

National Service—Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

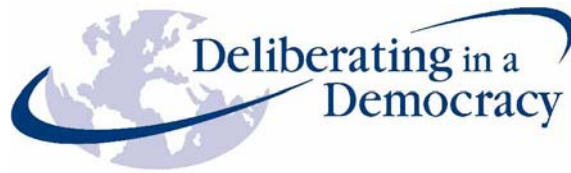
- Define *national service* in terms of citizen participation.
- Understand the importance of citizen participation in the national life of democratic societies.
- Identify important elements and examples of national service in democratic countries that have it.
- Analyze the reasons for supporting and opposing compulsory national service.
- Identify areas of agreement and disagreement with other students.
- Decide, individually and as a group, whether citizens between 18 and 25 years of age should be required to participate in at least one year of national service; support decisions based on evidence and sound reasoning.
- Reflect on the value of deliberation when deciding issues in a democracy.

Question for Deliberation

Should our democracy require citizens between 18 and 25 years of age to participate in at least one year of national service?

Materials

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



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 democratic governments require some form of
12 civilian or military national service.

13 **Mandatory Military and Civilian National Service**

14 Military service is one of the oldest forms of national service and is common to both
15 democratic and non-democratic countries. Such democratic countries as Austria, Brazil,
16 Denmark, Finland, Germany, Israel, Mexico, Norway, Russia, South Korea, Sweden,
17 Switzerland, and Turkey require male and occasionally female citizens to participate in military

18 service when they become 18 years old. The time of service ranges from several months
19 (Switzerland) to three years (Israel). Some countries, such as Russia, have a draft (a government
20 policy that requires citizens to serve in their armed forces). In Norway and Sweden, persons who
21 object to military service can choose alternate service, such as firefighting.

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

31 Other countries, such as China, Kenya, South Africa, and the United Kingdom, offer state-
32 sponsored programs in which participation is voluntary. In the United States, the Corporation for
33 National and Community Service sponsors several service options. Approximately 70,000
34 Americans 17 and older participate each year in AmeriCorps, a program designed to meet
35 community needs in education, the environment, public safety, homeland security, and other
36 areas. AmeriCorps members receive academic scholarships in exchange for a year of full-time
37 service. Through Senior Corps, nearly 500,000 Americans age 55 and older meet community
38 needs as volunteers, foster grandparents, and senior companions.

39 **National Military Service and National Identity**

40 National military service can help mold a common national identity. During World War II,
41 the United States stressed the fact it was a democracy that represented people from every nation
42 who were united in fighting for freedom. The effort to mobilize such a diverse country led
43 directly to greater social acceptance of Catholics and Jews and to the equal rights movements of
44 African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and American Indians.

45 Similarly, the modern state of Israel, which includes Jews who have immigrated from dozens
46 of different countries, uses its army as a “melting pot” and as a national school for all citizens.
47 Military service represents one of the most fundamental networks for professional, social, and
48 political life in Israel.

49 Many people oppose the use of military service precisely because it serves the needs of
50 tyrannies and democracies equally well. They point out that military personnel often harbor a
51 narrow vision of democracy that has little room for different perspectives or dissent. Critics are
52 further concerned that governments can manipulate the confusion between simple patriotism and
53 genuine citizenship. Some military personnel also believe that using the armed forces as a
54 citizenship “school” detracts from the military’s primary mission of defending the country.

55 Many civilians also oppose using military service to meet citizenship ends. In countries with
56 mandatory military service, many people have bitter memories of long months doing useless
57 “military” activities far from home. They question the citizenship value of enduring the unequal
58 treatment that often accompanies military life. Critics also note that young people are asked to
59 interrupt their studies while their peers in other countries can continue their studies. They ask
60 why young people are the only ones asked to sacrifice for their country.

61 **National Service: Supporters and Opponents**

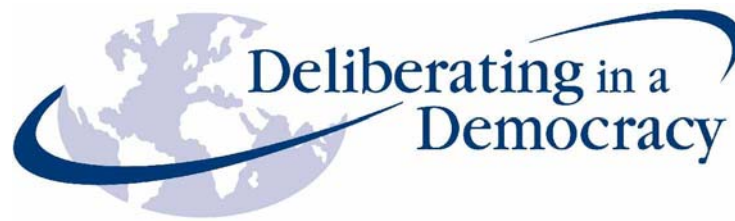
62 Following the attacks by al Qaeda on September 11, 2001, many people in the United States
63 called for greater levels of national service by young Americans. In January 2002, U.S. President
64 George W. Bush called on all Americans to devote the equivalent of at least two years of their
65 lives—or 4,000 hours—to service and volunteering. He created the USA Freedom Corps as a
66 way to promote service and coordinate volunteer opportunities offered through federal programs.
67 However, there is no federal support for those who volunteer for the USA Freedom Corps.

68 One proposal for formal national service in the United States calls for all persons 18 to 25 to
69 choose between military and civilian service to the country. Those who choose military service
70 would serve less time, but all would receive government grants and other benefits.

71 Supporters of compulsory national service argue that it can create in young people a
72 commitment to country and a responsibility to others. In their view, national service can provide
73 non-college-bound youths with positive experiences and opportunities for upward mobility in
74 society. Advocates claim that national service helps build young people's self-esteem, develops
75 work-skills, and teaches them civic responsibility. At the same time, national service provides a
76 large labor force to work on national problems and to help out during emergencies. When
77 confronted with the argument that service should not be compelled, they point out that many
78 types of citizen behavior are compulsory, from paying taxes to sending children to school.
79 National service, they say, is a reasonable obligation of citizenship.

80 Opponents of mandatory national service argue that it puts the needs of the state ahead of the
81 rights of citizens. It violates the important democratic principles of individual freedom and
82 limited government. Critics oppose using military or civilian national service to promote national
83 identity precisely because such service can develop obedience to the state rather than

84 independence among citizens. They also maintain that government-centered national service is
85 misguided and would be costly and inefficient to run. Expanding national service programs will
86 only diminish the importance of private charities and the good they can do. They believe that the
87 best interests of the people are best served by the people, not by the government. Mandatory
88 service, they say, is not the way to instill civic responsibility.



National Service—Selected Resources

- Bandow, Douglas, "National Service: Utopias Revisited," *Cato Policy Analysis No. 190* (Washington, DC: The Cato Institute, March 15, 1993), <http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa-190.html>.
- Brookings Institution, *United We Serve: National Service and the Future of Citizenship*, Symposium Transcript, Washington, DC (July 30, 2003), <http://www.brook.edu/comm/events/20030730.pdf>.
- "Conscription," *Wikipedia* (St. Petersburg, FL: Wikipedia Foundation, 2005), <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conscription>.
- "Corporation for National and Community Service (USA)" (Washington, DC: CNS, 2005), <http://www.cns.gov/>.
- DiLorenzo, Thomas J., "National Service: A Solution in Search of a Problem," *The Freeman: Ideas on Liberty* (Irvington-on-Hudson, NY: Foundation for Economic Education, March 1990), Vol. 40: 3, <http://www.fee.org/publications/the-freeman/article.asp?aid=585>.
- Epstein, Edward, "Public Service: Making Americans—New Push for National Service," *San Francisco Chronicle* (January 6, 2002), p. A-3, <http://www.cityyear.org/pressroom/clipp.cfm?Clipp=MakingAmericans&CatID=5>.
- Spalding, Matthew, and Krista Kafer, "AmeriCorps: Still a Bad Idea for Citizen Service," *Research: Urban Issues Backgrounder 1564* (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, June 28, 2002), <http://www.heritage.org/Research/UrbanIssues/BG1564.cfm>.
- Stroud, Susan, "National Youth Service in Sixteen Countries: Program Characteristics," from *Second National Youth Development Conference, Our Future Now—Empowering Young People Through Youth Development*, Workshop Stream, International Perspectives, Glenelg, South Australia (2000), http://www.thesource.gov.au/ausyouth/conf_pdf/pg85.pdf.
- "Uncle Sam Needs You: Is National Service the Answer?" *Bill of Rights in Action* (Los Angeles, CA: Constitutional Rights Foundation, Spring 1988), Vol. 4: 4.



National Service—Deliberation Question with Arguments

Deliberation Question

Should our democracy require citizens between 18 and 25 years of age to participate in at least one year of 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 will provide young people with positive opportunities to meet other people from different backgrounds and build networks and connections that promote equality and mobility within a society.
4. National service will enable young 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 many young 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 our democracy require citizens between 18 and 25 years of age to participate in at least one year of 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 will be 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 young people in “make work” activities. Working on meaningless projects will make young citizens resent their country, not revere it. They will be especially resentful because they are being asked to sacrifice for their country while older citizens are not.
5. National service programs will 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.