

2017 SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER TOPIC ANALYSIS

Lincoln-Douglas Debate

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Resolved: In the United States, national service ought to be compulsory.

Let's start with a discussion of definitions and framing.

Compulsory: Mandated. Required, usually required by law.

Compulsory does not necessarily mean universal, or that the national service must be mandatory for everyone. The question of "mandatory for whom?" could potentially become a point of clash in debates – are you defending that 15-year-olds and 65-year-olds are required to do service? Both men and women? Those with religious or moral objections to military service? What is the punishment for failing to comply? If you are defending the implementation of a specific type of national service, these questions are important to think about while writing your affirmative case.

Ought: Obligation, often a moral obligation.

You can define this strategically based on the case you are running. If your constructive is about the importance of agency, autonomy, and choice, it may be best to define "ought" as a moral obligation. Then, think about the question of implementation. Even if compulsory national service may be good for pragmatic reasons (military victory, democratic involvement, etc.), are these impacts sufficient to generate a *moral* obligation? Does the brand of morality your framework defends care about the consequences of a policy, or is the intent of national service what matters? Conversely, if you are reading an argument about how the consequences of compulsory national service are good/bad, then it may be more strategic to define ought in the context of the actor - the US. What a government ought to do, or is obligated to do, may be different than what an individual-centric conception of morality could demand. Maybe a government is not bound by morality at all, and a government's obligation is merely do what's in the best interest of their country.

National service: Typically defined as young people doing some kind of service on behalf of their country.

This definition becomes very important. Intuitively, and in a lot of dictionary definitions you'll find, "national service" is defined as service in the Armed Forces. Other definitions may include civilian service, or work on behalf of the community that may or may not include military service. You can define "national service" in a way that is strategic for what you are defending. Either way, it is important to think about what kind of national service you are defending. Are you defending that national service as a concept should be mandatory? That military conscription in particular should be compulsory? Civilian service? A particular type of civilian service, e.g. participation in the Climate Conservation Corps, ought to be mandatory?

Background on National Service

Military national service: Military conscription is a form of mandatory service in the Armed Forces. In the United States, conscription is referred to as “the draft”. Currently, the US has a system called Selective Service, where all male citizens and male immigrants ages 18-25 are required to register with the Selective Service System. This includes refugees, undocumented immigrants, transgender women, and men with disabilities that would prevent them from being able to serve. If a draft is called, these men will be randomly selected to be inducted into the Armed Forces. Exemptions based on abilities to serve, as well as moral and religious objections to war, will be evaluated after the draft is called. The Selective Service System serves as a contingency plan; although the draft has ended and the US currently uses an all-volunteer force, the Selective Service System is put in place to allow the draft to be reinstated if needed. The draft was used during the Civil War, World War 1, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.

Civilian national service: There has never been a form of mandatory civilian national service, though there are a number of voluntary civilian national service programs. AmeriCorps, Peace Corps, Learn and Serve America, Senior Corps, Youth Conservation Corps: these are all existing, government-funded and government-regulated programs that facilitate service among young people. You may choose to defend that service in one of these programs ought to be mandatory, or you may just want to research these programs for examples of service programs doing good or unsatisfactory work on behalf of their community.

Affirmative Arguments

Consequentialism: Some of the best literature on the topic comes from the consequences of having widespread participation in national service programs. If affirmatives are defending service in the military, there are plenty of arguments about how expanding the military is key to preventing military overstretch, which would have large impacts on the US’ ability engage in war or exert influence in the international arena. On the civilian service side, mandatory participation in programs that serve the students in an educational capacity or work on behalf of the environment may have long-term impacts that function well under a consequentialist framework.

Community building: With civilian service in particular, widespread participation could have an impact on our ability to engage in a safe and inclusive community. There are countless articles about how serving in AmeriCorps programs forced young people to see part of the community they would not otherwise come into contact with, serve populations that are different than them, or question the structural causes of inequality.

Social contract: Social contract theory states that citizens give up certain freedoms when they join the state in order to receive protection from the government. Affirmatives may argue that compulsory national service is just a way that citizens are required to give up their freedom. This argument may also be used to answer the negative’s criticism of the compulsory nature of the service. Given that citizens agree to live in the

state, they also agree to certain mandatory measures such as following the law, paying taxes, and participating in service.

Democracy: As evidenced by low voter turnout and participation in elections, democratic engagement in the United States is low. Tying citizenship to service is a good way to force involvement in issues that affect their community, be it through civilian service or military service. This could be a strategic argument paired with a framework about agonism, that engaging in civil discourse in a community is important for democracy, or just that the United States ought to prioritize actions that are in line with democratic ideals.

State power: Some political philosophers and social contract theorists argue that giving the state power over its citizens is justified and productive. Thomas Hobbes wrote that the sovereign is due complete obedience by its citizens to avoid the state of nature. This may have the implication that the state should have the ability to mandate that its citizens serve on the state's behalf. There are also arguments about how the government may use its power to go to war more cautiously if their families are at risk of being drafted.

Negative Arguments

Given the different potential definitions of national service, it will be smart to have a few negatives tailored to each type. For example, having a military service-specific disadvantage will be strategic in your arsenal, as well as a general philosophical negative case that is responsive to community-building arguments based on a definition of civilian service.

Compulsion bad: The most common philosophical negative positions will be those that criticize the compulsory nature of the aff. It is morally wrong to require citizens to take action, regardless of the good consequences. These positions will require robust justification of a moral framework that denies the moral relevance of consequences, the most common being Kant.

Militarism: Affirmatives that defend military conscription may be subject to criticism on the grounds that they promote militarism. Militarism is the concept that a state ought to aggressively expand and use its military, which is often tied to imperialism and expansionist ideologies. Many authors also criticize conscription for fostering a culture of militarism within the United States by demanding participation in the Armed Forces. They write that militarism instills values like refusal to question authority and solving problems through aggression.

Biopower: Michel Foucault coined the term "biopower", literally meaning power over bodies. In this case, biopower may refer to the way that compulsory service is a tool of power that gives the government the ability to control its citizens. Under the name of safety, or building community, the government tells its people that they must dedicate their time to programs that they deem worthy, or risk punishment.

Belittles authentic volunteerism: This argument could take a couple of different forms. As a counterplan, the negative may argue that the United States could take various steps to increase the number of volunteers in the military or civilian service programs. The negative could also find evidence about how authentic requires a sense of self-motivation in order to build community or democratic engagement; forcing someone to participate does not build character. Additionally, private associations that do non-profit work may have their independence threatened by compulsory civilian service given that in most cases, the government will have control over the type and duration of service that is done.

Quality of military service: There are plenty of empirical arguments from previous wars that the draft has been used about how volunteer forces are better soldiers because they are willing to undergo training and serve for longer periods of time, affecting casualty rates among soldiers. This also affects troop morale; serving next to someone who wants to be there is different than serving next to someone who did not want to go or even disagrees with the war.

Military conscription ineffective: The US Department of Veteran's Affairs is already heavily criticized for its inability to effectively provide patient care and benefits to veterans. The VA is unequipped to handle the large influx of new soldiers. There are also arguments about how the families in the community that have money or influence will be better able to avoid service by using their influence to be given an exemption from service.

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