



National Service—Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Define *national service* in terms of citizen participation.
- Understand the importance of citizen participation in the national life of democratic societies.
- Identify important elements and examples of national service in democratic countries that have it.
- Analyze the reasons for supporting and opposing compulsory national service.
- Identify areas of agreement and disagreement with other students.
- Decide, individually and as a group, whether all adult citizens should participate in one year of mandatory national service; support their decisions based on evidence and sound policy.
- Reflect on the value of deliberation when deciding issues in a democracy.

Question for Deliberation

Should all adult citizens in our democracy participate in one year of mandatory national service?

Materials

- Lesson Procedures
- Handout 1—Student Deliberation Guide
- Handout 2—Student Deliberation Worksheet
- Handout 3—Student Reflection on Deliberation
- Reading
- Selected Resources
- Deliberation Question with Arguments (*optional—use if students have a difficult time extracting the arguments*)



National Service—Reading

1 In a democracy, the government serves with the “consent of the governed.” Citizens consent
2 (agree) to support the government so long as the government protects the rights of citizens and
3 represents their interests. But citizens often disagree about what the government should do to
4 protect them and represent their interests.

5 Democracies allow people to express their views about almost everything. Rarely do people
6 agree. In democratic societies, where people come from different cultures and may not speak the
7 same language, there may be even more disagreement about what the government should do and
8 how much citizens should pay in taxes to support the government. Citizens also are often
9 suspicious of government and worry about keeping their rights.

10 How a democracy develops and keeps a sense of national unity and identity is very
11 important. In part to address these needs, many democracies have some form of mandatory
12 civilian or military national service.

13 **What Is National Service?**

14 National service generally means citizen participation in a mandatory program—sponsored
15 or conducted by the government—to address a national public need. Typically, young adults are
16 required to serve full-time for a limited period of time, from six months to one or more years.
17 While serving, citizens either receive basic support from the government—such as housing,

18 food, clothing, and modest stipend—or the government provides a minimum-level wage. There
19 are two basic forms of mandatory national service: military and civilian. A country may require
20 either one or both of these types of service.

21 **Mandatory National Service: The Military**

22 Military service is one of the oldest forms of national service and is common to both
23 democratic and non-democratic countries. Such democratic countries as Austria, Brazil,
24 Denmark, Finland, Germany, Israel, Mexico, Norway, Russia, South Korea, Sweden,
25 Switzerland, and Turkey require male and occasionally female citizens to participate in military
26 service when they become 18 years old. The time of service ranges from several months
27 (Switzerland) to three years (Israel).

28 National military service often molds a common national identity. In a May 2006 speech,
29 Russian president Vladimir Putin stressed the role of the military as a symbol of national unity
30 and national will. He also expressed hope that preparation for military training might address
31 some of the problems of youth, such as chronic disease, drinking, smoking, and use of drugs.
32 During World War II, the United States identified itself as a democracy that represented people
33 from every nation who fought together for freedom; the effort to mobilize such a diverse country
34 led directly to greater social acceptance of Catholics and Jews and to the equal rights movements
35 of African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and American Indians.

36 Many people oppose the use of military service precisely because of its power to shape the
37 thinking of citizens. They point out that governments can manipulate the confusion between
38 allegiance to one's country and allegiance to a specific party or leader. Some military personnel
39 believe that using the armed forces as a citizenship "school" detracts from the military's primary

40 mission of defending the country. Similarly, many people in countries with mandatory military
41 service have bitter memories of long months doing useless “military” activities far from home.
42 They question the citizenship value of enduring the unequal treatment that often accompanies
43 military life. For these and other reasons, groups such as the Union of the Committees of
44 Soldiers’ Mothers of Russia have called for the armed forces to be comprised of volunteer,
45 professional soldiers. The United States currently has an all-volunteer force.

46 Most countries that have mandatory military service have options for those who refuse to
47 serve for moral or religious reasons or who cannot serve for physical reasons. In Norway and
48 Sweden, persons who object to military service can choose alternate service, such as firefighting.
49 Estonia offers some flexibility to young men as to when they perform their required military
50 service: they can choose to do so any time between the ages of 19 and 28.

51 **Mandatory National Service: Civilian Examples**

52 Several nations also call for mandatory civilian national service. Since 1944, Mexico has
53 required that all university students participate in a service program during their last year of
54 studies before they receive their degree. Medical students must serve disadvantaged communities
55 for one year before being licensed. Costa Rica has no military but has a similar requirement for
56 medical professionals to serve disadvantaged communities before receiving a medical license. In
57 Nigeria, service is required of all university and polytechnical graduates under 30, unless they
58 graduate with high honors or enter the military or the police. Egypt requires women high school
59 graduates, who are exempt from military service, to perform six months of national service in
60 literacy centers or to do similar work.

61 Other countries, such as China, Kenya, South Africa, and the United Kingdom, offer state-
62 sponsored programs in which participation is voluntary. In the United States, the Corporation for
63 National and Community Service sponsors several service options. Approximately 70,000
64 Americans 17 and older participate each year in AmeriCorps, a program designed to meet
65 community needs in education, the environment, public safety, homeland security, and other
66 areas. AmeriCorps members receive academic scholarships in exchange for a year of full-time
67 service.

68 Significantly, these volunteer programs often draw older citizens who have more life
69 experiences. Through the U.S. Senior Corps, for example, nearly 500,000 Americans age 55 and
70 older meet community needs as volunteers, foster grandparents, and senior companions. In
71 January 2002, U.S. President George W. Bush called on all Americans to devote the equivalent
72 of at least two years of their lives—or 4,000 hours—to service and volunteering. He created the
73 USA Freedom Corps as a way to promote service and coordinate volunteer opportunities offered
74 through federal programs. However, there is no federal support for those who volunteer for the
75 USA Freedom Corps.

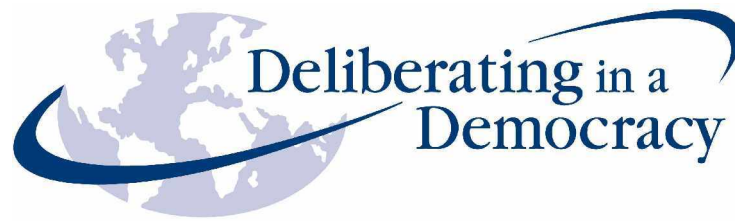
76 **Mandatory National Service: Supporters and Opponents**

77 Supporters of mandatory national service argue that it can create in citizens a commitment to
78 country and a responsibility to others. In their view, national service can provide citizens from all
79 walks of life and from different parts of the country with positive experiences and opportunities
80 for upward mobility in society. Advocates claim that national service helps build people's self-
81 esteem, develops work-skills, and teaches them civic responsibility. At the same time, national
82 service provides a large labor force to work on national problems and to help out during
83 emergencies. When confronted with the argument that service should not be compelled, they

84 point out that many types of citizen behavior are compulsory, from paying taxes to sending
85 children to school. National service, they say, is a reasonable obligation of citizenship.

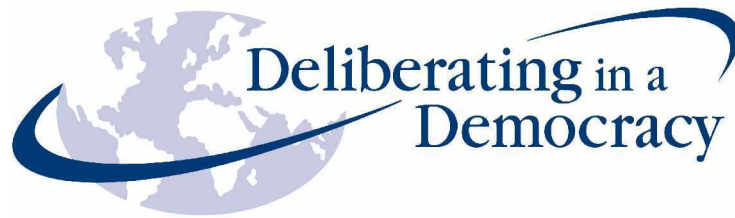
86 Opponents of mandatory national service argue that it puts the needs of the state ahead of the
87 rights of citizens. It violates the important democratic principles of individual freedom and
88 limited government. Critics oppose using military or civilian national service to promote national
89 identity precisely because such service can develop obedience to the state rather than
90 independence among citizens. They also maintain that government-centered national service is
91 misguided and would be costly and inefficient to run. Expanding national service programs will
92 only diminish the importance of private charities and the good they can do. They believe that the
93 best interests of the people are best served by the people, not by the government. Mandatory
94 service, they say, is not the way to instill civic responsibility.

95 How democracies develop and maintain a sense of national unity and meet the needs of their
96 citizens is a critical set of questions for government and citizens. Whether mandatory national
97 service—civilian or military—is a useful tool in those efforts is a subject for deliberation by
98 policymakers and citizens.



National Service—Selected Resources

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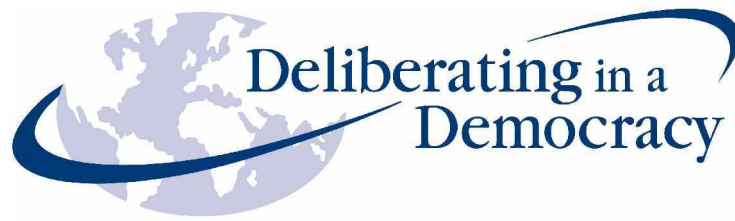
National Service—Deliberation Question with Arguments

Deliberation Question

Should all adult citizens in our democracy participate in one year of mandatory national service?

Arguments to Support the Deliberation Question

1. Most democratic nations require citizens to do many things that are in the public interest, such as paying taxes, sending children to school, and serving as jurors. National service is a reasonable and logical requirement.
2. Because they permit so much diversity and public disagreement, democratic countries need to foster a sense of common identity and national purpose among citizens. National service will help achieve this goal.
3. National service provides citizens with positive opportunities to meet people from different backgrounds and build networks and connections that promote equality and mobility within a society.
4. National service enables citizens to meet a critical national need by creating a dedicated labor force to work on worthwhile public projects such as rebuilding parks and roads, assisting in hospitals and schools, and helping out during natural disasters and times of national crisis.
5. National service can be a positive, even transformative experience for citizens. Service offers opportunities to build self-esteem, develop work and leadership skills, and promote civic responsibility.



National Service—Deliberation Question with Arguments

Deliberation Question

Should all adult citizens in our democracy participate in one year of mandatory national service?

Arguments to Oppose the Deliberation Question

1. Democracy is based on a respect for individual freedoms and for limited government. National service violates both these fundamental principles. Mandatory military service is especially troublesome because it serves the needs of tyrannies and democracies equally well.
2. National service is not necessary in a democracy. The best interests of the people are served by the people, not by government. When people meet their own needs and pursue their own dreams, then government will respond to what the people want, not what the government wants.
3. National service means a large, costly bureaucracy. All this money can be much better spent meeting the real needs of citizens.
4. National service will place people in “make work” activities. Working on meaningless projects makes citizens resent their country, not revere it. They may be especially resentful because of the nature of other people’s service in more desirable or more comfortable activities. Unequal sacrifice will only aggravate the resentment of a mandatory program.
5. National service programs hurt civil society. Citizens will learn to rely only on what the government provides, instead of using their own skills and resources to serve and care for their neighbors. Furthermore, asking the military to serve as a citizenship “school” will detract from the military’s main purpose of defending the country.