

# The transformation into an All-volunteer Force: Lessons Learned in Spain

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## 1. Introduction

The most remarkable factors that affect the number of applicants are:

1. Demographic reduction of the contingent of young people available
2. Improvement of the labor market
3. The end of conscription, which was the best means to attract volunteers
4. Increase of competition from other options: local polices, national police, *Guardia Civil*, etc.
5. Decrease of repetitive applicants.
6. Health level and drugs consumption among youths.
7. Impact of international crisis: depleted uranium in Kosovo, Perejil island incident, participation and withdrawal from Iraq, etc.
8. Public opinion of the Army

### 1.1. Demographic reduction.

Historically, the model of military recruitment –conscription or volunteer- is associated with the number of the amount of youths in a society. In the same way that the introduction of conscription was possible and pressed by the increase of young population in Western countries throughout the nineteenth century, nowadays the decline of mass armies and the abolition of conscription is related to the decrease in the number of births. In most cases, those who worry about the difficulties of recruiting soldiers in an environment where a lack of youths, do not realize that the situation would be more problematic for the country with compulsory drafts, since the Armies would employ young workers needed for the labor market.

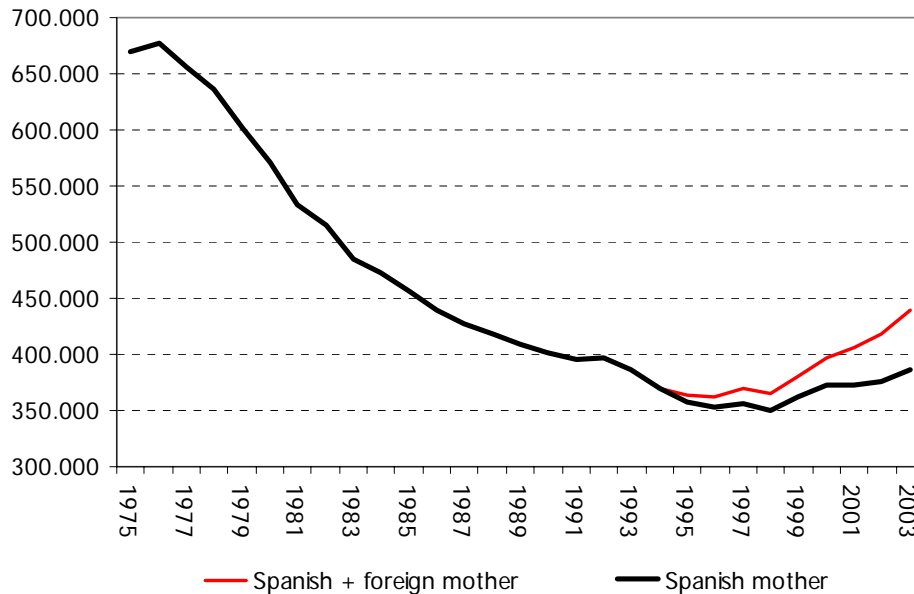
In any case, the incidence of demography is real and worrying, not only for the Spanish but also for all the NATO Armed Forces (Sandell 2003, 2004). In the case of Spain the number of citizens coming of age has decreased 40% in the last ten years. Besides, demographic evolution directly affects two parameters related with the predisposition of youths to join the Army: the level of youth unemployment and family income.

The decrease in births implies a decrease in the number of children per woman, that is, the decrease in the number of brothers and sisters. Those children brought up in bigger families are more inclined to join the Armed Forces, as can be deduced from the comparison of the reference family size of the candidates and the population of this generation: 50% of the Spanish teenagers live in families of more than two brothers, the percentage is 57% among recruits. This

phenomenon has been observed also in other countries: most of French candidates come from numerous families and the alone children are the exception (Benoit-Guilbot 1998).

The abolition of the draft in Spain took place during the best demographic period: when the baby-boomers came of age.

### Evolution of births in Spain.



Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística.

## 1.2. Improvement of the labor market.

The proportion of youths applying for the Armed Forces in the fifty provinces of Spain is mainly related to the following variables:

- family income
- youth unemployment
- good opinion on the Army

### Lineal regression of youths applying for the Armed Forces.

	Coef.	St. error	Estándar coef.	T	Sig.
(Constant)	34.26	10.217 3		3.353	,002
Family incomes	-.53	0.185	0.336	-2.853	,006
Seeking first employ	2.1	0.577	0.493	4.186	,000

$R = 0,73$ ;  $R^2 = 0,53$

Source: Own analysis with SISEM, INE and INEM data.

The model of youth unemployment and opinion on the Army –very related also with the feeling of national identity- managed to explain 63% of the variability among provinces.

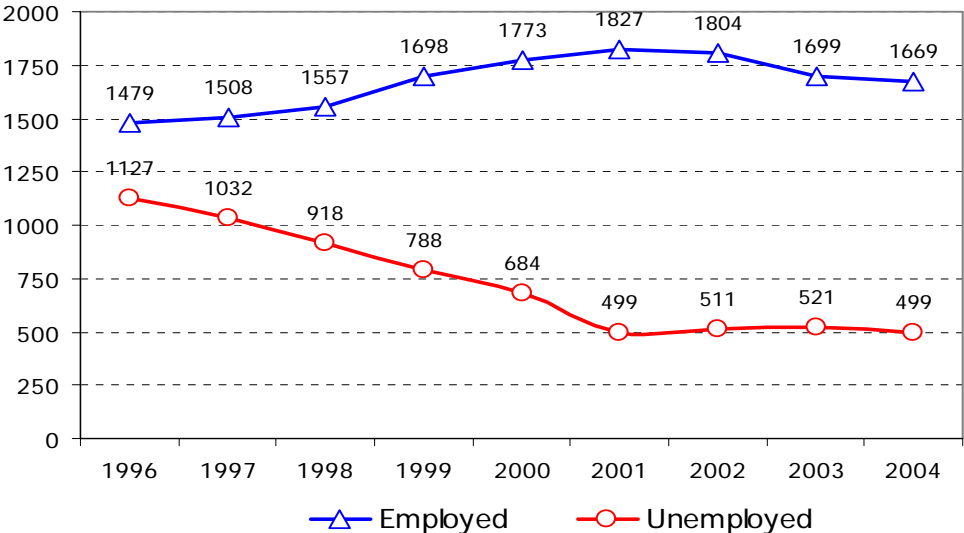
A low family income implies a minimum proportion of candidates per youth, but not the opposite. There are rich provinces with high proportions of candidates but there are not poor provinces with low proportion of candidates.

A low rate of young unemployment is incompatible with a high proportion of candidates, but not the opposite. There are provinces with high unemployment with a low rate of candidates but there are not provinces without youths on the dole with high rates of candidates.

In sum, employment is a restraint to high proportions of candidates and the low family income as contention of reduced proportions of candidates.

The comparison of the candidate’s occupational profile to the people of the same age shows the same results: youths on the dole are more inclined to join the Army. Apart from the reason that they are looking for a way of earning a life, it is important to take into account that the unemployed youth has got more opportunities to get information and take the entrance exam; qualitative and quantitative researches confirms this phenomenon (Michavila 2002). Currently, 23% of the candidates who take the exam were unemployed, the proportion is lower (19%) in those who made an appointment to take the exam and finally do not come up.

**Evolution of employment among 16-24 year-old (both sexes).**



Source: Encuesta de Población Activa.

The proportion of youths working or on the dole not only impacts the number of candidates but also their occupational profile: the proportion of those with any labor experience has increase throughout the years. For instance, in 1998 the percentage of recruits who worked before joining the Armed Forces was 17%, two years later it was 46%, and currently is 60%.

**1.3. The end of conscription.**

In the countries where volunteer and conscript recruitment coexist, most of the volunteers enlisted come from conscription. Conscription is the main tool used to advertise military life. Spanish experience shows that compulsory recruitment not only channels youngsters to enroll as volunteers, but also encourages many of the conscripts to do the same once they finish their compulsory military service.

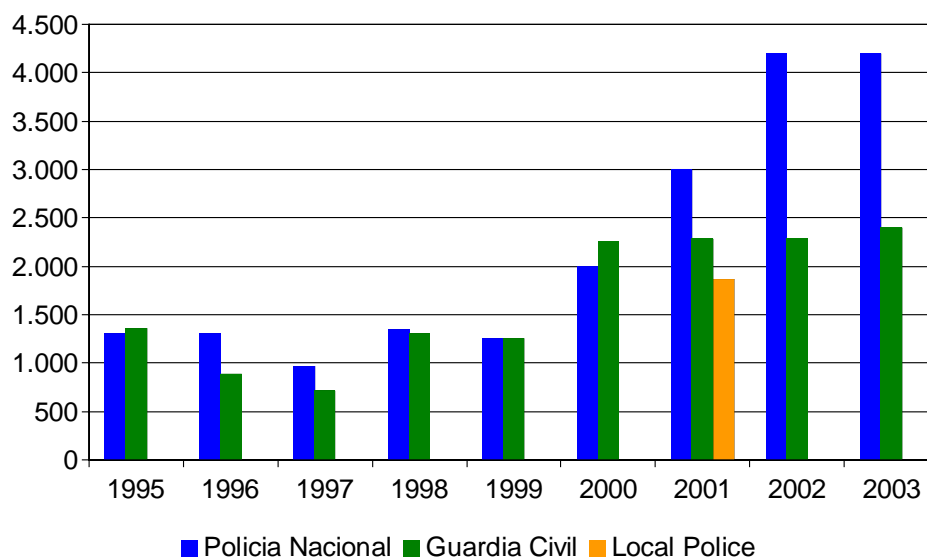
In 1998, one out of four male volunteer recruits were or had been conscripts. This proportion has been falling during the transformation into an all-volunteer Army.

On the other hand, the increase of voluntary personnel in file and rank means an increase in the number of potential recruiters, since the privates are the best agents of recruitment. At the present time, one third of the candidates recognize that they got the information about the military from a friend; the proportion is higher among the youngest. Television commercials is the second means of information (28%), followed by relatives (28%), buses (10%) and Internet (6%).

#### **1.4. Increase of competition.**

Almost half of the Spanish youths who recognize they have considered joining the Armed Forces, say at the same time that they considered applying for the different kinds of police forces: *Guardia Civil* (similar to the Italian carabinieri of the French Gendarmerie), *Policia Nacional* or the local polices. So these organizations suppose a competition to military recruitment, the proportion of which can be seen in the graph, considering that ten thousand youngsters are joining the Spanish Armed Forces every year.

**Evolution in the number of vacant posts in police forces.**



#### **1.5. Decrease of repetitive applicants.**

At the beginning of the transformation into an All-volunteer Force, the market is still virgin, the labor military supply is new for all youngsters. The situation gets to the end when the youngest cohort reaches the maximum age to join the Armed Forces, since the chances of working in the barracks is not new any more, except for those who are reaching the legal age. In those countries where the volunteer system has been implemented this phenomenon appeared provoking a false image of the youth.

There is another phenomenon regarding to the virgin market. During the first step of the process, the Armed Forces has got more applicants than vacancies, so a big proportion of those who have failed, keep on applying. In the case of Spain the numbers of rejected candidates oscillates between 50% and 70%. So this situation produces a significant amount of repetitive applicants exaggerating artificially the number of candidates. However, if the proportion of applicants drops under the rate of one candidate per post, the Institution offers the same post several times trying to fill it, as it has been the case in Spain in some branches. This produces the opposite phenomenon: the multiplication of vacant posts. So we have gone from the amplifying effect of the repetitive applicants to the multiplying phenomenon of the posts.

The situation is not homogeneous in all the branches, in those where the demand is high there is still a surplus of candidates, at the same time in those where the demand is low there is an excess of available posts.

### **1.6. Health and drugs.**

In the year 2003 21% of the candidates failed the test due to medical reasons, most of them (12% of the total candidates) because they tested positive in the drug consume test; the consumption of drugs is forbidden in the Armed Forces of Spain.

Although consumption of drugs among the Spanish youths is still lower than the European average, the consumption of cannabis among them is one of the highest in the EU, together with France, Germany, Ireland and the United Kingdom. 22% of Spanish teenagers under 18 consume cannabis habitually; the proportion is higher in male teenagers: 25%. Half of these consumers recognize they have had problems related to losses of memory, depression, apathy, difficulty in concentrating... 3% use cocaine, ecstasy or other strong drugs. Besides, one out of five students declares having got drunk in the last 30 days.

So the proportion of habitual young consumers of cannabis applying for the Army is half that of the reference group, but this means 12% of Spanish candidates.

Approximately, 2% of the young population have severe problems related with mobility, sight or hearing. The figure is not too worrying for an Institution that requires workers in good shape and health. However, the percentages of people between 16 and 24 with any kind of chronic disease reach 16% of the females and 12% of males, not taking into account the people suffering from allergies, which is another 17%. For instance, 5% of 16 to 24 year-old youths suffer from frequent headaches, another 5% from bronchitis or asthma, 4% from depression or other psychological problems, 2% from rheumatism or arthritis...

So the proportion of available youths to fill the file and ranks in Spain has to be reduced a fifth because of drugs consumption and other health problems.

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