the very end of this vast country; keep him in military service for a long and indeterminate time; (and) make him die far from the land of his birth (Graham 1990:29).

In rural areas, the prevalence of subsistence production or otherwise precarious employment opportunities will generally encourage voluntary enlistment. Yet, with few exceptions, military service has not offered a very promising career path to the rural poor in Latin America. The armed forces in the region have traditionally recruited officers almost exclusively from military academies, promoting from the rank and file only in exceptional circumstances. For those rural households with a relatively secure and sufficient source of income, the poor standard of living and remuneration, not to mention the risk to life and health facing recruits, makes few predisposed to voluntarily serve in the armed forces.

Force is more than simply a cost-effective method of recruitment though; its influence reverberates through many other aspects of the socio-economic structure. The threat of arbitrary and arduous conscription can serve to reinforce parallel work systems, particularly patron-client relationships in the labour market. Forced recruitment in a sense then could be viewed as a system that relies on a tri-partite alliance between the state, the military and the dominant socio-economic class. The latter group may benefit, as employers, from the downward pressure on potential recruits’ working terms and conditions that the threat of coerced military service exerts. They are also the recipients of legislated, or effective, exemption from recruitment themselves as members of the alliance of privilege. Paradoxically though, the political influence of a patron or evidence of a current contractual obligation (usually some form of debt labour arrangement) can also offer some of the poor limited protection from recruiters. Consequently, Graham (1990:29) has argued that the real rationale
of the draft is to underpin patron-client relationships, with recruitment acting as a receptacle for the ‘shiftless poor’ (as opposed to the working ‘respectable’ poor) who might otherwise threaten societal order (Meznar 1992:337). This recognition of enforced conscription as an instrument of social control, press-ganging social outcasts and dissidents, has been emphasised by a number of historians. It has not, however, been explicitly addressed by economists and there is presently an absence of studies examining whether the burden of recruitment has fallen upon specific societal sectors.

Yet systems of forced recruitment only endure when the links between the military and the government are strong, and the representative nature (viewed from the perspective of potential recruits) of that government is weak. A degeneration of the relationship between the military and the government and/or a strengthening of the democratic credentials of the state leads to an erosion of the armed forces’ licence to carry out socially divisive practices, both in terms of recruitment and more general military operations. Hunter, for example, has noted how, within three years of the return to civilian rule in Brazil in 1985:

…elected officials began to take gradual yet significant steps to check the military’s political interference. Politicians first confronted the military over issues that directly affected their popularity and electoral standing. Later, their actions included efforts to diminish the military’s institutional basis for political involvement… (1995:427).

Economic factors too have hastened the military retreat. The widespread adoption of neo-liberal policies in the region, with their particular emphasis on internal balance, were a key factor in defence spending in the region, dropping 35.2 per cent over the 1985-90 period (Franko 1994:41). In Honduras, this combination of democratic opening and a neo-liberal induced economic squeeze led business organisations and other elements of civil society to demand the subordination of the military to civilian authority and a cut-back in the army’s influence (Ruhl 1996:42ff). One manifestation of this was an increasing opposition to the traditional recruitment practices of the army, which were viewed, in some quarters, as inequitable (see Flores 1995:227/9).

The Armed Forces and Forced Recruitment in Honduras

Forced recruitment is not a new phenomenon in Honduras, dating from the time of the Liberal government of Marco Aurelio Soto, which introduced obligatory military service under Article 16 of the 1880 Constitution. Exemptions from serving were offered to those employed by the mining companies which generated the major proportion of the country’s export revenues (Posas and del Cid 1983:40), and workers in the aguardiente (a local sugar-based alcoholic spirit) industry given the importance of spirit duties to government revenues (Funes 1995:54). Funes goes on to recount how one individual recruited in this fashion rather imaginatively requested his release on the grounds that he was a sleepwalker (!), although whether this was deemed an admissible reason for exemption is not recorded. Although ethnic background was often a justification for exemption in much of Latin America – those not of the casta limpia...
(white or mestizo classes) being excluded from this ‘honourable’ service until all other recruitment options were exhausted (Archer 1992:229,46) – ethnicity was never an explicit ground for exemption in Honduras.

The numerous civil wars played out around this time led to the government frequently finding itself in a ‘thousand difficulties’ and, with the military budget dominating government expenditures at the turn of the century, frequent recourse was made to the obligatory recruitment of militias (Mariñas, cited by Martínez 1994:17). In practice however, the military value of such recruits was questionable; there was a dearth of training, and discipline and organisation were so poor that the majority were recruited without knowing why they fought (Funes 1995:48,52). While recognition of these failings led to the approval of a new Military Service Law (1913) and an upgraded salary (1917) designed to attract recruits, voluntary recruitment levels remained low and desertion rates persisted due to the abysmal living conditions the enlistee encountered (Funes 1995:108ff). Furthermore, as the number of exemptions on offer to the middle classes proliferated over time, ‘militia service came to be viewed as a form of lower-class servitude rather than a patriotic duty’ (Flores 1995:214).

This changed after the Caudillo Tiburcio Carías Andino (1933-49) initiated a process of military modernisation and professionalisation, sending officers to receive advanced military training in the US Army School of the Americas in Panama and creating the First and Second Infantry Battalions in 1946. The provision of academic training and enhanced pecuniary benefits (improved salary scales, pension and retirement benefits) during the 1950s and 1960s attracted an expanded and ambitious officer corps who successfully consolidated the military’s position in Honduran society. Living conditions for recruits also improved, enabling the 4,500-manpower target (approximately 0.2 per cent of the economically active population) to be almost wholly met through voluntary enlistment (Blutstein et al. 1971:192). Consequently, although the new 1965 Constitution formalised the requirement for all males between the ages of 18-32 to undertake obligatory military service for periods of up to eighteen months (Article 321), it had little immediate effect upon recruitment practices. This changed swiftly following the 1969 ‘football war’ with El Salvador, as Article 321 greatly facilitated the call-up of a large number of draftees. However, the brevity of the conflict afforded little opportunity for the new recruits to adjust to combat conditions.

The 1980s saw Honduras on a war footing once again; though this time there was the identification of an internal enemy – communist insurgency – with an external enemy – the newly installed Sandinista government in Nicaragua (Salomón 1994:61). Consequently, although the mandate of power passed to the elected Liberal government of Roberto Suazo Córdova in 1981, the military retained the right to veto appointments to the Cabinet, control the police and security forces and, have immunity from human rights or corruption investigations (Schulz and Schulz 1994:71/2). The military also benefited financially as US fears regarding the perceived totalitarian tendencies of the Sandinista state translated into increased aid inflows; with the Palmerola airbase becoming home for 1200 US soldiers by August 1983.

As tensions mounted, so did manpower demands with the armed forces swelling to peak at 15,400 personnel in 1989. Although the 1982 Constitution
had confirmed the obligatory nature of military service, the failure to match this with improved pay or living conditions for the average recruit dissuaded males from voluntarily enlisting. In response, the Honduran military began to round-up large numbers of 18 year olds for their obligatory military service (Salomón 1992:59), a practice that continued until forced recruitment was first temporarily suspended (1993), then replaced with a lottery-based system (1994) before finally being abolished (1995). Author Andy Thorpe encountered first-hand the passions progeny recruitment provoked whilst working at the National State University of Honduras in 1992. A telephone call, which later proved to be incorrect, to the department warning of the imminence of a recruiting campaign outside a local secondary school was sufficient to see two of the secretaries drop everything and leave, screaming, to rescue their sons. The fear of recruitment – and the loss resulting as school careers were interrupted and economic opportunities forgone – compounded by the resentment felt by most civilians regarding the privileged position of the military in contemporary Honduran society helped fuel a growing anti-military movement that was ultimately successful in ending forced conscription practices (Ruhl 1997:43ff, 1999:13).

However, although forced recruitment is now history in Honduras, there is still a pervading belief that the principal victims of such recruitment processes were the uneducated rural poor (Blutstein et al. 1971:188; Flores 1995:227/9). Yet, paradoxically, as we have indicated elsewhere, these ‘lower-quality’ recruits are precisely those whom, given a choice, the armed forces would ideally reject due to the increased training costs involved (Thorpe and Cameron 2000). This therefore raises the question as to whether recruitment policy in Honduras historically discriminated in favour of (or against) certain groups.

**Honduran Drafting Practices and Likely Influential Factors in the Recruitment Process**

Traditionally, recruitment patterns in rural and urban areas differed slightly. In urban areas, military foot patrols stopped young males who appeared to fall within the requisite age bracket during impromptu ‘hunting’ periods. Preferred hunting grounds included the vicinity of secondary schools as the academic year came to an end, and football matches and/or other events where a high preponderance of young males could be expected as this reduced search costs (Thorpe and Cameron 2000). In rural areas military roadblocks halted traffic and picked out potential recruits; coffee harvesting areas, much to the chagrin of local growers, were particularly susceptible to such tactics.

Examination of national identity cards (a requisite for all Hondurans over the age of 18) ascertained whether the individual was exempt on grounds of age (under 18, over 30) or formal marriage. Exemptions were also extended to those with physical and mental disabilities, those of below average stature and those whose duties were deemed indispensable for either the present (‘protected’ occupations) or future (those undertaking university education) welfare of the economy or the family (husbands or only sons). Those males who were unable to provide evidence of ineligibility for service were immediately transferred to a military barracks.
While, in theory, the 1982 Constitutional provision of *Habeas Corpus* (Article 182) allowed such illegal detentions to be rescinded through judicial warrant, circumstances conspired against the detained youths. First, in order to move a writ of *habeas corpus* the petition had to state both the place of detention and the authority responsible for said detention. However, the nature of the abduction frequently denied the youth’s family from having sufficient information to proceed (Amnistía 1988). Second, the weakness of the judicial system meant that even if a writ was presented, the full process of law could still fail to occur (CEDOH Sept 1992).

Unfortunately, details on the numbers and characteristics of those who fell prey to these periodic manhunts are extremely sparse. The armed forces do not publish figures for forcible, as opposed to voluntary, recruitment. The Honduran Human Rights Committee (*Comité de la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos* - CODEH), in recognising forced recruitment as an infringement of personal liberty, indicated that the number of reported infringements escalated from 358 in 1987 to 2,212 in 1991. Yet these figures are unlikely to represent the true scale of the problem on two counts. First, there is an element of underestimation as the figures only reflect those cases of which CODEH has been informed (POSCEA/OXFAM 1992:77). Second, there is also a countervailing tendency present; the CODEH categorisation aggregates forced recruitment violations with illegal detentions to arrive at the quoted infringement figure.

Until recently, there was even less information on historic selection bias. Thorpe and Cameron (2000) however, have partially remedied this lacuna, examining whether the Honduran armed forces implemented systematic recruitment patterns in rural Honduras during the period when the country was either under military rule or when the military played a key role in political affairs (defined for the purposes of this paper as the period of military hegemony and covering the period prior to 1981). This paper extends that work, comparing recruitment bias in the period of military hegemony with evidence from the period of fledging democracy (1981-1991). We accept the decision to split the sample as we have done, though it could be construed as tendentious. Ruhl (1999:14), for example, has argued that the military were only put on the defensive a decade later during the Callejas regime, although interestingly, the same author has also noted that the military’s popularity had not only faded by the late 1970s (1999:6), but that the institution had also become more accommodating in the sense that it encouraged civil society organisations to keep pressing their demands within established channels (1999a:5). While extraparliamentary activity was quickly suppressed, particularly during General Alvaro Martínez’s tenure as head of the armed forces (1982-1984), we contend that, as it was in the military’s interest to preserve the fledging democracy (largely to ensure the continued inflow of US aid), the modality of the recruitment process may have altered as a consequence.

The primary data is taken from the POSCEA-OXFAM study into ‘The Challenge for the Honduran Peasant Movements in the Decade of the Nineties,’ which was collected between December 1991 and March 1992 in the rural areas of 16 of the country’s 18 departments, the departments of Gracias a Dios and Las Islas de Bahía being ruled out on grounds of excessive costs.

Sample selection was determined through a five-stage stratification process. First, representations were made to each peasant organisation (plus the coffee
growers’ association AHPROCAFE) to ascertain claimed size and geographical distribution of membership. Second, after pilot studies had established that a daily average of four interviews per interviewer was the most that could be expected, the project budget was broken down to indicate a potential sample of 1,120 informants. The third stage (after taking the decision to allocate 20 per cent of the interviews to informants outside the agrarian reform sector) was to calculate the number of informant interviews per organisation the ‘quota’ based upon claimed membership. These quotas were then disaggregated to the departmental level (based on claimed spatial concentration) and then, by summing up organisation quotas on a departmental basis, we established departmental interview ‘targets’. The final stage in the selection process occurred at the field level when the interviewers made contact with regional peasant organisers of the national unions and selected the peasant groups to be visited. In total 1,053 peasant families were interviewed, a response rate of 87.75 per cent. Although the survey was directed principally at determining the households’ socio-economic status, orientation to market and technical level of production, an ancillary questionnaire collected data on how the household had been affected by recruitment procedures and security service behaviour over time. The dependent variable selected – the probability of a member of the respondent’s household having been forcibly recruited – allowed us to examine recruitment procedures over time for selection bias. After a series of preliminary discussions with a number of informants we hypothesised that the probability of forced recruitment was likely to be influenced by five independent variables: socio-economic status; political allegiance; place of residence; market-orientation; age.

Socio-economic status can be defined in a number of ways, although the most obvious relates to household income and/or wealth levels. Income levels were ascertained from survey data, suitable adjustments being made to incorporate household self-consumption through the use of local shadow prices. The inclusion of livestock ownership (cattle and chickens) as a wealth proxy can be justified on two grounds. First, the imperfections of rural credit markets in Honduras see the majority of peasants saving, by necessity, through livestock investment. Second, even where credit institutions do exist and are used, there is a marked reluctance to disclose savings levels – hence we have assumed that livestock ownership is positively correlated to financial asset holdings. Land ownership was not employed as a wealth proxy due to the high proportion of land held in either a collective or cooperative form (73.6 per cent) within our sample. Alternatively, socio-economic status can be gleaned by reference to a household’s educational background, with the level of parental schooling perhaps reflecting the esteem with which a household is held in the local community. Consequently, we introduced three independent variables designed to capture the effects of socio-economic status: household income, livestock holdings subdivided into chicken or cattle ownership, and level of parental schooling.

We hypothesise that higher socio-economic status would increase the likelihood of evading the draft, as (i) the clear link between status and investment in human capital formation (Cameron and Thorpe, 2000) amplifies the opportunities for claiming exemption on grounds of continuing education, and (ii) these households can mobilise greater resources to employ judicial (habeas corpus) or non-judicial (bribery) evasional measures.
Political allegiance variables were introduced to examine the hypothesis that selective recruitment practices have been targeted at radical or potentially ‘subversive’ minorities. Historically, the close affinity between the Nationalist party and the military suggests that traditional National Party supporters were less likely to be targeted in recruitment drives than members of the Liberal Party or the two smaller political parties (the PINU or the Christian Democratic Party). The notion that membership of a peasant organisation – an alternative measure of rural radicalness – was also likely to result in a greater probability of recruitment was supported by our fieldwork experiences in San Marcos de Colón, Choluteca. Here, members of the UNC peasant organisation intimated that large landowners collaborated with the military to ensure that recruitment drives were targeted at peasant groups involved in land invasions (POSCAE/OXFAM 1992:85). If these tales are generalised across the country then union membership is likely to be a liability when viewed from the conscription perspective. We therefore hypothesize that members of the Liberal and smaller political parties and peasant organisations were more likely to have been over-represented in the draft.

Residence was also likely to be a determining influence upon drafting prospects. The ‘football war’ saw Honduran-Salvadorean relations reach their nadir in 1969, with diplomacy remaining tense in the eighties as the guerillas of the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front (FMLN) built and consolidated their power base in the border regions (departments of Ocotopeque, Lempira, Intibucá, La Paz and Valle). Political turbulence in Nicaragua also saw both the FSLN (in the 1970s) and then the contras (1980s) electing to site part of their operations in Honduras’ southern departments (Choluteca, El Paraíso and Olancho). Consequently the greater military profile required to combat these perceived external threats could also be used to sweep up draftees at a much reduced cost. Cost considerations were also likely to encourage recruitment practices in those other departments where military bases are located (Francisco Morazán and Comayagua). We therefore hypothesize that households in border regions and/or departments where military bases were sited were more at risk from recruitment practices than households in other departments.

Market orientation is important given the military proclivity to employ road-blocks as the primary means of detaining – and thence identifying – potential recruits in rural areas. As low income and the limited necessity of subsistence level households to travel reduces the likelihood of their passing along the highways, the probability of recruiting from such households is correspondingly lower. Conversely, rice and coffee producing households are more commercially oriented and so both the need to market their produce and the increased travel opportunities that this production income offers are expected to increase the probability of members of these households being conscripted. The probability of recruitment is perhaps greatest for coffee producing households for, as we have intimated earlier in this paper, the military historically viewed the coffee-picking season, with its high labour requirements, as a prime recruitment opportunity (Thorpe and Cameron 2000). We hypothesize therefore that while subsistence households will be under-represented in the recruitment process, there is a correspondingly higher probability of coffee growing households falling victim to the draft.

Finally, age was incorporated because, although an individual can only be
inducted for military service once, the older the respondent, the greater the likelihood that a member of the household in which they were residing had become a victim in this annually repeated game of ‘cat and mouse’.

**Historic Selection Bias: A Discussion of the Findings**

The dependent variable – the probability of a member of the respondent’s household having been forcibly recruited – was estimated with regard to the independent variables identified above for the two periods. The original sample was reduced to 794 households due to missing data values for one or more of the independent variables before linear and logit probability coefficients were estimated (results and details of the econometric software used are available from the authors on request). The principal findings are detailed in Table 1.

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* 'More/Less likely' refers to variables found to be significant at the 10 per cent level (two-tailed test) from a rural survey of 794 households.

Evidence suggests that higher income households in our sample (contrary to the original hypothesis we advanced) were statistically more likely, rather than less likely, to be recruited in the pre-1981 period. One plausible explanation for this is that, by directly controlling the state apparatus, the military effectively dictated recruitment terms; hence, in those instances where roadblock ‘catch’ exceeded recruitment targets, the recruiting officer could simply retain the higher quality (physically and mentally able) conscripts, secure in the knowledge that their decision was unlikely to be overturned. As these preferred physical and mental qualities were more prominent in high income (well-nourished) than low income (poorly nourished) households, selection procedures would have unduly discriminated against the former. As the transition to democratic rule also coincided with an upsurge in human rights violations, ably documented by CODEH following its foundation in 1981, the military resorted to extra-parliamentary channels to preserve its authority (Amnistía 1988:10;
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Kaye 1997:694). Although we have no specific proof, we conjecture that in order to avoid public vilification upon the sensitive issue of conscription, the military may well have amended its recruitment practices and become less inclined to retain higher quality recruits – conscious in the knowledge that the families of such recruits were more likely to complain to CODEH and/or seek their release through the courts.

While Christian Democrat activists and supporters were more assiduously targeted by the military in recruitment drives in the democratic period, we found no evidence to suggest that peasant organisation membership or allegiance to the Liberal Party affected recruitment probabilities in either period. One possible explanation for the pronounced recruitment of Christian Democrats during the democratic period may relate to the growing radicalness of the organisation, which had gradually drifted away from its church roots, linking with the left-wing Frente Patriótico Hondureño to boycott the 1980 elections (Meyer and Meyer 1994:497). Although re-admitted to the parliamentary process in time for the 1981 elections, its legacy by association with leftist groupings may well have made it a prime target for military recruitment campaigns. By contrast, in the pre-1981 period, Nationalist party supporters were over-represented in the recruitment process, although the reason for this is not clear.

Residence does appear to have some influence upon recruitment probabilities, although with the exception of La Paz (which also has a military base), inhabitants in the border departments were no more likely to be recruited than their non-border counterparts. Instead, results indicate that residence in Cortés (both periods), Ocolopique (pre-1981), Olancho, Lempira and Atlántida (democratic period) made households less vulnerable to recruitment. The reduced probability of rural households being drafted in Cortés during either period may well be attributable to a military cost-minimising strategy which concentrated recruitment effort in the urban environs of San Pedro Sula, the country’s principal industrial city – although if this was indeed the case, it is surprising that reduced probabilities were also not evident in the department of Francisco Morazán, where Tegucigalpa, the Honduran capital is located. In the case of the Lempira findings, one possible explanation for local under-recruitment in the democratic period could relate to the growing articulation of the ethnic voice. Growing local leadership strengths amongst the Lenca community in Southern Lempira dating from 1975 were reinforced by the 1982 Constitutional guarantee on indigenous rights (Thorpe et al. 1995:78; Rivas 1993:133). This could conceivably have made the military wary of recruiting in that department in the post-1981 period. The reduced probability of recruitment in Atlántida is most likely attributable to the presence of the foreign fruit companies (Standard Fruit and the Tela Railroad Co., a subsidiary of United Brands). These companies are major local employers, and the military were unlikely to risk offending such powerful companies by siphoning off part of their workforce for military service once democratic rule had been re-established. Why residence in Ocolopique (pre-1981) should have resulted in a reduced recruitment probability would seem to merit further investigation.

Contrary to expectations, members of subsistence production households are no less likely to be recruited than other producers. Although the need to commercialise output led us to surmise that coffee-producing households were
more liable to be drafted, the reverse appears to have been the case. One conceivable explanation for this, consistent with the recent expansion of coffee cultivation in the country, relates to topographical considerations. As coffeegrowing takes place on upland terrain which is largely removed from the main inter-city thoroughfares, the historic likelihood of being ‘snatched’ by a military recruiting team was low. The probability of recruitment has increased (towards the norm) in the democratic period as international support, notably technical assistance (Small Farm Coffee Project) and titling (Proyecto de Titulación de Tierras) from USAID and the EU construction and maintenance of coffee roads programme (1985), have encouraged coffee-grower movements by increasing grower returns and/or reducing marketing and transport obstacles (Larsen 1995:66ff and 85; EU 1995:148). Geography appears to account for the rather perverse behaviour of the rice-growing variable, as there was a marked regional shift in rice production. In the period preceding 1981, over half of the country’s rice was produced in Cortés, a department registering low rural recruitment probabilities as we have noted earlier. While rice production declined sharply in Cortés during the subsequent democratic phase, this was matched by production doubling in Olancho and tripling in Atlántida and Colón, with three-quarters of national rice production coming from these latter three departments by the close of the 1980s (Noé Pino and Perdomo 1990). We conjecture therefore that, although recruitment probabilities were lower than the norm in two of these three departments due to the fear of offending the fruit companies (by recruiting banana workers in Atlántida) or the locally powerful hacenderos (by drafting cattlemen in Olancho), this may well have led to the targeting of other crop producers such as rice growers. Finally, while respondent age proved insignificant in the recruitment process, the appearance of the chicken wealth proxy in the pre-1981 data is less easy to explain.

Concluding Remarks – and the Conclusion of Forced Recruitment

This paper has analysed the likelihood of certain groups being under- or over-represented in the annual rural recruitment process, identifying a number of differences between the period of military hegemony (prior to 1981) and the subsequent democratisation period (1981-91). Our study suggests that the transition to democracy coincided with a more egalitarian recruitment process, subject to the caveat of potential sample bias (see Endnote 12), as the preference for higher quality recruits was tempered by the knowledge that the households from which such recruits were drawn were more likely to protest against such practices. While urban recruitment drives provide one plausible reason for the lower than expected probability of recruitment in rural Cortés, a similar outcome was not observed in Francisco Morazán – where the capital is situated – a finding that suggests an analysis of urban recruitment trends is warranted. The two most significant findings from the study perhaps are: (i) the increased probability of the military inducting Christian Democrat supporters in the democratisation period as the party moved leftwards, and (ii) the way the spatial relocation of rice production from Cortés to Olancho, Atlántida and Colón made rice-growing households more, as opposed to less, exposed to the likelihood of recruitment. The debate over whether forced recruitment procedures
in Honduras were discriminatory has however, as we have earlier intimated, been somewhat overtaken by events which have taken place since the survey was undertaken.

The 1990s saw the military increasingly coming under attack (Ruhl 1996:43). Political fragility was replaced by political continuity as the Nationalist government of Rafael Callejas (1990-4) replaced the Liberal government of José Azcona, while the disappearance of the external threat following the election of Violeta Chamorro (and the ending of forced conscription) in Nicaragua and the signing of the Salvadorean peace accords was matched by drastic cuts in US aid and a growing assertiveness on the part of civil society (Salomón 1994a:223; Ruhl 1996:53ff). Growing civil society pressures saw the armed forces cede terrain; an Office of Professional Responsibility was opened in 1991 to investigate claims of misconduct by police officers (CEDOH 1992); the brutal violation and murder of a student, Riccy Mabel, in July of the same year saw the supposed military perpetrators turned over for trial in a civilian court (CEDOH, various) and in December of the same year the government appointed the country’s first Human Rights Commissioner. Pressures intensified when a specially created Ad Hoc Commission announced the disbandment of the publicly loathed police investigation unit, the DIN (Dirección Nacional de Investigaciones) in 1993, its replacement (Dirección de Investigación Criminal – the DIC) being separated from military control in January 1995 by the Liberal administration of Roberto Reina (1994-8). The Treasury Police were also removed from police control in late 1994, with constitutional reforms in early 1995 paving the way for the complete demilitarisation of the national police force in 1997 (Ruhl 1996:49, 1999:16).

Furthermore, the economic crisis, which forced the Callejas government to adopt neo-liberal adjustment policies in line with the majority of other Latin American economies, also saw disproportionate cuts in the military budget.16 The militarisation of institutions such as Hondutel, the state telecommunications company, the merchant marine and immigration control was ended by the subsequent Reina government, although the growing military incursion into other areas of economic activity via the Instituto de Previsión Militar (IPM).17 survived, despite a fierce public debate (see Yllescas in La Tribuna, 22/11/1992 for example).

These combined economic and civil society inspired assaults upon military authority served to hasten the end of forced recruitment in Honduras. Forced recruitment had been temporarily suspended during the 1993 election campaign, the Chief of the Armed Forces, General Luis Discua, promising to seek more humane methods of filling military manpower requirements. After Reina’s victory, moves to replace the constitutional duty of obligatory military service with a voluntary recruitment system gathered pace. The military response to this threat was two-fold; (i) a national lottery system (el Sorteo) was introduced in 1994 which converted the military service requirement into an obligation to undertake ‘Servicio Militar Constitucional Educativo’ (SMCE) and (ii) incentives offered to those enlisting voluntarily were increased (see Table 2).
Table 2. Comparison of service options for volunteers and draftees under the Servicio militar constitucional educativo proposals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volunteers</th>
<th>Draftees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maximum period of service is set at <strong>twelve</strong> months.</td>
<td>Maximum period of service is set at <strong>eighteen</strong> months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perform one’s service in a region of your choice.</td>
<td>The Armed Forces will determine the region where one serves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those serving in Gracias a Dios are only required to serve <strong>nine</strong> months.</td>
<td>Those drafted who volunteer to serve in Gracias a Dios will only serve a maximum of <strong>twelve</strong> months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University students who have completed 50 per cent of their course will serve <strong>eighteen</strong> months in an officer reserve corps.</td>
<td>University students who have completed 50 per cent of their course will serve <strong>twenty-four</strong> months in an officer reserve corps.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school students who pass an entrance examination can enter the NCO reserve, serving <strong>eighteen</strong> months.</td>
<td>Secondary school students who pass an entrance examination can enter the NCO reserve, serving <strong>twenty-four</strong> months.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On 19 November 1994 the Junta Nacional de Alistamiento (National Enlistment Council) held open-air lotteries in all the principal population centres to determine who was liable for military service. Of the 174,000 males identified by the Registro Nacional de Personas as falling into the 18 to 25 age category, 9,000 names were drawn. Of these, those able to prove they were ineligible were discounted, leaving a total of 6,025 recruits liable for call-up in 1995. Newspaper reports in the months following El Sorteo however suggest that voluntary recruitment levels remained low whilst many lottery ‘winners’ chose not to present themselves for service (El Heraldo, El Tiempo, various issues). Constitutional reforms in 1995 effectively halted the practice of conscription and compelled the armed forces to increase basic salaries and provide a series of vocational training schemes in order to fulfil its (reduced) manpower requirements.18

This new modus operandi represents a departure from the historic system of forced recruitment in two principal ways. First, its intended educational reorientation may, by enhancing human capital formation, improve military manpower efficiency by attracting high-quality recruits to the ranks. Second, some anecdotal evidence is emerging to suggest that voluntary enlistment patterns are likely to differ from historically forced recruitment patterns – the most evident manifestation of this being the enlistment of female personnel in the 100 Infantry Battalion in February 1997 (El Heraldo, 7/2/1997). It will be important to examine then, after the new system is embedded, whether military manpower efficiency does indeed improve and/or whether enlistment patterns in the new all volunteer force exhibit a different selection bias to those that we have documented in this paper.

* * *
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Notes

1. Author Andy Thorpe’s interest in this topic was aroused during Honduran fieldwork in early 1992 when, returning from interviewing a number of peasant households near Juticalpa in Olancho, the survey vehicle encountered a military roadblock. Papers were requested and, while the author (foreigner), driver (female) and senior team member (having already served in the armed forces) were exempted from service, Hector, the fourth member of the team, was obliged to leave the vehicle, being informed that he was being drafted on the spot! There ensued a long and heated argument between the author and the military detachment officer before, grudgingly, he gave up his catch and allowed Hector to rejoin the research team.

2. Forced labour, be it for military, agricultural or other service, affects a wide range of social and economic processes, but its primary impetus is economic. Evidence for this can be seen in the concentration of coerced participation in areas that provide the greatest economic viability. McCreery (1983:741) for example finds that in late nineteenth century Guatemala, mandamiento demands were inflicted most heavily on villages closest to the main communication routes between the highlands (where potential recruits lived) and the boca costa (where the plantations were situated).

3. McCreery cites numerous instances of abuse relating to military and other labour obligations in Guatemala, for example: ‘Alcaldes sold exemption from mandamiento (ordered) drafts and road duty, and local military commanders rounded up men purportedly for military service or zapadores (construction gangs organized along military lines) but in fact, to extort money for their freedom: one local commandant reportedly adopted this course whenever his gambling debts threatened to get out of control (McCreery, 1983:748). In a similar vein, Archer (1975:231) relates how in Bourbon Mexico: ‘… many of the alguaciles and cuadrilleros (local governors) responsible for conducting the levies used their offices to extort money from the laboring classes.’

4. Weaver (1994:39) finds that, in the colonial period, legislation relating to systems of forced labour in Central America used ethnic criteria as a means of differentiation and justification.

5. The citations from Graham and Meznar are based on research into nineteenth century Brazil, however this facet of forced recruitment has also been identified in Bourbon Spain: ‘A form of recruitment used for many years was the forced levy, a levy realised with the express intention of clearing the cities of undesirables – vagrants, villains and the idlers’ (our translation from Borrego Berlín, 1989:98) and Mexico: ‘In Querétaro, if a rumour spread that recruiting was to take place or, even worse, a levy of vagabonds… men fled the cities (Archer, 1975:230).’ In the United States, these vagabonds were somewhat distinctive, the New York Herald (1850) commenting upon those recruited for the first filibustering expedition of William Walker: ‘Thanks to Colonel Walker, we shall soon see ourselves lose many unemployed and useless
individuals. (…) This pernicious multitude is composed of bankrupted bank presidents, bud-
 ding generals and corrupt clerics… who have infested our street corners like hungry wolves…”

6. Posas and del Cid (1983:38) calculate that the War Office absorbed 30.5 per cent of expendi-
 tures in 1894, a figure that grew to reach 42 per cent in 1901. While increasing government
 revenues from banana sales saw an increase in the absolute levels of state expenditure and a
 corresponding decline in the proportion allocated to the armed forces, the defence bill of $4.5
 million still represented 25 per cent of the total budget in 1939 (Blutstein et al. 1971:184).

7. One extreme manifestation of this saw conscripts switching sides in mid-battle when a victor
 appeared likely through the simple expedient of swapping the ribbon tied to their arm – which
 identified their allegiance – for the colour of the opposing faction (Beaulac, as reported by
 Posas and del Cid, 1983:87ff).

8. In 1956 the military deposed the elected civilian President. The junta only allowed civilian rule
 to be restored after a new constitution guaranteed its institutional autonomy and deprived
 future civilian presidents of the power to either select or sack the chief of the armed forces or
 issue orders directly to the armed forces (see Ruhl, 1999 for a discussion of the growth of
 military power in Honduras from 1956 to date).

9. Meza, et al. (1988:4) quote a US study detailing how both the quantity and structure of USAID
 lending to Honduras changed over the period 1980-5. While the sums advanced rose from $57
 million to $283 million, the percentage going to the Armed Forces rose from 7 per cent to 76
 per cent (from $4 million to $215 million). In a similar vein, Arrivillaga (1993:41) notes that
 while the country received $39.4 million in US military aid over the period 1946-81, the period
 1982-7 garnered $346.8 million.

10. These grounds include: (i) employment, such as Congressional deputies, judges, church minis-
 terial governors, diplomats and newspaper reporters; (ii) education, university
 students who regularly attend their classes and those undertaking their final year of secondary
 education; (iii) family necessity, where the male is the only or first son of a single mother or
 retired parents; (iv) aptitude, those with physical and mental incapacities are excluded; and (v)
 those who have lived overseas for more than five years.

11. Further support for this chronological division is given by Prats and Dove (1995, 2a:5) who
 note that; ‘…from 1954 until 1981 no chief of the Honduran armed forces retired without
 having first served as President of Honduras.’

12. We acknowledge that this introduces a bias into our survey as it leads to the over sampling of
 reform sector households. Furthermore, although clear evidence of social differentiation was
 apparent across the sample, the exclusion of large landowners – who, albeit, form only a small
 proportion of the rural population – will conflate the degree of differentiation recorded. Such
 bias was inescapable, however, in the light of the study’s principal objective.

13. Although this introduces potential inaccuracies in instances where the characteristics of the
 respondent’s household have changed over time, the limited intergenerational mobility evid-
 ent within rural Honduras minimizes the likelihood of such inaccuracies (Thorpe and Cam-
 eron, 2000).

14. We are grateful to an anonymous referee for pointing out that the recruitment process was just
 as likely to ensnare labourers who happened to pick coffee in the wrong place at the wrong
 time. While the POSCAE-OXFAM survey did compute off-farm income, it failed to distin-
 guish by source of activity, and so we were unable to follow through with the referee’s observa-
 tion.

15. The major change in relations with El Salvador is evident in the way both countries accepted
 the new demarcated borders drawn up by the International Court of Justice in The Hague in
 in 1993 – with military aid dwindling to just $325,000 by 1995.

16. While central government expenditures declined 3.5 per cent in real terms under Callejas’
 presidency, the military’s absolute share slipped from 10.6 per cent (498.6 million Lempiras) to
 4.3 per cent (261.3 million Lempiras), [Thorpe, 1996: Table 1A].

17. The IPM controlled a bank (BANFFAA), an insurance company (PREVISA), a credit card
 company, an international investment corporation (CONFINTER), one of the country’s two
 cement companies (INCEHSA), the merchant marine (until 1995), a funeral parlour and a
 cemetery (Funes, 1995:396ff)

18. Ruhl (1999:16) suggests that the ending of forced recruitment and a failure to raise salaries
sufficiently had reduced the armed forces – excluding the police – to around 6,000 men by early 1997.

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