Moving Up the Ranks:
Conscription and Intergenerational Mobility

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Abstract

This paper examines whether military service can promote intergenerational mobility in developing countries. We use survey data from 3,037 men exposed to conscription to compare respondents' socioeconomic and educational outcomes with those of their parents. Exploiting the random assignment of conscription by lottery, we show that serving increases upward mobility for individuals from low-SES backgrounds, with no effects for those from more privileged ones. The positive effects of military service on mobility disappear under non-democratic regimes or wartime, underscoring the importance of stable institutional contexts for the military to enhance mobility.
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1 Introduction

Military service can be a turning point in a person's life, with lasting economic and social consequences. This experience has shaped the life trajectories of people around the world: over 80% of countries implemented some form of conscription in the 20th century, and roughly 40% still maintain it today (The Economist, 2021). While the effects of military service on individual outcomes have been widely studied, less is known about its potential to influence mobility across generations. This question is especially timely amid growing concern over persistent inequality—and particularly relevant in developing economies, where intergenerational mobility tends to be lower and opportunities more constrained (van der Weide et al., 2024).

We examine the role of conscription in promoting intergenerational mobility in such contexts by focusing on Argentina, where compulsory military service was assigned through a yearly lottery during the 20th century. Leveraging survey data from 3,037 men across 29 cohorts eligible for conscription more than 28 years ago, and exploiting the random variation generated by the lottery, we study whether military service affected conscripts' ability to attain higher socioeconomic status and educational levels than their parents. By comparing respondents' outcomes with those of their parents, we assess whether conscription increased the likelihood of upward mobility—particularly among individuals from underprivileged backgrounds.

Our results indicate that, among individuals whose parents did not complete high school, serving in the military reduced the likelihood of being in low socioeconomic status by 17 percentage points (a 56% decrease relative to the likelihood of being low-SES in the control group). In contrast, the effects of conscription on socioeconomic status are economically small and statistically imprecise for those whose parents completed high school or more. These patterns are mirrored in educational attainment: conscription increased the likelihood of completing high school by 8 percentage points for individuals whose parents did not reach that milestone (a 9% increase relative to high school attainment in the control group). However, it did not significantly affect the likelihood of completing education beyond high school for those whose parents had already attained that level. Overall, military service appears to have boosted the upward mobility of individuals from underprivileged backgrounds, while having little effect on those from more advantaged ones.

We also find that, in the long run, conscripts whose parents did not complete high school are significantly more likely to report more diverse networks of close friends and to have close friends with college degrees. However, these conscripts are not more likely to

report close friends who also served in the military, suggesting that such friendships were not initiated during service. Overall, the interactions and skills acquired in the military may have allowed conscripts to access more diverse connections later in life, including with privileged individuals, but these personal connections appear to be a reflection of conscription's positive impacts on mobility rather than a central intervening mechanism.

Qualitative evidence indicates that a central mission of conscription was to ensure that recruits acquired basic literacy skills, particularly reading and writing. However, this educational goal became secondary during periods of conflict or non-democratic governments, when the military's priorities shifted toward combat readiness and counterinsurgency. An analysis of heterogeneous effects by political context corroborates this interpretation: the mobility-enhancing effects of conscription are muted for conscripts who served during wartime or under non-democratic governments, suggesting that periods of political instability and conflict limited the institution's potential to promote upward mobility.

This paper contributes to several strands of literature. It adds to the robust body of work studying how military service can affect earnings and provide economic opportunity. Previous studies have produced mixed results. Research on conscription during intense military conflict (e.g., Vietnam veterans) has documented negative effects on earnings and labor force participation (Angrist, 1990; Angrist, Chen and Song, 2011; Autor, Duggan and Lyle, 2011). By contrast, other studies have shown that military service can foster earnings and economic opportunity, particularly among individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds (Greenberg et al., 2022; Card and Cardoso, 2012; Barrera et al., 2025; Grönqvist and Lindqvist, 2016). In general, however, this literature examines contexts in developed economies. Our paper, in contrast, explores whether conscription can promote opportunity in a developing country, where the military may partly compensate for limited educational provision resulting from low state capacity and informality. Moreover, our data cover conscription during both wartime and peacetime, allowing us to examine how the effects of military service on opportunity vary depending on whether conscripts served during armed conflict and under democratic or military regimes.

Relatedly, the paper contributes to the literature on intergenerational mobility and its potential determinants (Chetty et al., 2020, 2014). In particular, it adds to work studying intergenerational mobility in developing economies (Alesina et al., 2021, 2023; Asher, Novosad and Rafkin, 2024; van der Weide et al., 2024). Research in these settings has uncovered substantial heterogeneity by religion and gender, as well as deep-rooted correlates such as colonial investments, missions, and railroads. By documenting the positive role of the military in promoting social mobility in Argentina, our paper provides evidence that this globally

prevalent institution may be another factor that historically fostered mobility in contexts where upward mobility is particularly difficult to achieve. Furthermore, our evidence shows that military service enabled individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds to establish close connections with higher-SES individuals later in life, facilitating the very relationships that can cement mobility by providing access to opportunity, in line with previous research on the benefits of residing in high-opportunity areas (Chetty et al., 2020).

Finally, our paper builds on the growing literature that leverages the Argentine conscription lottery to study the effects of military service on a range of outcomes. The foundational study exploiting this natural experiment is Galiani, Rossi and Schargrodsky (2011), who showed that conscription increased the likelihood of developing a criminal record. Subsequent research has examined how it fostered a military mindset (Ertola Navajas et al., 2022) and promoted national affiliation without improving civic attitudes (Ronconi and Ramos-Toro, 2025). Moreover, Cruces, Rossi and Schargrodsky (2023) used the lottery outcomes for those not called to serve to show that incentives for draft-dodging increased the probability of later employment in the public sector. Our study leverages the same natural experiment and adds to this literature by shedding light on another social impact of conscription in Argentina: its role as a driver of socioeconomic mobility, particularly for those from underprivileged backgrounds. Our findings are not at odds with Galiani, Rossi and Schargrodsky (2011)'s seminal study, as they are concentrated among conscripts from low-SES backgrounds. This does not preclude the possibility that conscripts from more advantaged families—who did not gain additional economic opportunity from service—may have been more inclined to engage in criminal activity due to the opportunity cost of serving. Moreover, Galiani, Rossi and Schargrodsky (2011) focus primarily on cohorts who served under military governments, and our results reveal that conscription did not promote socioeconomic mobility in those periods.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the study context, data, and empirical approach. Section 3 reports the main results, Section 4 discusses mechanisms and heterogeneities, and Section 5 concludes.

2 Background, Data, and Methods

This section begins by providing an overview of how conscription worked in Argentina. It then discusses the data that we rely on for our analysis, and it details the empirical approach that we use to examine conscription's effects on intergenerational mobility.

2.1 Conscription in Argentina

Argentine compulsory military service was in place between 1902 and 1994. It was based on a yearly lottery that assigned a 3-digit number to every unique combination of the last 3 digits of the national identification for members of the cohort that was up for service. The lottery assignment happened in April of the year before conscription would take place, and months after (before it was known who would be called to serve) members of the cohort that was eligible for service would be medically examined. After medical exemptions were granted, the army held a publicly-broadcast event in which, based on military needs, a cutoff number was announced. Members of the cohort who had received a lottery number above the cutoff were called to serve, while those who received a number below it were not.

The typical experience of conscripts comprised 12 months of service, with roughly the first two being devoted to basic military training and the remaining 10 to deployment. While deployed, conscripts took care of basic tasks like patrolling, mending local infrastructure, and repairing vehicles and equipment. Crucial for the purposes of this paper, there were aspects of life while serving in the military that may have provided conscripts, particularly those from underprivileged backgrounds, with access to social and economic opportunities otherwise unavailable. Indeed, illiterate conscripts would be taught to read and write during their time of service (Ejército Argentino, 1967). Moreover, those who served had many opportunities to interact with peers from different backgrounds, both during leisure time and in their assigned activities. Serving may therefore have cultivated social skills that subsequently facilitated ties across social divides, particularly friendships between conscripts from low- and high-SES backgrounds.

2.2 Data

We rely on survey data collected in Ronconi and Ramos-Toro (2025). The data, from two survey-rounds conducted in 2022, comprises 3,037 Argentine men belonging to 29 cohorts born between 1944 and 1975. Respondents provided various demographic characteristics, they reported characteristics of their ancestors, and answered questions related to national pride, civic attitudes, as well as attitudes toward people from different backgrounds.

For the purposes of this paper, the data include key aspects that allow an assessment of conscription's effects on intergenerational mobility: respondents' educational attainment, their socioeconomic status, the educational attainment of their parents, information on whether they served in the military, and the last three digits of their national identification. Appendix Table A1 shows the summary statistics of the variables that the paper

examines.[1] This information allows determining whether respondents achieved a higher educational attainment and socioeconomic status than their parents. Importantly, we are able to determine whether respondents were called to serve in the military by matching their national identification numbers with the lottery outcomes for the relevant cohorts. We retrieve these lottery numbers from Galiani, Rossi and Schargrodsky (2011) for cohorts born between 1944 and 1966 and from Ronconi and Ramos-Toro (2025) for cohorts born after 1966.[2]

The protocol followed by Ronconi and Ramos-Toro (2025), registered in the AEA with ids AEARCTR-0008950 and AEARCTR-0009914, was focused on examining whether conscription contributed to national affiliation, civic values, and social integration. Hence, it should be noted that conscription's role as an engine of intergenerational mobility was not a part of the research question originally pursued when collecting the data that we rely on. However, we follow Banerjee et al. (2020), who emphasize that researchers should not, in the interest of scientific inquiry, refrain from examining other results that were not originally considered, and that readers "should treat those results exactly as they would any study on secondary data without a pre-analysis plan" (p.11).[3]

2.3 Empirical Approach

We use the lottery outcome, randomly assigned within cohort, as a source of exogenous variation for serving in the military. In particular, we estimate the following two-stage-least-squares (2SLS) model (Angrist, Imbens and Rubin, 1996).

$$served_i = \alpha highnumber_i + \mu_{c(i)}^{fs} + \delta_{d(i)}^{fs} + \Gamma' X_i + \nu_i \tag{1}$$

$$y_i = \beta served_i + \mu_{c(i)} + \delta_{d(i)} + \Theta' X_i + \epsilon_i \tag{2}$$

With (1) corresponding to the first stage and (2) to the second stage of the 2SLS model. y_i corresponds to the outcome of interest, $served_i$ is an indicator for having served, $highnumber_i$

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[1]The sample tends to over-represent highly educated individuals and those from the City of Buenos Aires, as discussed in Ronconi and Ramos-Toro (2025).

[2]Figure A1 and Table A2 in the Appendix replicate results in Ronconi and Ramos-Toro (2025): The former shows that there is no bunching in the distribution of the last 3-digits of our respondents' national identification, while the latter indicates that the share of respondents called to serve in each cohort coincides with the share of the cohort that was called to serve. These results suggest that there was no untruthful reporting, and that there's no selection into the sample based on treatment status.

[3]To account for the fact that we examine a different hypothesis than the registered ones, Appendix Table A4 presents the main results after adjusting for multiple hypotheses testing, showing that the main findings are not the result of false discovery rate.

corresponds to a dummy that equals 1 for those who received a lottery number above the cutoff number determining being called to serve, $\delta_{d(i)}^{fs}$ and $\delta_{d(i)}$ are vectors of district fixed effects (based on residence at age 16), and $\mu_{c(i)}^{fs}$ and $\mu_{c(i)}$ are vectors of cohort fixed effects.[4] To improve precision, some of our specifications also account for X_i, which corresponds to a vector of individual-level characteristics. These include indicators for the number of grandparents who were immigrants, an indicator for having a father who served, and indicators for the maximum educational attainment of each parent. All of our tables present both the two-stage least squares estimates of serving in the military on the dependent variables of interest, as well as the reduced form estimates of being assigned a high lottery number (i.e., a number that would require the individual to serve). We cluster standard errors at the ID-cohort level to account for the fact that this was the level at which the lottery outcome was assigned (Abadie et al., 2022).

Our main outcomes are measures of respondents' socioeconomic status and upward educational mobility. Specifically, we consider indicators for being in low-SES and for achieving educational levels above that of their parents.[5] To zoom-in on whether the military boosts opportunity for conscripts depending on their socioeconomic background, we examine heterogeneous effects by whether respondents' parents completed high school, and we also restrict the sample to respondents whose parents didn't complete high school (42% of the sample). Finally, we consider information about respondents' networks of close friends. Specifically, we examine an indicator for having a close acquaintance who completed college, and another one for having a close acquaintance who served in the military.

We test the robustness of our design by conducting a balance check using covariates established prior to the lottery. Table 1 presents the regression results of the instrument ($highnumber_i$) on various subsets of covariates, with clustered standard errors and controls for cohort and district fixed effects following our empirical model from above. Importantly, besides running the test on the full sample of respondents (columns 1–4, following Ronconi and Ramos-Toro (2025)), we also run the test on the subsample of individuals whose parents did not complete high school (columns 5–7), as most of the analyses are based on them.

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[4]The cutoff that determined eligibility to serve was set at the national level until 1984. However, starting 1985 (cohort 1966), the cutoff was set at the district level. Results are unchanged if one accounts for cohort-district fixed effects for those born after 1965 (Table A6). We do not choose this as our main specification as several district-cohort cells are singletons, and the resulting number of fixed effects is heavily taxing on the data.

[5]Data from Ronconi and Ramos-Toro (2025) includes a variable directly generated by Netquest, which captures the socioeconomic status of participants. We use that information to construct our indicator for being in low-SES. Appendix B provides more details on how Netquest measures SES and how we build the low-SES indicator.

These predetermined characteristics can't predict the instrument, which provides reassuring evidence that the it was indeed randomly allocated. Notably, the F-statistics for the joint significance test in columns 4 and 7 are 0.70 (p=0.71) and 0.62 (p=0.69), respectively.

Table 1: Balance Table

	Full Sample				HS-Parent=0		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Father served in military	-0.020			-0.020	-0.030		-0.033
	(0.017)			(0.017)	(0.028)		(0.028)
One immigrant grandp.		-0.001		-0.001		0.029	0.029
		(0.025)		(0.025)		(0.043)	(0.043)
Two immigrant grandp's		0.024		0.024		-0.010	-0.011
		(0.023)		(0.023)		(0.038)	(0.038)
Three immigrant grandp's		0.008		0.007		0.007	0.004
		(0.032)		(0.032)		(0.050)	(0.050)
Four immigrant grandp's		-0.012		-0.015		-0.026	-0.030
		(0.024)		(0.024)		(0.039)	(0.039)
Father: Secondary educ.			-0.013	-0.014			
			(0.021)	(0.021)			
Father: Higher educ.			-0.030	-0.031			
			(0.026)	(0.026)			
Mother: Secondary educ.			-0.006	-0.007			
			(0.021)	(0.021)			
Mother: Higher educ.			0.018	0.018			
			(0.028)	(0.028)			
Cohort FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Control mean	0.55	0.55	0.55	0.55	0.59	0.59	0.59
Obs.	3037	3037	3037	3037	1162	1162	1162

Note: Each column regresses the instrument for having served in the military on sets of ex-ante characteristics, controlling for cohort and district fixed effects. The instrument is an indicator for having a high lottery number (assigned based on the national ID's last 3 digits), which implied being required to serve. Columns 1–4 are based on the full sample of respondents and columns 5–7 use only individuals whose parents did not complete high school. The control group is low-number individuals within the corresponding sample. The F-statistic for joint significance equals 0.70 (p=0.71) in column 4 and 0.62 (p=0.69) in column 7. Standard errors are clustered at the ID-cohort level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

3 Results

This section examines the impact of military conscription on intergenerational mobility, focusing on socioeconomic status and educational attainment. We leverage the random assignment of conscription via a lottery to estimate the causal effects of military service. Table 2 begins by showing the first stage of our two-stage least-squares approach for the entire sample as well as for the sample of respondents whose parents did not complete high school, a subsample of particular importance given our interest in whether conscription boosted mobility for those from underprivileged backgrounds. Columns 1–4, Panel B, show that receiving a high lottery number provides a powerful instrument for serving in the military: Receiving such number increased the likelihood of serving by 39 percentage points (p.p) (effective F-statistics of 488 in Column 2—Olea and Pflueger (2013)), while said likelihood increased by 46 p.p. among those whose parents did not complete high school (effective F-statistics of 260 in Column 4). The discrepancy between these point estimates suggests that those from underprivileged backgrounds were less likely to engage in successful draft-dodging behaviors than the average potential conscript.

Columns 5–9 examine whether serving in the military affected the likelihood of an individual being in low-SES later in life. When considering the full sample (Columns 5 and 6), we observe negative coefficients, though the effects are imprecise and modest in magnitude. However, a more nuanced picture emerges when disaggregating the analysis by the socioeconomic background of individuals, as determined by their parents' educational attainment (Column 7). For individuals hailing from disadvantaged backgrounds—specifically, those whose parents did not complete high school—military service strongly reduced the likelihood of remaining in a low-SES category. The estimates indicate a 16 p.p. reduction in the probability of being low-SES for this group, a substantial effect representing a 56% decrease relative to the control group mean of 30%. Conversely, for individuals from more privileged backgrounds (i.e., at least one parent completed high school), military service did not yield a statistically significant impact on their long-term socioeconomic status. A consistent pattern emerges when examining the reduced form estimates: For those from underprivileged backgrounds, receiving a high lottery number decreased the likelihood of being low-SES by 8 p.p., while the point estimate is statistically imprecise and economically smaller for those whose parents completed high school.

Table 2: First Stage and Impact on Low Socioeconomic Status

	First Stage, All		First St., HS Par.=0		All Respondents			HS Par.=0	HS Par.=1
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Panel A: Two-Stage Least Squares									
Served					-0.05	-0.05	-0.16***	-0.17***	0.04
					(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)
Served x HS par.							0.18***		
							(0.06)		
HS parent						-0.11***	-0.18***		
						(0.01)	(0.03)		
Baseline + Int.							0.03		
							(0.04)		
Panel B: Reduced Form									
High number	0.39***	0.39***	0.46***	0.46***	-0.02	-0.02	-0.08***	-0.08***	0.02
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)
High N. x HS par.							0.09***		
							(0.03)		
HS parent		-0.01				-0.11***	-0.16***		
		(0.02)				(0.01)	(0.02)		
Baseline + Int.							0.01		
							(0.02)		
Cohort FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Add. controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Control mean	0.12	0.12	0.11	0.11	0.19	0.19	0.30	0.30	0.14
Obs.	3037	3037	1162	1162	3037	3037	3037	1162	1874

 Note: Columns 1–2 and 3–4 show the first stage coefficients (Panel B) for the entire sample and for the set of respondents whose parents did not complete high school, respectively. Columns 5–9 show 2SLS (Panel A) and reduced form (Panel B) estimates for the effect of serving in the military on the likelihood of being low-SES later in life. Served is an indicator for having served in the military, instrumented with an indicator (High number) for being assigned a lottery number that meant being called to serve (assigned based on the national ID's last 3 digits). HS Parent is an indicator that equals one if a respondent's parent completed high school, 0 otherwise. Additional controls include indicators for having a father who served in the military, for each possible educational level of the father and mother, for each possible number of immigrant grandparents, and a survey round fixed effect. The control group is low-number individuals. Standard errors are clustered at the ID-cohort level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

To further validate these findings, Columns 8–9 present results from separate regressions for individuals from lower and higher SES backgrounds, respectively. The reduced-form and 2SLS estimates from the disaggregated analysis confirm the pattern: a significant reduction in the likelihood of being low-SES for the disadvantaged group, but no significant effect for the more advantaged one. Finally, Table A3 in the Appendix runs the same analysis with

high-SES as the dependent variable, revealing coefficients that are positive but smaller and less precise. Taken together, these results indicate that military service offered a pathway to upward mobility, allowing individuals from disadvantaged households to rise out of the lowest socioeconomic ranks. Crucially, these results speak to the long run effects of serving in the military on social mobility, as the information was recorded in 2022 and the sample was comprised of respondents who faced conscription over 28 years before.

We next turn to the impact of military service on educational attainment, specifically examining the likelihood of individuals achieving a higher level of education than their parents. Table 3 displays these findings. Columns 1–2 focus on the probability of completing high school for the subset of individuals whose parents did not achieve this educational milestone. Serving in the military increased the likelihood of completing high school by 8 p.p. for these individuals — a 9% increase relative to the control group mean—, while the reduced-form estimates show that receiving a high lottery number increased this likelihood by 4 p.p. Columns 3–4 present an analogous analysis for achieving higher education (defined as tertiary or college completion) among individuals whose parents did not attain higher education. Note that the sample for this analysis is larger, as it also includes individuals whose parents completed high school (but nothing more). Conscription is associated with a 5 p.p. increase in the likelihood of obtaining a higher education degree (a 10% rise relative to the control group mean, though the point estimate is imprecisely estimated). Finally, Columns 5–6 examine college completion among individuals whose parents did not complete college. The estimated effects of military service become negative and imprecise: The 2SLS and reduced-form estimates are -3 and -1 p.p., respectively, but these effects are noisily estimated. Collectively, the findings in Table 3 show that conscription fostered upward educational mobility for individuals whose parents had low educational attainment.

As a robustness check, we account for multiple hypothesis testing in Table A4. Specifically, focusing on the sample of respondents whose parents did not complete high school, the table shows False Discovery Rate (FDR) adjusted sharpened q-values for the main results shown in Tables 2 and 3, following Benjamini, Krieger and Yekutieli (2006) and Anderson (2008). Crucially, the results retain their precision, with the main findings remaining significant at the 5% level.

Table 3: Upward Educational Mobility

	High School		Higher Ed.		College	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A: Two-Stage Least Squares						
Served	0.08**	0.08**	0.05	0.05	-0.03	-0.03
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Panel B: Reduced Form						
High number	0.04**	0.04**	0.02	0.02	-0.01	-0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Cohort FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Add. controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Control mean	0.90	0.90	0.50	0.50	0.34	0.34
Obs.	1162	1162	2216	2216	2622	2622

Note: Each column shows 2SLS (Panel A) and reduced form (Panel B) estimates for the effect of serving in the military on the likelihood of completing the educational attainment described in the column heading. In each column, the sample is restricted to respondents whose parents *did not* complete the educational attainment described in the column heading. Served is an indicator for having served in the military, instrumented with an indicator (High number) for being assigned a lottery number that meant being called to serve (assigned based on the national ID's last 3 digits). HS Parent is an indicator that equals one if a respondent's parent completed high school, 0 otherwise. Additional controls include indicators for having a father who served in the military, for each possible number of immigrant grandparents, and a survey round fixed effect. The control group is low-number individuals with no parents that finished high school. Standard errors are clustered at the ID-cohort level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Finally, we examine whether serving in the military contributed to the formation of connections that provide access to opportunity. Table A5 examines the contemporary network of close contacts of respondents. In particular, it examines the impact of military service on (1) an indicator for having a college graduate among their close friends, (2) a measure of network diversity that captures a tendency to being close friends with outgroups, and (3) an indicator for being close friends with a former conscript.[6] The table shows that serving in

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[6]Data from Ronconi and Ramos-Toro (2025) include indicators for having a close acquaintance from different groups, and the measure of network diversity is a summary index (Anderson, 2008) built with these

the military increases the likelihood of being close friends with college graduates for those from underprivileged backgrounds (not for those from more privileged ones). Similarly, individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds experienced the largest gains in network diversity as a result of their military service, while this effect is smaller in magnitude and statistically insignificant for those from more advantaged ones. However, these friendships do not seem to have initiated in the military: The impact of serving in the military on the likelihood of being close friends with former conscripts is economically and statistically small (even more so among conscripts from disadvantaged backgrounds).

These results suggest that the military may have provided conscripts with skills (including social ones) that allowed them to broaden their social circles and form cross-class friendships later in life, furthering their access to opportunities that would have been unavailable otherwise. Importantly, however, the fact that these friendships were not initiated during military service limits the extent to which the baseline patterns are explained by the social connections and ties that conscripts could form while serving in the military.

4 Mechanisms and Contextual Heterogeneity

This section explores potential channels through which military service influenced intergenerational mobility. Our analysis of conscripts' close contacts (see Table A5) limits the scope for cross-class connections in the military as the primary mechanism underlying conscription's effect on intergenerational mobility. Instead, we provide qualitative and quantitative evidence that points to a different channel: the role of the military as a provider of education. We further examine how the impact of conscription on mobility outcomes varied depending on whether service occurred during peacetime or wartime, and under democratic or non-democratic governments (Table 4), thereby shedding additional light on the importance of the military's role as a provider of education in periods of internal stability.

One of the central roles of compulsory military service in Argentina since its inception was to contribute to the formation of conscripts—both morally and in terms of basic literacy—particularly for those who had not acquired such skills before joining the military (Sillitti, 2023). As early as 1915, manuals were explicitly designed to teach recruits how to read, write, and conduct themselves in social settings (de Vedia, 1915). Crucially, this function of the military as an institution that helped close educational gaps for conscripts from disadvantaged backgrounds persisted well into the second half of the twentieth cen-

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indicators.

tury (Archivo Nacional de la Memoria, 2023, p. 22). Our findings are therefore consistent with the view that the military could act as a complementary provider of education in contexts where formal schooling was inadequate or altogether absent—a role that is especially relevant in developing countries where the state's presence and capacity remain limited in certain regions.

The Argentine military's commitment to providing such schooling, however, was not consistent across the century. During military governments and wartime, the institutional priorities shifted decisively away from education and toward combat and counterinsurgency. Conscripts serving under non-democratic regimes were often immersed in an anti-subversive logic that emphasized identifying and confronting the "enemy within," leaving little space for educational objectives (Garaño, 2013, 2018; Archivo Nacional de la Memoria, 2023). Likewise, those who served during wartime describe experiences dominated by survival and combat rather than by instruction (Kon, 1982).

To test whether the military's role as a channel for intergenerational mobility was conditional on institutional stability, Table 4 compares outcomes for conscripts serving in peacetime versus wartime, and under democratic versus military regimes. Four cohorts in our data were directly exposed to armed conflict: two during the Malvinas/Falklands War in 1982 and two during the Operativo Independencia against internal guerrillas in 1975–1976. Column 1 reports the heterogeneous effects on socioeconomic status among individuals from low-SES backgrounds. While peacetime service reduces the probability of remaining in low-SES by 19 percentage points (reduced-form estimate of –8 p.p.), the effect attenuates to an imprecise –6 p.p. (–3 p.p. reduced-form) for those serving in wartime. Column 2 shows a similar pattern for educational attainment: conscripts from disadvantaged families who served in peacetime were 11 p.p. (5 p.p.) more likely to complete high school, but the estimates for wartime service are slightly negative and statistically insignificant.

We further analyze the role of the broader institutional context by comparing democratic and non-democratic regimes. Of the 29 cohorts in our sample, 14 served under military rule. Column 3 shows that service during democratic periods reduces the probability of remaining in low-SES by 23 p.p. (–10 p.p. reduced-form), while this effect is roughly halved for those serving under a dictatorship. Column 4 reveals a parallel result for educational outcomes: service under democratic governments increased the likelihood of high school completion by 15 p.p. (6 p.p. reduced-form). In contrast, estimates for conscripts under military regimes are small, imprecise, and economically negligible (3 and 1 p.p., respectively).

Table 4: Heterogeneity by Institutional Context

	Peacetime v. Wartime		Democracy v. Military Gov.	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Low SES	High School	Low SES	High School
Panel A: Two-Stage Least Squares				
Served	-0.19***	0.11**	-0.23**	0.15***
	(0.07)	(0.05)	(0.10)	(0.06)
Served x wartime	0.14	-0.14		
	(0.16)	(0.09)		
Served x military gov.			0.12	-0.12
			(0.13)	(0.08)
Baseline + Interaction	-0.06	-0.03	-0.11	0.03
	(0.14)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.06)
Panel B: Reduced Form				
High number	-0.08***	0.05**	-0.10**	0.06***
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.02)
High num. x wartime	0.05	-0.06		
	(0.09)	(0.05)		
High num. x military gov.			0.04	-0.05
			(0.06)	(0.04)
Baseline + Interaction	-0.03	-0.02	-0.06	0.01
	(0.08)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.03)
Cohort FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Add. controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Control mean	0.30	0.90	0.30	0.90
Obs.	1162	1162	1162	1162

Note: Each column shows 2SLS (Panel A) and reduced form (Panel B) estimates for the effect of serving in the military on the outcome described in the column heading. The sample is comprised of respondents whose parents did not complete high school. Served is an indicator for having served in the military, instrumented with an indicator (High number) for being assigned a lottery number that meant being called to serve (assigned based on the national ID's last 3 digits). HS Parent is an indicator that equals one if a respondent's parent completed high school, 0 otherwise. Low-SES and High School are indicator variables for being low-SES and for having completed high school, respectively. Additional controls include indicators for having a father who served in the military, for each possible number of immigrant grandparents, and a survey round fixed effect. The control group is low-number individuals with no parents that finished high school. Standard errors are clustered at the ID-cohort level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Taken together, these results indicate that while military service can act as an engine of upward mobility by providing basic educational tools to disadvantaged conscripts, its effectiveness is strongly shaped by institutional context. In Argentina, only in periods of democratic governance and peacetime did the military sustain an environment in which educational aims were prioritized. By contrast, during wartime and under non-democratic rule, the military's emphasis on combat readiness and internal repression undermined its potential to contribute meaningfully to conscripts' schooling and long-term social mobility.

Our heterogeneity analysis by wartime versus peacetime and by democratic versus non-democratic governments further limits the plausibility of cross-class interactions in the military as the central mechanism. Low-SES conscripts had broadly similar opportunities to bond and interact with peers from higher-SES backgrounds across institutional contexts. As shown in Table A7, although individuals whose parents had completed high school were less likely to be conscripted overall, they were not less likely to serve during wartime, and were in fact more likely to be conscripted during military governments. The fact that our results are driven by conscription during peacetime and democratic periods—when the frequency of such cross-class interactions was, if anything, somewhat lower—suggests that these interactions are unlikely to be the primary channel behind our findings.

5   Conclusion

We study the role of compulsory military service as a vehicle for intergenerational mobility in the context of a developing country. Exploiting the Argentine conscription lottery, we show that military service provided a pathway for upward mobility among individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. Beyond its direct impact on education and socioeconomic outcomes, service also increased the likelihood that conscripts from disadvantaged families formed close friendships with college graduates, thereby expanding their access to opportunities.

Our evidence suggests that the military's role as a provider of basic education was a central mechanism behind these effects. Qualitative sources indicate that, for much of the twentieth century, educational goals were an explicit priority of the Argentine armed forces. Yet this role weakened during periods of conflict and non-democratic rule, when the focus shifted toward combat and counterinsurgency. Consistent with this shift, we find that the positive effects of conscription on mobility were concentrated among individuals who served during peacetime and under democratic governments, underscoring the importance of institutional stability for the military's mobility-enhancing potential.

Under the right circumstances, military service in developing countries can expand opportunity for individuals from less advantaged households. Given the widespread persistence of low intergenerational mobility across the developing world, these results highlight the potential social benefits of the military as an institution. Crucially, the mechanisms we uncover suggest that such outcomes depend on institutional conditions that may be absent in very low-capacity states. These insights point to the importance of future research examining the specific policies and organizational features within the military that can help replicate these benefits, even in settings marked by institutional fragility.

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Appendix A: Additional Tables and Figures

Table A1: Summary statistics

	N	Totals			Means by served status		Diff. (w/ cohort FE)	
		Mean	Min	Max	Yes	No	Coef.	p-val
Panel A: Full Sample								
Served	3037	0.379	0	1	1.000	0.000	1.000	0.000
High-number	3037	0.553	0	1	0.858	0.367	0.380	0.000
Age	3037	58.76	47	78	62.07	56.75	-	-
BA metro	3037	0.509	0	1	0.551	0.484	0.024	0.235
High school parent	3037	0.617	0	1	0.587	0.635	-0.026	0.188
College parent	3037	0.137	0	1	0.130	0.141	0.000	0.996
Num. immig. grandp.	3037	1.694	0	4	1.843	1.604	-0.027	0.640
Father served	3037	0.675	0	1	0.670	0.678	0.001	0.975
Panel B: HS-Parent=0								
Served	1163	0.408	0	1	1.000	0.000	1.000	0.000
High-number	1163	0.590	0	1	0.893	0.381	0.405	0.000
Age	1163	59.90	47	78	62.68	57.98	-	-
BA metro	1163	0.491	0	1	0.528	0.465	0.027	0.401
High school parent	1163	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
College parent	1163	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
Num. immig. grandp.	1163	1.838	0	4	1.909	1.789	-0.141	0.144
Father served	1163	0.674	0	1	0.657	0.686	-0.018	0.552

Note: This table presents summary statistics for the regressor of interest (*Served*), the instrumental variable (*High-number*), and characteristics determined before conscription, for the full sample and for the subsample of respondents from low-SES backgrounds (those whose parents did not complete high school). The last two columns test for statistically significant differences between conscripts and non-conscripts at the within-cohort level, accounting for age. Panel A is replicated from Ronconi and Ramos-Toro (2025).

Figure A1: Distribution of last 3 digit combinations of the National ID
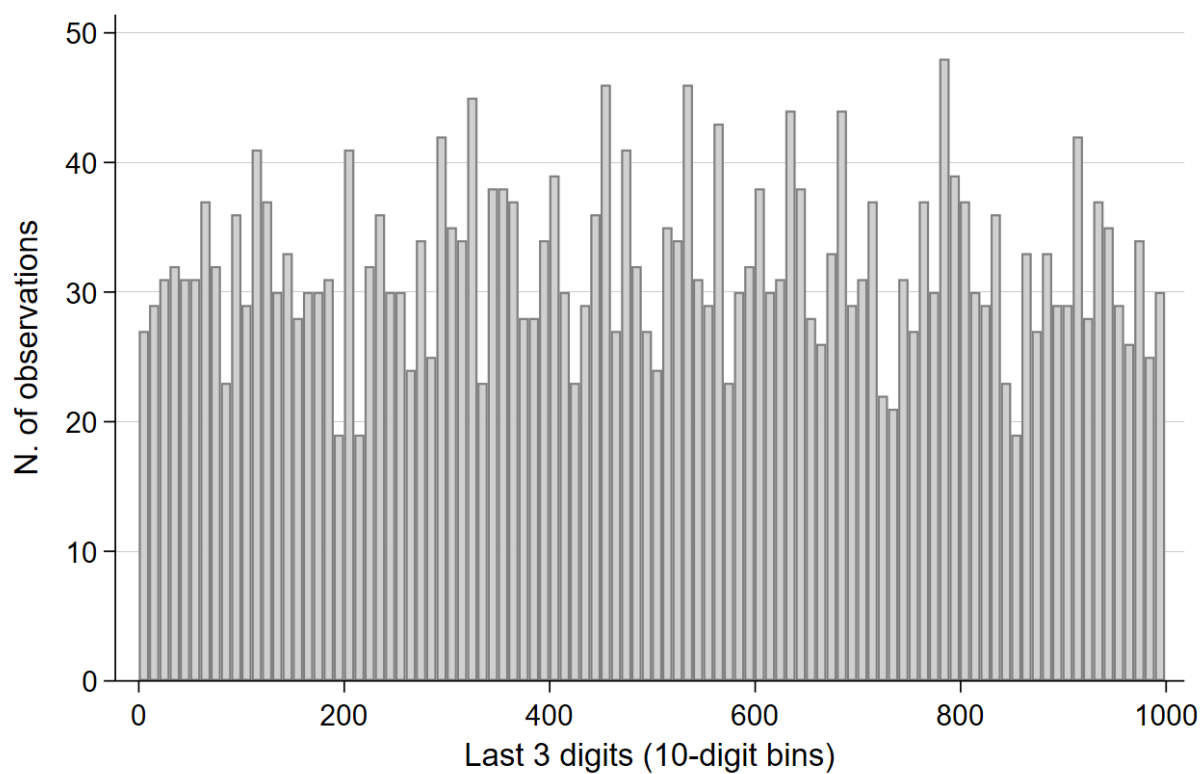
Note: This figure plots the frequency of last 3 digit combinations of national IDs in the sample, grouped in 10-digit bins. Replicated from Ronconi and Ramos-Toro (2025).

Table A2: Selection into the sample by treatment status

Cohort	Pop. Share w/ High Number	Sample Share w/ High Number	Difference	P-Value
1944	0.77	0.94	-0.17**	0.02
1945	0.74	0.72	0.02	0.85
1946	0.79	0.86	-0.07	0.27
1947	0.72	0.65	0.07	0.40
1948	0.71	0.80	-0.09	0.12
1949	0.79	0.73	0.06	0.34
1950	0.76	0.81	-0.05	0.25
1951	0.87	0.88	-0.01	0.79
1952	0.88	0.91	-0.03	0.30
1953	0.86	0.82	0.04	0.31
1954	0.93	0.90	0.03	0.28
1958	0.83	0.82	0.01	0.73
1959	0.68	0.64	0.04	0.39
1960	0.66	0.63	0.03	0.46
1961	0.65	0.64	0.01	0.76
1962	0.68	0.69	-0.01	0.82
1963	0.65	0.65	-0.00	0.96
1964	0.60	0.63	-0.03	0.50
1965	0.61	0.61	-0.00	0.96
1966	0.33	0.38	-0.05	0.30
1967	0.31	0.40	-0.09**	0.03
1968	0.37	0.37	-0.00	0.94
1969	0.41	0.52	-0.11***	0.01
1970	0.47	0.43	0.04	0.33
1971	0.28	0.34	-0.06	0.15
1972	0.11	0.11	-0.00	0.87
1973	0.25	0.22	0.03	0.46
1974	0.28	0.26	0.02	0.66
1975	0.26	0.23	0.03	0.43
Total	0.56	0.55	0.01	0.52

Note: This table examines, for each cohort individually and for the full sample (final row), whether the proportion of individuals with a high number in the sample differs significantly from the corresponding proportion in the population. Replicated from Ronconi and Ramos-Toro (2025). * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A3: High Socioeconomic Status

	Full Sample			HS parent=0	HS parent=1
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Panel A: Two-Stage Least Squares					
Served	-0.01	-0.00	0.04	0.11*	-0.08
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.07)
Served x HS par.			-0.07		
			(0.07)		
HS parent		0.12***	0.15***		
		(0.02)	(0.03)		
Coef. Interacted group			-0.03		
			(0.06)		
Panel B: Reduced Form					
High number	-0.00	-0.00	0.02	0.05*	-0.03
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)
High N. x HS par.			-0.03		
			(0.03)		
HS parent		0.12***	0.14***		
		(0.02)	(0.02)		
Coef. Interacted group			-0.04		
			(0.04)		
Cohort FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Add. controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Control mean	0.26	0.26	0.16	0.16	0.31
Obs.	3037	3037	3037	1162	1874

Note: Each column shows 2SLS (Panel A) and reduced form (Panel B) estimates for the effect of serving in the military on an indicator that equals one if the respondent is classified as high-SES. Each column is restricted to the the sample described in the column heading. Served is an indicator for having served in the military, which we instrumented with an indicator (High number) for being assigned a high lottery number that meant being called to serve (assigned based on the last 3 digits of the national ID). HS Parent is an indicator that equals one if a respondent's parent completed high school, 0 otherwise. Additional controls include indicators for having a father who served in the military, for each possible number of immigrant grandparents, and a survey round fixed effect. The control group is low-number individuals with no parents that finished high school. Standard errors are clustered at the ID-cohort level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A4: FDR-Adjusted Sharpened Q-Values

	(1)	(2)
	Low SES	Upward Mobility, High School
Panel A: Two-Stage Least Squares		
Served	-0.17	0.08
	(0.008)***	(0.037)**
	[0.017]**	[0.019]**
Panel B: Reduced Form		
High number	-0.08	0.04
	(0.007)***	(0.038)**
	[0.015]**	[0.019]**
Cohort FE	Yes	Yes
District FE	Yes	Yes
Add. controls	Yes	Yes
Control mean	0.30	0.90
Obs.	1162	1162

Note: Each column shows 2SLS (Panel A) and reduced form (Panel B) estimates for the effect of serving in the military on the main outcomes considered throughout the paper. Parentheses indicate standard p-values and brackets indicate false discovery rate adjusted sharpened q-values, following Benjamini, Krieger and Yekutieli (2006) and Anderson (2008). Serving is instrumented with an indicator for having a high lottery number (assigned based on the last 3 digits of the national ID), which implies being required to serve. Additional controls include indicators for having a father who served in the military, for each possible number of immigrant grandparents, and a survey round fixed effect. The control group is low-number individuals with no parents that finished high school. Standard errors are clustered at the ID-cohort level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A5: Peers and Network Diversity

	Friend of College Grad.		Network Diversity Index		Friend of Ex-Conscript	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A: Two-Stage Least Squares						
Served	0.07	0.16**	0.33**	0.45***	0.08	0.08
	(0.06)	(0.08)	(0.14)	(0.17)	(0.07)	(0.08)
Served x HS par.		-0.14		-0.29		0.02
		(0.09)		(0.19)		(0.10)
HS parent		0.15***		-0.70***		0.01
		(0.04)		(0.09)		(0.05)
Baseline + Interaction		0.02		0.16		0.10
		(0.07)		(0.14)		(0.08)
Panel B: Reduced Form						
High number	0.03	0.08**	0.13**	0.21***	0.03	0.03
	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.08)	(0.03)	(0.04)
High N. x HS par.		-0.07*		-0.16*		0.00
		(0.04)		(0.09)		(0.05)
HS parent		0.14***		-0.72***		0.01
		(0.03)		(0.07)		(0.04)
Baseline + Interaction		0.01		0.05		0.04
		(0.03)		(0.05)		(0.03)
Cohort FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Add. controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Control mean	0.70	0.61	-0.10	0.36	0.44	0.44
Obs.	1965	1965	1965	1965	1965	1965

Note: Each column shows 2SLS (Panel A) and reduced form (Panel B) estimates for the effect of serving in the military on the outcome described in the column heading. The sample is comprised or respondents whose parents did not complete high school. Served is an indicator for having served in the military, instrumented with an indicator (High number) for being assigned a lottery number that meant being called to serve (assigned based on the national ID's last 3 digits). HS Parent is an indicator that equals one if a respondent's parent completed high school, 0 otherwise. Friend of College Grad is an indicator that equals one if the respondent reports being closed friends with someone who has a college degree, 0 otherwise. Network Diversty Index is an index capturing how many different outgroups are included in the respondent's close social network. Additional controls include indicators for having a father who served in the military, for each possible number of immigrant grandparents, and a survey round fixed effect. The control group is low-number individuals with no parents that finished high school. Standard errors are clustered at the ID-cohort level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A6: First Stage and Main Results, Full Set of Fixed Effects

	First Stage	FS, HS Par.=0	Low SES, HS Par.=0			High School, HS Par.=0		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Panel A: Two-Stage Least Squares								
Served			-0.19***	-0.22***	-0.31***	0.08*	0.11**	0.16**
			(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.11)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.06)
Served x wartime				0.18			-0.16*	
				(0.16)			(0.09)	
Served x military gov.					0.21			-0.14
					(0.13)			(0.09)
Baseline + Int.				-0.04	-0.10		-0.05	0.02
				(0.15)	(0.08)		(0.08)	(0.06)
Panel B: Reduced Form								
High number	0.40***	0.47***	-0.09***	-0.10***	0.04*	0.05**	0.07***	
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	
High num. x wartime				0.07		-0.08		
				(0.09)		(0.05)		
High num. x military gov.							-0.06	
							(0.04)	
Baseline + Int.				-0.03		-0.03	0.01	
				(0.08)		(0.04)	(0.03)	
Cohort-District FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Add. controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Control mean	0.12	0.10	1.00	0.29	0.89	0.89	0.89	
Obs.	2984	1117	1117	1117	1117	1117	1117	

Note: This table presents first stage coefficients and the main results in the paper under a richer set of fixed effects: controlling for cohort fixed effects until cohort 1965 and cohort-district fixed effects from cohort 1966 onward. Columns 1 and 2 (Panel B) show, respectively, the first stage coefficients for the entire sample and for the set of respondents whose parents did not complete high school. Column 3 presents the impact of serving on being low SES among those coming from a disadvantaged background and columns 4–5 explore heterogeneities by serving during wartime or under a military government. Finally, column 6 shows the impact of serving on upward educational mobility in terms of high school completion, and columns 7–8 explore the same heterogeneities as in columns 4–5. Additional controls include indicators for having a father who served in the military, for each possible number of immigrant grandparents, and a survey round fixed effect. The control group is low-number individuals with no parents that finished high school. Standard errors are clustered at the ID-cohort level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A7: Differences in Pool of Conscripts during Peacetime v. Wartime and Democratic v. Military Governments

	(1) Served	(2) Served
HS parent	-0.05***	-0.07***
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Wartime	0.20***	
	(0.04)	
HS Par. x Wartime	0.03	
	(0.05)	
Military Gov.		0.20***
		(0.03)
HS Par. x Military Gov.		0.08**
		(0.04)
Control mean	0.38	0.31
Obs.	3037	3037

Note: Each column shows OLS estimates characterizing conscripts who served during wartime v. peacetime (column 1) and during military v. democratic governments (column 2). The table reveals that (i) individuals from advantaged backgrounds were less likely to serve; (ii) wartime and military governments strongly increased the likelihood of being conscripted; and (iii) the increase affected individuals from advantaged backgrounds differentially more, implying that the likelihood of having peers from more privileged backgrounds did not decrease during wartime and military governments. The control group is individuals from a disadvantaged background during peacetime (column 1) or during democratic governments (column 2). * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Appendix B: Measuring Socioeconomic Status of Participants

This section documents how the socioeconomic status (SES) measure used in this paper was constructed. Netquest, the panel provider, computed the measure during data collection for Ronconi and Ramos-Toro (2025) using proprietary variables that are not publicly released; below we summarize their procedure.

SES is determined via a scoring grid that combines characteristics of the household's main income earner with the household's mix of income contributors. First, a contributor ratio is computed (number of earners relative to household size). Conditional on the main earner's labor status (employee, employer, self-employed, unemployed, or inactive), Netquest applies lookup tables that cross: highest education attained (four levels), occupational level (executive/manager, supervisor, worker), job skill level (professional, technician, specialized, non-specialized), firm size or staff supervised (for employers/executives), weekly hours for the self-employed (> 35 or < 35), and health insurance coverage (insured vs. uninsured). Each cell in the grid yields a score from 1 to 5.

Scores map to five SES categories: 1 = ABC1, 2 = C2, 3 = C3, 4 = D1, and 5 = D2–E. ABC1 corresponds to combinations with higher education, managerial/professional roles, larger firms or staff responsibility, full-time engagement, health coverage, and a favorable contributor ratio. C2–C3 capture intermediate profiles (secondary/tertiary education, mid-level or technical/specialized roles, small/medium firms or stable self-employment, typically with coverage). D1 and D2–E reflect lower education, non-specialized or under-employment, unemployment/inactivity without coverage, and unfavorable contributor ratios, with D2–E the most vulnerable segment.

We observe only the respondent's SES category. Throughout the paper, we use an indicator for low SES equal to 1 for D1 or D2–E and 0 otherwise.