



## Student Attitudes Toward the Introduction of Mandatory Military Service in Croatian Armed Forces

Marija Gombar, mag.cin.<sup>1\*</sup>, Prof.dr.sc. Siniša Opić<sup>2</sup>, Maja Križanec Cvitković, mag.catech.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Croatia, PhD student at The University North (Koprivnica),  
[gombar.ma@gmail.com](mailto:gombar.ma@gmail.com), [magombar@unin.hr](mailto:magombar@unin.hr)

<sup>2</sup>Full professor at the University of Zagreb, Faculty of Teacher Education,  
[sinisa.opic@ufzg.hr](mailto:sinisa.opic@ufzg.hr)

<sup>3</sup>Primary school, Sračinec, 1st Private Gymnasium Varaždin, PhD student at The University North (Koprivnica),  
[mkcvitkovic@unin.hr](mailto:mkcvitkovic@unin.hr)

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\***Corresponding author:** Marija Gombar, mag.cin, Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Croatia, PhD student at The University North (Koprivnica), [gombar.ma@gmail.com](mailto:gombar.ma@gmail.com), [magombar@unin.hr](mailto:magombar@unin.hr)

### Abstract

Mandatory military service in the Republic of Croatia has been suspended since 2007, aiming to create a smaller, more professional military while alleviating financial burdens. Following NATO accession, Croatia benefits from strategic military protection against potential threats. Traditionally, military service was compulsory for men only, but some countries include women. This requirement often sparks controversy, with opponents arguing it infringes on individual freedoms, while supporters maintain it is vital for national security and youth development. This research explored high school students' attitudes in Croatia regarding the potential reintroduction of mandatory military service. Surveying 190 students from three northwestern counties, shows that respondents generally lack a definitive opinion on the trend of mandatory service in Europe or its reinstatement in Croatia. However, they believe women over 18 should not be obligated to serve. Additionally, there is no significant difference in attitudes based on whether respondents have family in the military or are related to Croatian War Veterans. Ultimately, both male and female students share similar views on compulsory military service, and they express little fear of global conflicts, often preferring to remain in their comfort zones regardless of personal beliefs.

**Keywords:** armed forces; attitudes; students; mandatory military service; youth development.

### Introduction

Finer, in his book "State and Nation-Building in Europe: The Role of the Military," offers the following definition of military conscription: "Conscript originally referred to the typical recording of acceptable names for voting purposes, with only those selected by chance required to serve" (Finer, 1975, p. 94). Historically, it has been established that only men are obligated to fulfill military service, while women are exempt from this duty. Military service can be categorized into two main types: compulsory recruitment, which encompasses both military and civil service, and voluntary recruitment for those entering military service under contract. Furthermore, some nations rely solely on volunteer and professional armies.

Over the past decade, several NATO member countries have either reintroduced or contemplated introducing compulsory military service. This shift has been further complicated by Russia's actions in Ukraine, beginning in 2014, and the subsequent invasion in 2022. Although Sweden was not

a NATO member until 2023, it has a vital role in addressing security concerns across the European continent. 2017 Sweden reinstated mandatory military service, having previously abolished it in 2010. This decision was motivated by the increasingly unstable security landscape in the Baltic Sea and the need to strengthen the nation's military capabilities. As a full NATO member, Sweden's military security situation significantly impacts the alliance's overall military structure.

In response to threats from Russia, Lithuania reintroduced conscription in 2015, initially as a temporary measure but keeping it due to ongoing instability. While not abolishing conscription, Norway became the first European country to implement compulsory military service for women in 2016, aiming to strengthen its military amid rising tensions. Estonia also enforces mandatory military service and has enhanced its defense capabilities since 2014 due to pressures from its proximity to Russia. Conversely, Germany has not reintroduced conscription, which was abolished in 2011, although discussions about its potential revival are ongoing. Russian threats and the necessity for a stronger military presence within NATO largely drive the growing pressure to reinstate conscription. Countries along NATO's eastern borders are particularly focused on renewing conscription in response to the perceived security risks posed by Russia. While other NATO members, including Germany and France, are engaging in public debates on this issue, they have yet to arrive at definitive conclusions. In democratically developed countries throughout Europe and beyond, the phenomenon of refusing military service based on personal convictions is becoming increasingly prevalent. This brings us to the concept of "conscientious objection," which pertains to individuals who oppose bearing arms or participating in any form of military training and service. Such objections may stem from various religious, philosophical, or political beliefs. Article 18 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights asserts: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes the freedom to change one's religion or belief and the freedom, either alone or in community with others, in public or private, to manifest one's religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance."

It was not until the twentieth century that the importance of human rights was truly recognized. As a result, various armed forces worldwide have adopted the principle of conscientious objection. This principle is most widespread in Europe, where human rights were egregiously violated during the two World Wars. This historical backdrop is precisely why the "European Convention on Human Rights" was established to safeguard all citizens' rights and freedoms.

In certain states, there was a widespread belief that many men sought to evade military service by falsely claiming conscientious objector status. Vinen notes that the "National Service" in the United Kingdom required numerous young men to submit essays outlining their personal convictions about the appeal of conscience for presentation to the court tasked with adjudicating their cases (Vinen, 2015). Consequently, a primary

factor contributing to non-compliance with military service for an extended period was a religious objection to bearing arms. However, this dynamic shifted significantly in the latter half of the twentieth century. Political motivations have largely supplanted the spiritual reasons that once dominated. Those who choose to appeal based on their conscience now have various motivations for their refusal to serve.

Initially, the motivations for exempting oneself from military service were predominantly grounded in Christian principles. However, from 1967 onward in West Germany, most individuals who invoked their conscience did so for political reasons rather than religious convictions (Frevort, 2004). In the Federal Republic of Germany, the issue of conscientious objection remained a contentious and unresolved matter for many years, posing various political dilemmas for the public discourse. Individuals opting for conscientious objection in Germany were mandated to undertake civil service, which typically entailed contributing to state functions. This program facilitated civic engagement, allowing numerous citizens to fulfill roles within the state's social assistance framework (Mjoset and Holde, 2002). This model addressed the needs of state welfare initiatives but also relied on substantial contributions from the youth demographic.

This research focuses on high school students as the target group, as they represent the generation that would be directly affected by the potential reintroduction of mandatory military service. Focusing on students aged 16 to 18, this study aims to capture a period when young people become more aware of political and social issues, including security and defense matters. This age group is also going through a key stage of forming personal identities and values, meaning their views on military issues are strongly influenced by their educational, family, and social environments. Furthermore, Croatia's unique history of the Homeland War has profoundly impacted national identity and perceptions of the military, making it valuable to examine how these values are transmitted to younger generations and how they may affect their attitudes toward military service. Similarly, the Republic of Croatia instituted the "Civil Service Act," which delineates the rights and responsibilities of individuals invoking their conscience. This legislation explicitly stipulates that civil service is to be performed by those who, owing to their religious or moral convictions, are unwilling to participate in military obligations.

## **Research Methodology**

This research investigates the attitudes of 190 high school students in the Republic of Croatia concerning the potential reintroduction of military service in the Armed Forces. This issue has gained significance amid the recent public discourse on revitalizing compulsory military service, which was abolished in 2008. This study aims to provide insights into the perspectives of young people—who may become future recruits—and to analyze various factors that could influence their opinions on this topic.

For the purposes of this research, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

H1: The high school students from the sample have a positive attitude towards the introduction of military service in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Croatia, which means that they support this initiative.

H2: There is a statistically significant difference in the attitudes of high school students about the introduction of military service, considering whether the respondent has a family member who is a member of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Croatia or a Croatian veteran.

H3: There is a statistically significant difference in attitudes between male and female students on the issue of introducing military service into the Armed Forces of the Republic of Croatia.

These hypotheses will be tested using quantitative methodology and a survey questionnaire, with an emphasis on examining various factors that could shape the attitudes of high school students, including family connection with the Armed Forces, gender of respondents, and other sociodemographic variables.

The study sample consisted of 190 students from three counties in North-Western Croatia: Varaždin County, Međimurje County, and Koprivnica—Križevačka County. To gather data, a questionnaire was developed to assess the respondents' views on introducing military service in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Croatia. The surveys were distributed online through class groups created in Google Forms.

*For this research, we focused on three dependent variables:*

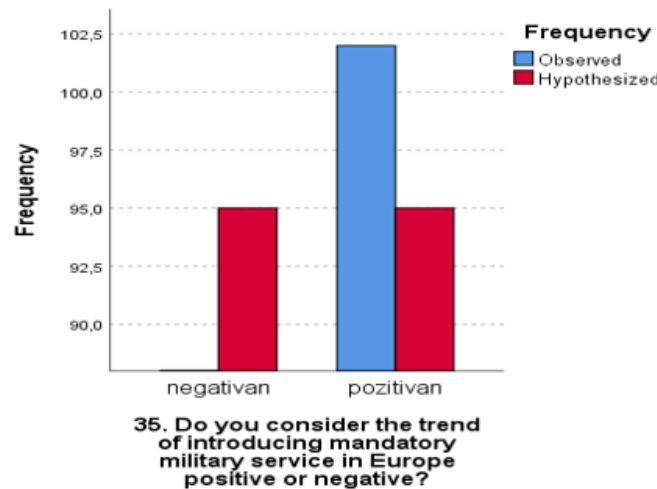
1. Do you consider the trend of introducing mandatory military service in Europe?
2. Do you think that compulsory military service should be introduced in the Republic of Croatia?
3. Do you believe that young women over the age of 18 should also serve in compulsory military service?

These variables are categorical and dichotomous. Additionally, we used three independent variables:

1. Sex
2. Do you have a Croatian veteran in your family?
3. Do you have a member of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Croatia in your family?

These variables are also categorical and dichotomous. A The chi-square test (Monte Carlo) was used to test H1. The results employed presented the hypothesis (in) and Table 1.

<b>Table 01- One-Sample Chi-Square Test Summary</b>	
Total N	190
Test Statistic	1,032 <sup>a</sup>
Degree Of Freedom	1
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test)	,310
a. There are 0 cells (0%) with expected values less than 5. The minimum expected value is 95.	



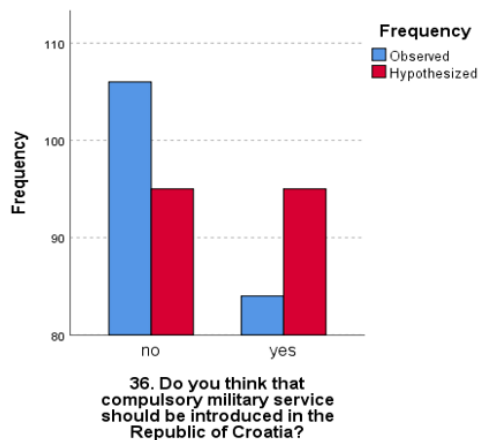
**Figure 01:** Do you view the trend of introducing mandatory military service in Europe as positive or negative?

As indicated in Table 1, there is no statistically significant difference in responses to the question regarding the trend of

introducing mandatory military service in Europe. This suggests a lack of a clearly defined positive or negative attitude

toward this issue. Furthermore, the respondents' views on introducing mandatory military service in the Republic of Croatia were also assessed, as shown in Table 2.

<b>Table 2 - One-Sample Chi-Square Test Summary</b>	
Total N	190
Test Statistic	2,547 <sup>a</sup>
Degree Of Freedom	1
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test)	,110
a. There are 0 cells (0%) with expected values less than 5. The minimum expected value is 95.	



**Figure 02:** – Should compulsory military service be introduced in the Republic of Croatia?

The findings from the Chi-square test, as displayed in Table 2, reveal an absence of a clear positive or negative attitude toward the proposed introduction of mandatory military service in the Republic of Croatia. Furthermore, the analysis

examined the differences in respondents' answers to the question, "Should young girls over the age of 18 also be required to serve compulsory military service?" The results of this analysis are presented in Table 3.

<b>Table 3- One-Sample Chi-Square Test Summary</b>	
Total N	190
Test Statistic	38,926 <sup>a</sup>
Degree Of Freedom	1
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test)	,000
a. There are 0 cells (0%) with expected values less than 5. The minimum expected value is 95.	

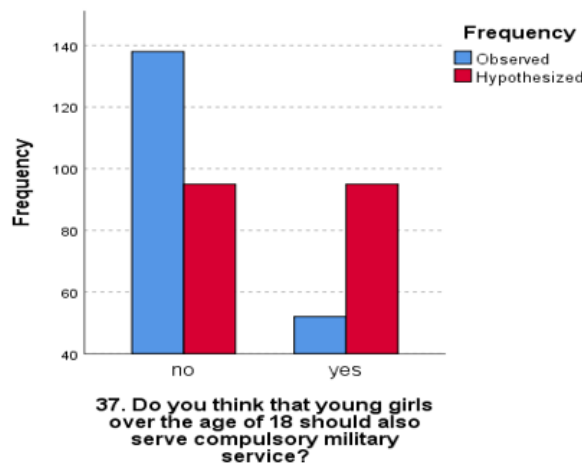


Figure 3 - Should young women over the age of 18 be required to serve in the military?

Table 3 indicates that the Chi-square test is statistically significant, highlighting a notable difference in responses to the question: "Do you believe that young women over the age of 18 should also be subject to compulsory military service?" The analysis of the observed and expected frequencies suggests that most respondents do not support mandatory military service for women over 18. In conclusion, as illustrated in Tables 1, 2, and 3, high school students do not hold a clear stance on the trend of introducing mandatory military service in Europe or on whether it should be adopted in the Republic of Croatia. However, they generally agree that girls over the age of 18 should not be obligated to serve in mandatory military service.

The H2 hypothesis proposes that there is a statistically significant difference in attitudes toward the introduction of military service in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Croatia, based on whether respondents have a family member serving in the Armed Forces or a Croatian veteran. The initial aspect of this hypothesis investigates the variable: "Do you have a Croatian veteran in your family?" and its relationship with the question, "Do you believe that compulsory military service should be introduced in the Republic of Croatia?" Tables 4 and 5 illustrate the Chi-square test results (using the Monte Carlo method), which contain the contingency table formatted as 2x2.

Table 4 - Do you have a Croatian veteran in your family? \* 36. Do you think that compulsory military service should be introduced in the Republic of Croatia? Crosstabulation

			36. Do you think that compulsory military service should be introduced in the Republic of Croatia?		Total
			no	yes	
7. Do you have a Croatian veteran in your family?	no	Count	48	43	91
		Expected Count	50,8	40,2	91,0
		% within 7. Do you have a Croatian veteran in your family?	52,7%	47,3%	100,0%
		% within 36. Do you think that compulsory military service should be introduced in the Republic of Croatia?	45,3%	51,2%	47,9%
		Residual	-2,8	2,8	
	Standardized Residual	-,4	,4		
	yes	Count	58	41	99
		Expected Count	55,2	43,8	99,0
		% within 7. Do you have a Croatian veteran in your family?	58,6%	41,4%	100,0%
		% within 36. Do you think that compulsory military service should be introduced in the Republic of Croatia?	54,7%	48,8%	52,1%
Residual		2,8	-2,8		
Standardized Residual	,4	-,4			
Total	Count	106	84	190	

Expected Count	106,0	84,0	190,0
% within 7. Do you have a Croatian veteran in your family?	55,8%	44,2%	100,0%
% within 36. Do you think that compulsory military service should be introduced in the Republic of Croatia?	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Table 5 - Chi-Square Tests <sup>c</sup>						
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	,655 <sup>a</sup>	1	,418	,466	,254	
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	,440	1	,507			
Likelihood Ratio	,655	1	,418	,466	,254	
Fisher's Exact Test				,466	,254	
Linear-by-Linear Association	,652 <sup>d</sup>	1	,419	,466	,254	,084
N of Valid Cases	190					

a. 0 cells (0,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 40,23.

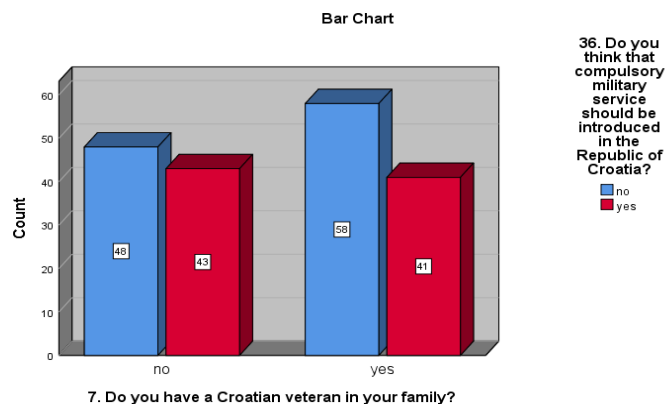
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

c. For 2x2 crosstabulation, exact results are provided instead of Monte Carlo results.

d. The standardized statistic is -,807.

Table 5 indicates that responses to the question, "Do you think that compulsory military service should be introduced in the Republic of Croatia?" do not vary based on whether the

respondent has a veteran in their family. Figure 4 provides a graphical representation of the response frequencies (2x2).



**Figure 4** - Bar chart: It's time to consider whether compulsory military service should be introduced in Croatia. Additionally, do you have a Croatian veteran in your family?

Furthermore, the responses to the question, "Do you believe that compulsory military service should be introduced in the Republic of Croatia?" were examined in relation to

whether the respondent has a family member serving in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Croatia. The findings of the Chi-Square Tests are detailed in Tables 6 and 7.

**Table 6** - Does your family include a member of the Croatian Armed Forces? Should compulsory military service be introduced in Croatia?

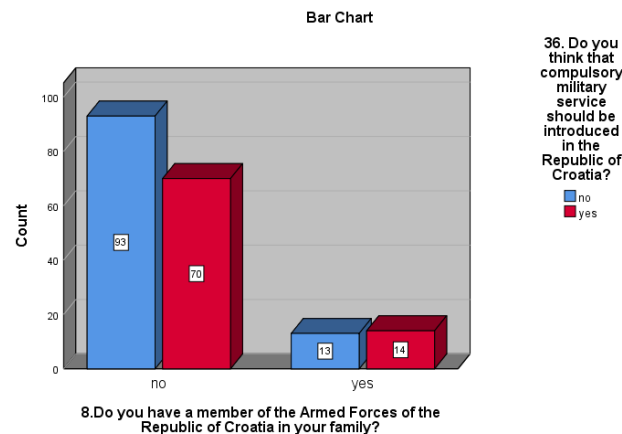
			36. Do you think that compulsory military service should be introduced in the Republic of Croatia?		Total
			no	yes	
8. Do you have a member of the Armed Forces of the	no	Count	93	70	163
		Expected Count	90,9	72,1	163,0
		% within 8. Do you have a member of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Croatia in your family?	57,1%	42,9%	100,0%

Republic of Croatia in your family?		% within 36. Do you think that compulsory military service should be introduced in the Republic of Croatia?	87,7%	83,3%	85,8%
	yes	Count	13	14	27
		Expected Count	15,1	11,9	27,0
		% within 8.Do you have a member of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Croatia in your family?	48,1%	51,9%	100,0%
		% within 36. Do you think that compulsory military service should be introduced in the Republic of Croatia?	12,3%	16,7%	14,2%
Total	Count	106	84	190	
	Expected Count	106,0	84,0	190,0	
	% within 8.Do you have a member of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Croatia in your family?	55,8%	44,2%	100,0%	
	% within 36. Do you think that compulsory military service should be introduced in the Republic of Croatia?	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	

Table 7 - Chi-Square Tests <sup>c</sup>						
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	,745 <sup>a</sup>	1	,388	,410	,256	
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	,428	1	,513			
Likelihood Ratio	,740	1	,390	,410	,256	
Fisher's Exact Test				,410	,256	
Linear-by-Linear Association	,741 <sup>d</sup>	1	,389	,410	,256	,114
N of Valid Cases	190					
a. 0 cells (0,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 11,94.						
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table						
c. For 2x2 cross-tabulation, exact results are provided instead of Monte Carlo results.						
d. The standardized statistic is ,861.						

As indicated in Table 7, there is no discernible difference in responses to the question, "Do you believe that compulsory military service should be implemented in the Republic of Croatia?" This holds true for both respondents with and without

a family member in the armed forces of the Republic of Croatia. Figure 5 provides a graphical representation of the response frequencies in a 2x2 format.



**Figure 5.** Bar Chart: It is essential to consider whether compulsory military service should be introduced in Croatia. Additionally, assess whether a family member is serving in the Croatian Armed Forces.

The results from the Chi-square test (Tables 5 and 7) indicate that the H2 hypothesis is rejected regarding the differences in attitudes toward introducing military service in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Croatia. This conclusion considers whether the respondent has a family member serving in the Armed Forces or is related to a Croatian veteran.

Additionally, the H3 hypothesis suggests that there is a statistically significant difference in attitudes toward the introduction of military service between male and female students. This hypothesis was assessed using the Chi-square test, as detailed in Table 9.

**Table 8: Sex \* Do you think that compulsory military service should be introduced in the Republic of Croatia? Crosstabulation**

			36. Do you think that compulsory military service should be introduced in the Republic of Croatia?		Total
			no	yes	
2. sex	male	Count	42	28	70
		Expected Count	39,1	30,9	70,0
		% within 2. sex	60,0%	40,0%	100,0%
		% within 36. Do you think that compulsory military service should be introduced in the Republic of Croatia?	39,6%	33,3%	36,8%
		Residual	2,9	-2,9	
		Standardized Residual	,5	-,5	
	female	Count	64	56	120
		Expected Count	66,9	53,1	120,0
		% within 2. sex	53,3%	46,7%	100,0%
		% within 36. Do you think that compulsory military service should be introduced in the Republic of Croatia?	60,4%	66,7%	63,2%
		Residual	-2,9	2,9	
		Standardized Residual	-,4	,4	
Total	Count	106	84	190	
	Expected Count	106,0	84,0	190,0	
	% within 2. sex	55,8%	44,2%	100,0%	
	% within 36. Do you think that compulsory military service should be introduced in the Republic of Croatia?	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	

**Table 9. - Chi-Square Tests<sup>c</sup>**

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	,797 <sup>a</sup>	1	,372	,449	,230	
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	,549	1	,459			
Likelihood Ratio	,800	1	,371	,449	,230	
Fisher's Exact Test				,449	,230	
Linear-by-Linear Association	,792 <sup>d</sup>	1	,373	,449	,230	,081
N of Valid Cases	190					

a. 0 cells (0,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 30,95.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

c. For 2x2 crosstabulation, exact results are provided instead of Monte Carlo results.

d. The standardized statistic is 890.

Table 9 demonstrates no statistically significant difference between male and female students in their responses to the question, "Do you think that compulsory military service should be introduced in the Republic of Croatia?" This outcome leads to the rejection of Hypothesis 3. Additionally, Figure 6 visually represents the response frequency values (2x2).



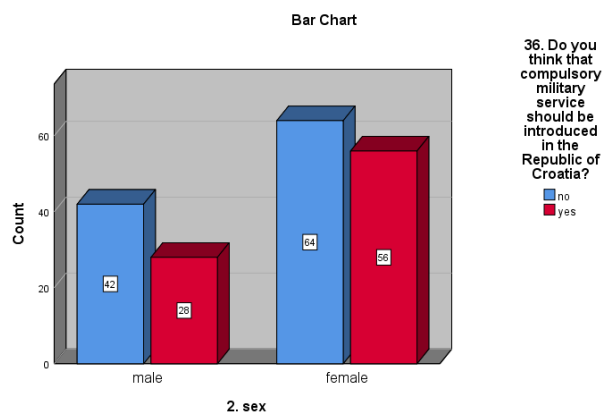


Figure 6 - Bar chart (Sex \* Do you think that compulsory military service should be introduced in the Republic of Croatia?)

The findings reveal that high school students in the sample have varied opinions on the introduction of mandatory military service in Europe, specifically in the Republic of Croatia. However, there is a consensus that females over the age of 18 should not be required to participate in such a program. Furthermore, opinions on establishing military service within the Armed Forces of the Republic of Croatia show no significant differences based on whether the respondents have a family member currently serving in the military or are related to a Croatian veteran. In conclusion, both male and female students generally share similar views on the necessity of implementing mandatory military service in the Republic of Croatia.

#### Does a family military background affect views on conscription?

The influence of a family's military background on attitudes toward conscription can vary significantly. Research suggests that this factor can directly and indirectly affect individuals' views regarding mandatory military service. Growing up in military families often fosters familiarity with the realities of service, including the discipline, challenges, and sacrifices involved. Family members who have served may instill a sense of duty and patriotism, emphasizing the importance of national defense and civic responsibility. As a result, individuals from these backgrounds may be more inclined to support conscription, appreciating the military's role in safeguarding the nation. Conversely, having close relatives in the military can lead to a more nuanced understanding of the demands and hardships associated with service. This perspective might cause individuals to oppose conscription if they believe it burdens young people or see the military as better suited for professional soldiers.

For families with a long tradition of military service, the military is often regarded as a professional career rather than an obligation fulfilled through conscription. These individuals may advocate for a professional army instead of a conscription-based one. The complexities of modern warfare necessitate highly trained professionals committed to long-term service, as

short-term conscription may not provide sufficient training to meet the demands of today's military operations. Furthermore, having a veteran in the family can shape individuals' perspectives on conscription in various ways. Veterans who had positive experiences in the military may support conscription, believing it cultivates essential values such as discipline, teamwork, and resilience. Veterans who have faced trauma or witnessed the challenges of military service may hold a critical view of conscription. They often feel that it compels young individuals into dangerous or traumatic circumstances against their will. Consequently, many may advocate for voluntary service, where individuals choose to enlist based on personal motivation. In countries like Croatia, where the Homeland War had a lasting impact on society, having a family member who is a veteran or who actively served during that conflict can shape perceptions of military service. Patriotic Sentiment: In some cases, families with veterans of the Homeland War may possess a heightened sense of patriotic duty, perceiving conscription as vital for maintaining a strong defense force. War Fatigue and Trauma: Alternatively, families who have personally experienced the consequences of war may be more cautious in supporting conscription. They might argue for a focus on peace-building or express concern that military service could unnecessarily endanger their loved ones.

Military families often view national security as a shared responsibility, which can lead them to support conscription as a way to ensure that the population is adequately trained and ready to defend the country. Conversely, they may also recognize that NATO membership and the growing emphasis on professional militaries in modern warfare indicate that conscription may no longer be the most effective method for securing national defense. Notably, the data reveals no significant differences in opinions on the establishment of conscription in Croatia's Armed Forces between individuals with a military family background and those without. This suggests that, at least within this sample group, having a family military background does not necessarily result in markedly differing views on conscription.

This scenario may indicate a broader societal consensus or neutrality on the issue, where students' perspectives are shaped more by contemporary trends, educational influences, or geopolitical awareness, rather than direct family input. In nations where the military plays a prominent cultural role, individuals from military families might hold more traditional views on service, perceiving it as an integral aspect of citizenship. This is particularly evident in countries like Israel and South Korea, where conscription is mandatory and seen as a civic duty. Conversely, in countries where the military has become increasingly professionalized and is less integrated into daily civilian life, those with military backgrounds may lean towards advocating for professional military solutions, viewing the armed forces as a specialized institution that requires dedicated, voluntary personnel. Socioeconomic status plays a significant role in shaping a family's perspective on conscription, particularly when viewed alongside their military background. Individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, especially those with family members in the military, often perceive conscription as a valuable opportunity for career advancement and the acquisition of essential skills, in addition to benefits like education subsidies and housing assistance. In contrast, those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds may oppose conscription, favoring pathways that allow their family members to pursue higher education or professional careers without the disruptions associated with military service.

The impact of a family's military background on attitudes toward conscription is quite complex. While some individuals from military families may support conscription due to their understanding of national security needs and a strong sense of duty, others may adopt a more cautious stance, favoring professionalization and voluntary service over mandatory conscription. The consistency in the data you provided indicates that, for Croatian high school students, family military connections may not be the predominant factor influencing their views on conscription. Instead, broader societal trends, the geopolitical context, and personal priorities—such as education and career aspirations—are likely more significant in shaping their opinions.

### **Arguments**

Military service, as we know it today, originated in Europe during the nineteenth century as a strategy for national defense against foreign invasions. At that time, and even now, few European nations could afford to sustain a professional army. The capacity to maintain such a force often hinges on a country's geographical advantages. Only the United Kingdom, with its formidable navy, possessed the optimal location. In contrast, other European nations, facing less favorable geography, shifted their focus to assembling large civilian

armies. Hazing is a serious concern within many military organizations. It is defined as the act of playing pranks on new recruits or members or imposing unpleasant tasks, often as a condition for joining a fraternity, sorority, or military group.<sup>1</sup>

According to Golomboš (2022), although hazing is often viewed as a means to initiate new soldiers, it actually has the contrary effect, making military service less appealing. In the Soviet Union and contemporary Russia, the term "Dedovshchina," which translates to "rule of grandfathers," describes a system in which newer recruits are forcibly suppressed, exploited, and systematically mistreated by more experienced soldiers (Eichler, 2022: p. 148). Furthermore, Lowry observes that some officers believe that Dedovshchina is beneficial for soldiers, suggesting that it prepares them for the harsh realities of military life (Lowry, 2008).

### **Conscription in a role to improve national security readiness**

The debate on whether military professionalization can fully replace conscription revolves around multiple dimensions, including military effectiveness, national security, and societal impacts. Both systems offer distinct advantages and challenges, and adopting one over the other depends on a country's security needs, geopolitical environment, and resources. Some key points explore whether professionalization can fully replace conscription: Modern warfare increasingly relies on advanced technology, intelligence gathering, and specialized military tactics (e.g., cyber warfare, and drone operations). A professional army is better equipped to develop and maintain these specialized skills because soldiers receive ongoing, intensive training. According to King (2011), professional soldiers demonstrate greater adaptability and are more effective in responding to complex and unpredictable situations than conscripts, who receive only basic training for a limited time. Professional soldiers tend to exhibit higher morale because they choose military service as a career. This sense of purpose and long-term commitment is essential for maintaining operational efficiency and fostering unit cohesion (Burk, 2014). A volunteer military force fosters a strong culture of commitment, encouraging soldiers to pursue ongoing training and career advancement opportunities, which contributes to a more cohesive military structure. Although professional armies require substantial investments in training, salaries, and benefits, they often prove to be more cost-effective over time. According to Galiani and Schargrodsky (2010), the opportunity costs associated with conscription—such as the economic impact of citizens foregoing education or career opportunities—are higher than those of maintaining a smaller, professional army. The continuous turnover of conscripts necessitates repeated training and investment, which can lead to

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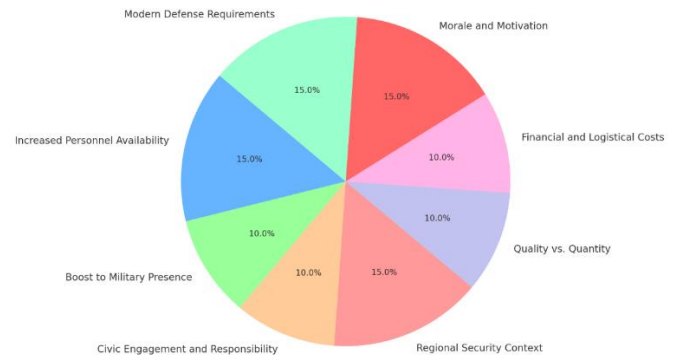
<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/hazing?q=hazing>, accessed: 11.09.2024.

wasted resources if these individuals do not continue their service beyond the mandatory period.

Professional armed forces are characterized by high mobility and the ability to deploy swiftly for both domestic and international missions. They are particularly well-equipped for peacekeeping operations, humanitarian initiatives, and rapid responses to unforeseen threats. The professionalization of the military promotes career development and specialization in critical areas such as intelligence, logistics, and technology, all of which are vital in modern warfare (Boot, 2013). For NATO member states like Croatia, a professional military better meets the demands of contemporary alliances. NATO strongly emphasizes interoperability, requiring member forces to operate together with a high degree of coordination and technical proficiency. As a result, professional soldiers are typically more prepared for international missions than conscripts, who may possess limited experience and undergo shorter training periods. Professional military forces are often smaller, which can restrict the availability of personnel during national crises or large-scale conflicts. On the other hand, conscription creates a broader pool of reserves that can be rapidly mobilized when needed. In countries like Finland and Switzerland, where conscription is enforced, the substantial reserve forces generated by mandatory service act as a deterrent and provide flexibility in addressing immediate threats (Dandeker and Gow, 1997). Conscription also offers the advantage of enhancing civic engagement and fostering a sense of national responsibility among a wider segment of society. In certain nations, military service is regarded as a rite of passage that connects citizens to their country's defense and unites them in shared responsibility (Burk, 2014). Although a professional military can be effective, it may divide the military and civilian society, with fewer individuals directly involved in national defense. This separation could potentially undermine societal resilience and diminish overall engagement with issues related to national security. In situations of total war or large-scale conventional conflicts, professional armies may find it difficult to meet the demands of extended engagements due to limited troop numbers. Countries such as Israel and South Korea implement conscription because they believe that relying solely on professional forces would be inadequate in such circumstances. In the event of a national emergency, conscription ensures that a substantial portion of the population is trained and ready to defend the nation, a strategy that has proven effective in previous conflicts (Boot, 2013). Some countries face immediate threats from neighboring states or non-state actors. In such cases, conscription ensures that the country can sustain a constant state of readiness. This is particularly relevant for countries in unstable regions where professionalization alone may not provide enough deterrence. While professionalization offers clear advantages in terms of military effectiveness, specialization, and international interoperability, it may not fully replace the need for conscription in certain contexts. Conscription provides a broader base of reserves, can act as a deterrent in regions facing significant threats, and fosters a sense of national unity. For

countries like Croatia, the decision depends on national security priorities, the geopolitical landscape, and resource availability.

For countries where immediate threats are low and where modern, technologically advanced militaries are needed, professionalization may indeed be sufficient. However, for those in unstable regions or facing constant threats, a combination of professional soldiers and conscription-based reserves may provide the optimal balance for national security.



**Figure 7** Arguments for and Against Conscription and Their Impact on National Security Readiness

The pie chart illustrates arguments for and against conscription and its perceived impact on **national security readiness**. The chart is divided into several key areas of discussion, each representing a major aspect of the debate surrounding conscription. Also, the chart provides a balanced overview of the arguments for and against conscription and its impact on national security readiness. While conscription offers advantages such as increased manpower, broader training, and civic engagement, it also poses challenges related to cost, motivation, and the need for specialized skills in modern military operations. The debate over the effectiveness of conscription is shaped by a country's specific geopolitical context, available resources, and modern military needs. This segment reflects the argument that conscription can rapidly expand the pool of trained military personnel. As Boot (2013) and King (2011) discuss, nations with conscription are often able to mobilize a significant number of trained citizens in times of crisis. Conscription enables the formation of reserves that can support professional soldiers, enhancing a country's ability to respond to sudden threats or conflicts.

This aspect of conscription highlights the ability to maintain adequate troop levels in smaller nations or countries with limited professional armies. Conscription can act as a deterrent, signaling to potential adversaries that a country has both active and reserve forces ready for defense. The psychological impact of having a strong military presence, even if largely comprised of conscripts, may contribute to national defense strategies (Gates, 2010). One of the non-military benefits of conscription is fostering a sense of national duty and unity among citizens. Burk (2014) emphasizes the role of military service in promoting civic responsibility, discipline,

and patriotism. This effect is particularly important in societies where national identity and community involvement are critical for resilience against external threats. In regions with geopolitical instability, such as Eastern Europe, conscription is seen as a necessity for maintaining military readiness. Countries like Finland and Estonia, which are closer to potential threats from Russia, have retained conscription to bolster their defense capabilities (Dandeker and Gow, 1997). This chart section highlights how specific regional threats can influence the decision to implement or maintain conscription.

This slice of the pie addresses the trade-off between having a larger conscripted force versus a smaller, more professionalized military. As King (2011) emphasized and Galiani and Schargrodsky (2010), modern warfare often requires soldiers with specialized skills, such as expertise in cyber warfare, intelligence, and drone operations. A conscript army may not provide the same level of expertise or operational effectiveness as a professional force, potentially undermining overall military performance. The economic implications of conscription are significant. Running a conscription program involves substantial investments in training, equipment, and infrastructure (Boot, 2013). Additionally, as Galiani and Schargrodsky (2010) point out, there are opportunity costs, as conscripts often lose time they could have spent on education or career development. The financial burden may reduce funding available for more critical defense needs, such as technology and intelligence capabilities. Understanding the psychological and motivational factors of a conscripted military force is crucial. Voluntary militaries typically comprise individuals who choose military service as a career, which often results in higher levels of morale and dedication. In contrast, conscripts may perceive their service as an obligation, leading to lower motivation and retention rates. Burk (2014) highlights the importance of morale in military effectiveness, particularly during extended operations where soldiers need a strong commitment to achieve success. The evolving landscape of modern warfare, which emphasizes technology, intelligence, and cyber capabilities, necessitates specialized training that conscription often cannot offer. Boot (2013) and Gates (2010) noted that many contemporary defense challenges—such as cyber threats and counterterrorism—are more effectively managed by a small, highly trained force rather than a large, conscripted one. This perspective underscores the notion that conscription may not adequately address the modern defense requirements of technologically advanced nations. The chart above provides a balanced overview of the arguments for and against conscription and its impact on national security readiness. While conscription offers advantages such as increased manpower, broader training, and civic engagement, it also poses challenges related to cost, motivation, and the need for specialized skills in modern military operations. The debate over the effectiveness of conscription is shaped by a country's specific geopolitical context, available resources, and modern military needs.

## Discussion

The discussion regarding the possible reintroduction of **mandatory military service** in the Republic of Croatia involves a nuanced interplay of **political** and **security considerations**. This topic can be analyzed from two primary perspectives: the **necessity for strategic action** and the **influence of global trends**. Supporters of conscription contend that Croatia, as part of the larger European geopolitical landscape, is **increasingly vulnerable**, especially amid ongoing conflicts such as the war in Ukraine and various other global security challenges. **Dandeker and Gow (1997)** assert that "geopolitical instability within Europe often necessitates that smaller states bolster their own defense capabilities, even within larger alliances." The **ongoing conflict in Ukraine**, coupled with various threats such as **hybrid warfare**, cyber-attacks, and regional disputes, has highlighted the **vulnerabilities** faced by European nations, including Croatia. The central argument is that while **NATO** provides a framework for collective defense, member states must also prioritize their **independent defense readiness** to respond effectively to regional crises. **Geopolitical instability**, marked by rising conflicts, migration crises, and intricate **hybrid threats** such as disinformation campaigns and cyber-attacks, underscores Croatia's need to maintain sufficient **trained reserve forces** capable of rapid mobilization during crises. As Boot (2013) observes, "In modern security environments, reserve forces trained under mandatory conscription are crucial for ensuring swift response capabilities during emergencies."

Security concerns are amplified by the belief that conscription could assist Croatia in tackling emerging threats by enhancing **civic engagement** in defense. Advocates contend that "conscription not only bolsters military readiness but also cultivates a sense of civic duty and national unity, particularly in smaller nations facing external pressures," as stated by King (2011). They argue that Croatia must be equipped to respond independently to **localized security crises**, irrespective of its NATO membership. Burk (2014) emphasizes that "while NATO provides collective security, national preparedness and the capacity to mobilize forces swiftly during a national crisis remain essential elements of a comprehensive defense strategy." Some contend that the reintroduction of conscription is shaped by **global trends**, evident in countries like **Finland** and **Latvia**, which have reinstated mandatory military service in response to regional security concerns. Nevertheless, Croatia's circumstances underscore a more urgent necessity for **national defense preparedness** amid the increasing instability across Europe. In conclusion, while **global trends** toward reintroducing conscription may influence Croatia's defense policies, the most compelling argument for its reinstatement is rooted in the nation's **strategic necessity**. As security in Europe becomes increasingly precarious, the capacity for **self-defense** and the **rapid mobilization** of reserve forces are vital components of Croatia's national security strategy.

The **reintroduction of mandatory military service** is an important step toward enhancing a nation's defense readiness and meeting its obligations as a **NATO member**. While **NATO** provides a framework for **collective defense**, Article 5 clearly

states that an attack on one member is considered an attack on all, making this principle fundamental to **shared security**. Nevertheless, the capability for **national self-defense** remains essential. As Dandeker and Gow (1997) observe, "NATO provides a security umbrella, but member states must maintain the ability to respond independently to immediate threats." This dual approach ensures that nations are not solely reliant on allied support and can effectively deploy their own forces in times of crisis. King (2011) emphasizes that "a balanced approach between national forces and alliance commitments is vital for a sustainable defense strategy." This highlights the need for nations to contribute to collective security while simultaneously **fortifying** their own defense systems. In this context, reintroducing conscription can **enhance reserve forces** and **improve mobilization capacity**, allowing the country to respond effectively to potential threats. While the **professionalization** of the military remains essential, Boot (2013) observes that "a well-trained reserve force established through conscription can provide rapid surge capability during emergencies." Therefore, national defense is regarded as a component of **international obligations** and a critical **domestic necessity** for ensuring **long-term security**. In conclusion, reinstating conscription enhances the domestic military and strengthens a country's role within the broader **NATO framework**. **This strategy** ensures that the nation can respond swiftly and effectively, both independently and as a part of a collective security alliance. For a more thorough analysis, consider exploring the works of Dandeker & Gow (1997), King (2011), and Boot (2013), which offer in-depth discussions on the relationship between national defense and international security partnerships.

Arguments against reintroducing mandatory military service in Croatia often consider the current security and economic landscape. This proposal is perceived as part of a broader trend among certain European nations responding to evolving geopolitical dynamics. For instance, Latvia, Lithuania, and Finland have opted to reintroduce or maintain conscription to address significant security threats, particularly in light of increased border tensions with Russia and the overall regional climate. These countries, being geographically and historically closer to the Russian sphere of influence, recognize an urgent need to enhance their national defense through reserve military forces, all within the larger security framework established by the European Union and NATO. In the Croatian context, opponents of mandatory military service argue that, as a NATO member, Croatia benefits from substantial security guarantees under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. This article asserts that an attack against one member is viewed as an attack against all members of the Alliance. Consequently, many believe that Croatia should focus on enhancing the professionalization of its armed forces rather than instituting mandatory military service, which is often regarded as an outdated model of military organization in contemporary armies. Numerous scholars in the field of modern defense policies highlight that a professional army, due to its specialization and efficiency, delivers superior outcomes compared to compulsory military service, which typically

involves brief training periods and a reliance on mass reserve forces (Boot, 2013; King, 2011).

One of the primary arguments against conscription relates to its economic consequences. Implementing mandatory military service would demand considerable budgetary resources for new conscripts' training, equipping, and logistical support. Galiani and Schargrodsky (2010) suggest that compulsory military service might hinder long-term economic productivity, as young individuals forfeit valuable time that could otherwise be spent pursuing education or entering the workforce. Therefore, while mandatory military service may bolster national defense, it could ultimately represent an inefficient allocation of state resources, particularly in the face of limited financial means. Military conscription was widespread during the era of blocs but gradually declined in subsequent years. After the Cold War, some countries maintained mandatory military service for a time; however, by the early 2000s, nearly all European nations had abolished it. In light of recent socio-political turmoil, a number of advocates are now calling for the reintroduction of conscription. Bieri emphasizes that while compelling arguments favor restoring military service, there are also notable drawbacks. He observes that much of the military infrastructure has been left unused due to a diminished need for such an extensive support system (Bieri, 2015). The notion of mass recruitment of citizens, particularly during times of imminent danger, underscores the complete professionalization of the military that occurred after the Cold War. Consequently, it is difficult to ascertain which contemporary trends concerning mandatory military service genuinely aim to recruit a young and healthy population, especially given that most people in Europe appear largely indifferent to wars or unrest.

Franke (2001) asserts that individuals who pursue public service careers in the U.S. military often exhibit a strong dedication to **civic responsibility** and **national loyalty**. These service members typically perceive military involvement as contributing to the **greater good**, aligning their personal aspirations with broader societal values like **patriotism**, **public duty**, and the **defense of democratic principles**. Franke states that "service members are motivated not only by personal ambition but also by a deep-seated desire to engage in national service, which is a fundamental aspect of civic involvement in modern democracies" (Franke, 2001: p. 98). This perspective underscores that military careers, especially in **public service roles**, attract individuals who value **collective security** and **societal welfare** over personal interests. For many, enlisting in the military is viewed as fulfilling **civic responsibilities** and contributing to the nation's safety and stability.

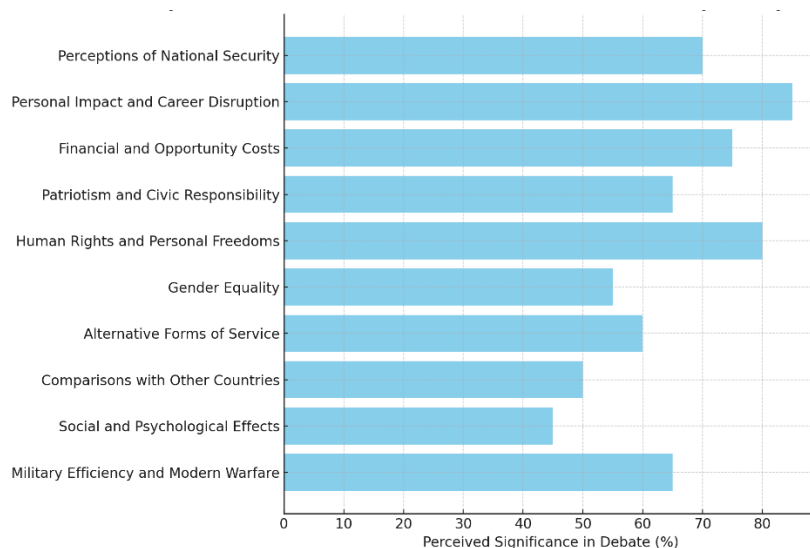
The discussion surrounding the reintroduction of conscription largely depends on individual perspectives. Advocates argue that conscription is vital for addressing regional security challenges and threats in an increasingly complex global landscape. In contrast, critics suggest that conscription reflects broader European trends that may not align with Croatia's modern defense needs. A comprehensive

evaluation of the country's security requirements and financial resources is essential for discussing implementing military service, particularly in light of long-term national security objectives. Throughout the twentieth century, most nations enforced universal conscription for all men without exception. This practice was particularly prominent during the world wars, which necessitated the general mobilization of the population. Golomboš (2022) points out that compulsory military service persisted through the Cold War in both political blocs, though it gradually decreased in subsequent years. By the early 2000s, nearly all European countries had abolished active mandatory military service, although some had maintained it for a time after the Cold War.

In light of recent socio-political turmoil, a number of advocates have emerged in support of reintroducing conscription. Bieri acknowledges that while strong arguments exist for reinstating military service, significant drawbacks must be considered. He points out that much of the military infrastructure has been abandoned due to a diminished need for such an extensive support system (Bieri, 2015). The concept of "mass recruitment" of citizens, particularly during times of imminent danger, underscores the comprehensive professionalization of the military after the Cold War. Consequently, it is challenging to discern which modern trends regarding mandatory military service genuinely seek to recruit a young and healthy population, especially given that most European people remain largely indifferent to wars or unrest. Franke (2001) posits that individuals pursuing careers in public service within the US military are generally inclined towards conservatism, patriotism, and a defensive mindset, which starkly contrasts with their peers who reject military life and uniforms. Furthermore, military members typically exhibit less support for global institutions and tend to be less self-centered. Supporting Franke's thesis, research conducted by Shevtsov (2007), Girsh (2019), and Harinen and Leskinen (2009) reveals that young people's attitudes toward military service are largely shaped by their upbringing and environment rather than their political beliefs. This demographic often champions military

service and endorses a strengthened military presence in their country. However, these studies also highlight that young people oppose conflicts, emphasizing the necessity of resolving global disputes peacefully. They conclude that many Eastern countries' robust sense of patriotism is slowly diminishing. **Attitudes toward the military** show notable differences between **Scandinavian** and **Balkan countries**, shaped by each region's **historical experiences, security environments, and geopolitical contexts (Osterberg et al., 2021)**. "Scandinavian countries have a long-standing tradition of contributing to international peacekeeping missions, motivated by a strong commitment to global stability and peace." (Jakobsen, 2005: p. 112)

This viewpoint reflects a tradition in which military service is regarded not only as a **national duty** but also as a valuable avenue for gaining skills and experiences pertinent to a **globalized security landscape**. Historically, Scandinavian countries have embraced a policy of **neutrality**, significantly shaping public perceptions of the military. However, Osterberg et al. (2020) observe that the increasing threat from Russia over the past decade has prompted a reassessment of this neutral stance as regional security dynamics have evolved. This shift signifies a **growing awareness** of external threats and a recognition of the need for a **strengthened national defense**. Balkan nations display military attitudes profoundly shaped by their unique post-conflict contexts and the enduring legacies of recent wars (Osterberg et al., 2020). These perspectives arise from the region's intricate history of **ethnic conflict, nationalism, and regional instability**, leading to a more **localized** understanding of the military's role in **national security**. In contrast, the Scandinavian approach is characterized by high levels of development, robust democratic institutions, and a steadfast commitment to neutrality, even amid emerging geopolitical challenges (Osterberg et al., 2020). This contrast underscores the difference between Scandinavian countries' outward-looking, opportunity-driven military ethos and the inward-focused, **security-oriented** perspectives prevalent in the **Balkans**.



**Figure 8** Key Discussion Points in Student Attitudes Toward Mandatory Military Service in Croatia (as per the author)

The diagram presented illustrates the perceived significance of various themes in a debate, represented through a horizontal bar chart. This visual tool effectively highlights the varying levels of importance that different topics carry within the discourse. By examining these categories and their corresponding significance levels, we gain insight into which participants in the debate prioritize issues. The chart's structure quantitatively represents the factors influencing the discussion, likely in the context of national or public policy debates, potentially involving defense, security, or social justice. The x-axis of the diagram represents the "Perceived Significance in Debate (%)", where each category is assessed based on how prominently it features in the debate. The y-axis lists ten distinct categories, ranging from national security to modern warfare, allowing for a comparative analysis of the importance of each theme. The variation in the bar lengths reflects the diversity of concerns shaping the discourse. At the top of the list, Perceptions of National Security emerges as a leading concern, with a significance approaching 75%. This finding suggests that national security issues are central to the debate, likely reflecting widespread concern about the protection and stability of a nation in the face of external and internal threats. Such a focus is often prevalent in military policy, defense spending, or geopolitical strategy discussions, where national security tends to dominate public and political attention. Similarly, Personal Impact and Career Disruption, which also scores high at just above 75%, reflects the individual-level concerns accompanying broader social or political debates. This category likely refers to the ways in which policy decisions, particularly those related to defense or compulsory service, could impact individual lives, careers, and personal futures. The significance of this theme suggests that while collective security is important, the personal costs borne by individuals remain a substantial concern.

Financial and Opportunity Costs, scoring around 70%, highlights the economic dimensions of the debate. Policy decisions, especially those related to national security, often come with substantial financial burdens, whether in direct military spending or the opportunity costs associated with resource allocation. This category reflects the need for participants to weigh the economic trade-offs, emphasizing how debates on national policy are not just about abstract principles but also practical financial consequences. Themes like patriotism, civic responsibility, human rights, and personal freedoms both hover around the 70% mark, suggesting they are nearly as important as financial concerns. Patriotism and Civic Responsibility point to the ethical and emotional motivations driving the debate, where appeals to national duty and collective identity shape the dialogue. On the other hand, Human Rights and Personal Freedoms counterbalance these collectivist arguments, underscoring the importance of individual liberties and the potential risks of policies that might infringe upon them. The relatively high importance of both themes indicates that the debate is not solely about practicality

or efficiency but also about deeper ethical and moral considerations.

In contrast, Gender Equality and Alternative Forms of Service score slightly lower, around 60%, which indicates they are important but not as central as the aforementioned categories. Gender Equality suggests a growing awareness of the need for inclusivity in policy decisions, particularly in historically male-dominated areas, such as military service or defense roles. Similarly, Alternative Forms of Service point to discussions about possible non-military solutions to national security or civic duty, such as civilian or humanitarian service, which may appeal to those advocating for a broader conception of service beyond traditional military frameworks. Comparisons with Other Countries and Military Efficiency and Modern Warfare score around 50% at the lower end of the spectrum, indicating that while these issues are part of the debate, they are not viewed as primary concerns. Comparisons with Other Countries might suggest an interest in benchmarking national policies against those of other nations. However, the lower significance implies that this external comparison is less influential in shaping the debate than internal factors like security or financial costs. While still relevant, Military Efficiency and Modern Warfare suggests that discussions about the technical or strategic aspects of modern warfare, such as the role of technology or tactical innovation, are present but not the focus of the debate. This significance distribution reveals a multi-faceted debate where personal, societal, and ethical concerns converge. The prominence of themes such as national security and personal impact suggests that participants in the debate are grappling with both collective and individual-level risks and responsibilities. The relatively high importance placed on financial costs reflects the practical considerations often dominating policy discussions, particularly in national defense, where resource allocation is critical. However, the significant weight given to ethical considerations, such as human rights and civic responsibility, also demonstrates that this debate is not solely about efficiency or pragmatism. Instead, it is deeply embedded in moral and philosophical concerns, where balancing individual freedoms with collective security presents a central tension. While arguments in favor of introducing mandatory military service highlight the strengthening of national security, patriotism, and physical readiness, opponents point to infringements on personal freedom, loss of time, and disruptions to individual plans and ambitions.

A critical analysis of these arguments in the contemporary context reveals the need for military systems to adapt to new forms of threats, such as cybersecurity, digital warfare, and hybrid threats, which do not necessarily require traditional military skills. In this sense, the military increasingly relies on technologically skilled personnel who can handle specialized tasks. This raises the question of whether traditional conscription can provide adequate expertise for such tasks or if the focus should shift to professional and specialized armed

forces. Additionally, the concept of national security has expanded to include mechanisms beyond the military alone, such as civil protection, humanitarian aid, and environmental security. This opens up possibilities for a broader spectrum of mandatory service programs outside traditional military frameworks. Including themes like gender equality and alternative service reflects a growing awareness of diversity and inclusivity in policy discussions. While these topics may not dominate the debate, their presence challenges traditional, often gendered notions of duty. The diagram highlights the complexity of public and policy debates related to national security and civic duty. The differing significance of various themes underscores the competing priorities involved. This chart captures key issues and encourages reflection on how these concerns interact and shape future debates, making it a valuable tool for understanding current policy discussions.

The introduction or re-establishment of mandatory military service today must consider international standards and legal norms that protect human rights. Conventions such as the European Convention on Human Rights and the United Nations clearly define individuals' rights to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, which includes the principle of conscientious objection. Various countries across Europe and beyond increasingly recognize the right of individuals to refuse military service on grounds of conscience, allowing them to serve in alternative civil roles. In implementing mandatory military service, Croatia would need to ensure mechanisms that respect its international human rights obligations, providing those with conscientious objections the option of alternative service forms. Additionally, Croatia's membership in NATO and the European Union implies an obligation to align national security policies with collective defense standards, where mandatory service would need to meet these international standards to align with contemporary security demands and uphold human rights principles.

## Conclusion

Following the breakup of Yugoslavia, the Republic of Croatia inherited much of the military infrastructure from that era, albeit with changes reflecting the defense needs of an independent nation. The formative period of the Homeland War underscored the significance of a capable national defense. Mandatory military service was maintained until 2008 when it shifted to a voluntary model. Today, Croatia enjoys membership in major international organizations, particularly the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which offer essential security assurances. However, maintaining a capable defense force remains critical in light of contemporary security demands (NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization). Croatia's favorable security environment is bolstered by its strong relations with neighboring EU and NATO members, including Italy, Slovenia, and Hungary, while Montenegro is also a NATO member. However, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia remain outside both NATO and the EU. Amid current geopolitical uncertainties, Croatia is exploring the

reintroduction of mandatory military service, reflecting a wider European trend to enhance military readiness. While countries such as Latvia have reintroduced conscription, Croatia benefits from NATO's security umbrella but recognizes the importance of maintaining an independently prepared military. Public attitudes toward mandatory military service vary among Croatian youth. Supporters argue that it enhances patriotism and bolsters national security by fostering loyalty and a sense of civic duty. They also believe that military service supports personal development by instilling discipline, responsibility, and resilience, key qualities for responsible citizenship. Additionally, proponents view conscription as a means of improving physical fitness among young people, which has broader implications for public health. They argue that the shared experience of military service has significant sociocultural benefits, creating bonds that foster unity across different segments of society.

Conversely, critics emphasize that mandatory military service infringes upon personal freedom, restricting individuals' rights to shape their own futures. There is a concern that conscription may lead to wasted time and missed opportunities, potentially disrupting educational or career aspirations. Moreover, critics highlight the lack of alternative options, such as volunteer programs, allowing young people to contribute to society in meaningful ways aligned with their personal interests and values. The findings from this research suggest that Croatian youth hold views that align closely with broader European trends, reflecting a mix of respect for national security and a strong emphasis on personal freedom. The public debate on mandatory military service remains lively, with arguments rooted in Croatia's unique social dynamics and perspectives on civic duty, individual liberties, and the importance of community contribution. This debate ultimately underscores the need for a nuanced approach that balances national security needs with the values of a democratic society, respecting both collective obligations and individual autonomy.

Therefore, the results of this research favor the European average, and young people in the Republic of Croatia do not have different attitudes than their peers throughout Europe and the Western world. Public debate on this topic is lively, and key arguments often reflect broader social dynamics in Croatia, including attitudes about national security, personal freedoms, and contribution to the community.

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