BRAZILIAN STUDIES PROGRAMME

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
LATIN AMERICAN CENTRE

Dataset on the perceptions of Brazilian youth toward a military career post-Covid-19

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Abstract

This dataset presents the results of a novel survey that looked at perceptions of military careers among the Brazilian youth. We conducted 2,055 computer assisted web interviews with a national representative sample of participants aged 16 to 26 years old. The data collection was organised around eight analytical categories: 1. Propensity to join the military; 2. Perceptions about military careers; 3. Conservative attitudes and views; 4. Work abilities and aspirations; 5. Perceptions of the job market; 6. Sociodemographic profile; 7. School and career trajectory; and 8. Family background. When asked about joining the Army, we found that 43.9% of respondents were likely to consider pursuing a military career. In general, perceptions towards the military were highly positive, mainly regarding both the expected economic benefits and the social status of the profession. This dataset offers a more comprehensive understanding of the profile of young people inclined to follow military careers and the lasting effects of the health and economic crisis in Brazil on the balance between military and civil sectors.

Background and summary

During President Bolsonaro's mandate (2018–2022), investment in Brazilian military careers led to growth in recruitment numbers, followed by an increase in salaries and pensions.[1] During the fiscal year of 2020, the Department of Defence consumed 1.4% of Brazilian GDP.[2] In 2021, more than 6,000 military personnel occupied commissioned positions in the federal government, equivalent to 18% of the total number of positions available[3] (Fig. 1).

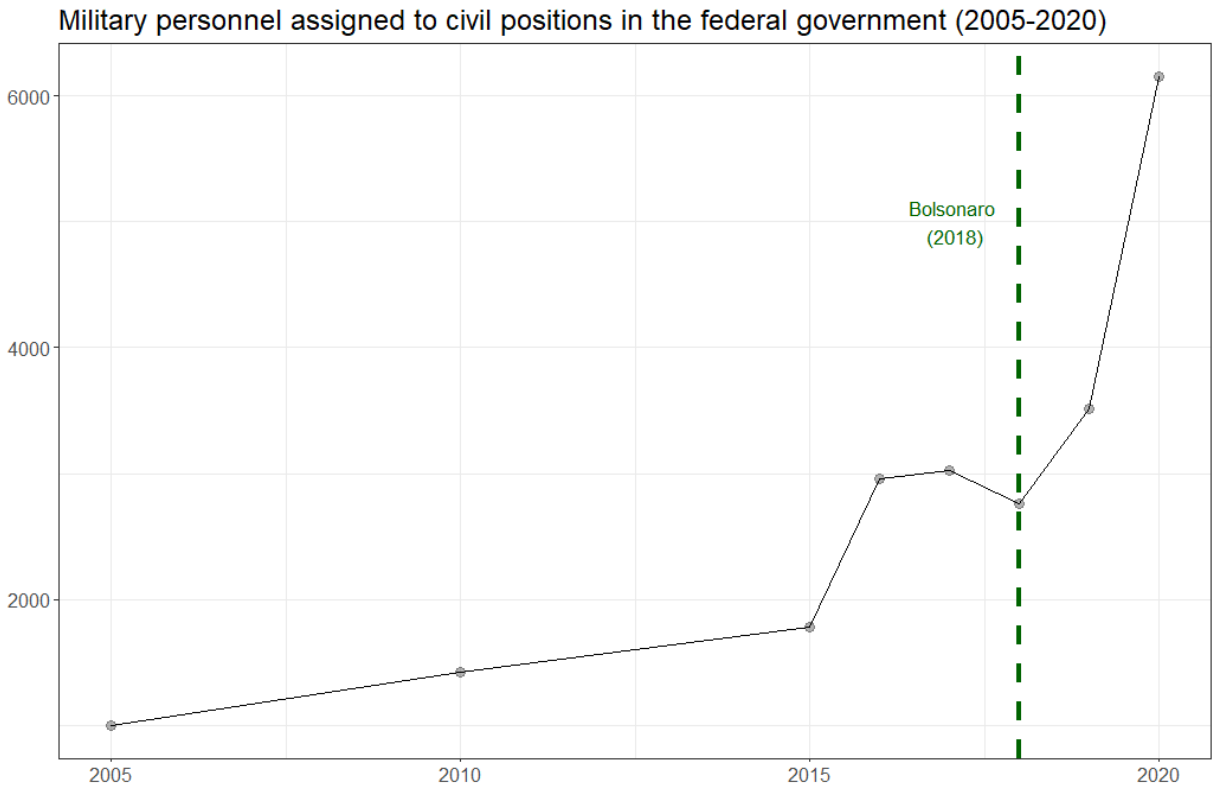

Figure 1: Military personnel assigned to civil positions in the federal government (2005–2020)[4]

Between 2018 and 2020, the number of military candidates for state and federal legislatures grew from 786 to 1,199, and during this same period, those who managed to be elected also rose from 14 to 76.[5] Eduardo Pazuello, an active-duty Army general with neither medical expertise nor political experience, led the Brazilian Ministry of Health from May 2020 to March 2021. Data from the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) also shows that the level of trust of Brazilian people in the Armed Forces has been high and stable over time.[6] When asked "to what extent do you trust the Armed Forces", considering a 1-to-7 scale, evidence from 231,354 cases from 2004 to 2019 suggests that the average level of trust in the Armed Forces is 4.65, making the military one of the most reliable institutions in the Americas.[6] Brazil displays the third highest average (5.1), only behind Canada (5.7) and the United States (5.6). Despite the growing popularity of military careers and the undeniable influence of the Armed Forces on national politics, there has been no data on how young people perceive the military or information on their propensity to enlist.

The purpose of this study is to fill this gap by presenting the results of a novel survey on perceptions of Brazilian youth towards the military. Exploiting timely data from a representative national sample of 2,055 16–26-year-olds, we present descriptive statistics on propensity to enter the military and perceptions of military careers. Additionally, our survey includes items on conservative attitudes and views, job market perceptions and expectations amid the pandemic, perceptions of the job market locally and nationally, sociodemographic profile, educational and career trajectory, and family background.

Methods

Data collection

A total of 2,055 youth were interviewed using computer assisted web interviews (CAWI) technology from October 22 to November 8 2021. The target audience profiled in this survey included youth aged 16–26 who were Brazilian citizens and had never served in the military. With a confidence interval of 95% and maximum error of 2.2%, the sample was stratified by age, sex, geopolitical region (North, Northeast, Central-West, Southeast and South) and education level. Sample weights were calculated following young population distribution in the general population as reported by the second largest demographic research survey running in the country, the National Household Sample Survey – PNAD.[7] Because young people are more likely to use several social networks concurrently,[8] recruitment was carried out from an online panel. The link to the questionnaire was randomly generated through digital shots, in accordance with the standards of ISO 26,362 which govern online surveys.[9] Data collection was carried out by FSBComunicação Company, hired by the authors of this study. Ethical protocol for interviews with those between 16 and 26 years old followed the University of Oxford guidelines, approved in September 2021 under process number SSH_OSGA_LAC_C1_21_074. The Brazilian Center for Analysis and Planning also validated the ethical process.

The increasing availability of mobile devices presents enormous opportunities for online data collection. Yet a common problem of online surveys is the lack of readable and functional design which may reduce the likelihood of finishing the questionnaire.[10] To mitigate this problem, we developed a survey equally suitable to be answered on multiple devices (mobile phones, tablets, or notebooks). Another problem that can affect response rates is the constrained access to the internet and connecting services.[11] Although internet access is growing in Brazil, there are regional inequalities, and in the Northeast, access is below the national average.[12] In addition to geographical variability, socioeconomic factors such as race, gender, and social class affect internet access. Official data suggest that access to the internet through mobile phones, as opposed to broadband, has increased in these sub-represented groups, particularly amongst those who are young.[12] To overcome the shortcomings of digital inequality, we created a survey that requires between 15 and 25 minutes be answered, thus allowing respondents with internet access exclusively on their phones to respond to the questions without overusing their data bundles.

Our survey instrument was composed of 58 questions that generated 135 variables in this database. Almost all items were closed ended, most of them consisting of Likert scales as response options. The variables were identified by a code formed by the initial “Q” and by a sequential number, beginning with the declaration that the interviewee was over 16 years old at the time of research (Q1) and that he/she agreed to participate in the study (Q2). The data collection was organised around eight key analytical categories, namely: 1. Propensity to join the military; 2. Perceptions about military careers; 3. Conservative attitudes and views; 4. Work

abilities and aspirations; 5. Perceptions of the job market; 6. Sociodemographic profile; 7. School and career trajectory; and 8. Family background (Fig. 2).

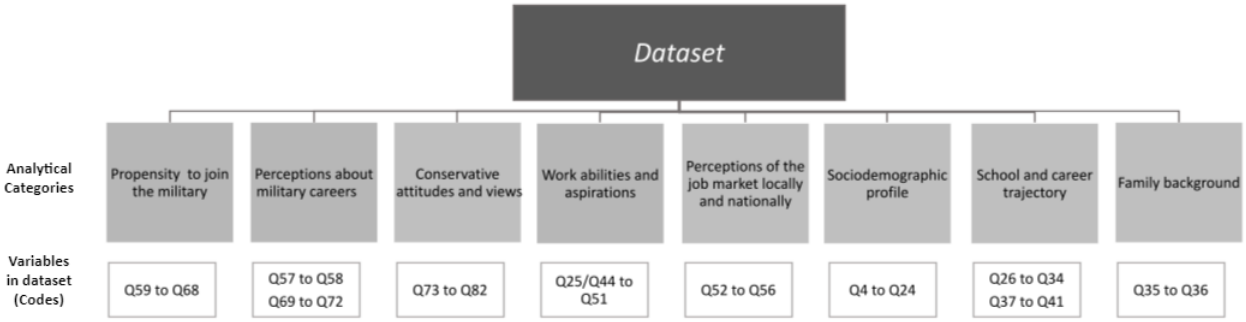

Figure 2: Dataset framework (Acronyms: Q = question)

Following the Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS), the primary source of information regarding enlistment behaviour in the United States,[13] we estimate the Composite Active Propensity (CAP) by aggregating the percentage of youth saying they will "definitely" or "probably" enter military service. To do so, we coded the Q59 and Q61 variables which ask the following: "How likely is it that you would currently consider a military career (Army, Navy, Air Force) as a job and employment option?" (Q59) and "How likely is it that you would currently consider a career in the Military Police as a job and employment option?" (Q61). The response options were presented in the following order: definitely, probably, probably not, definitely not and I don't know. Regarding internal validity, the percentage of youth saying they will "definitely" or "probably" enter military service has been shown to be an accurate measure of enlistment likelihood.[13] Therefore, respondents who acknowledge they are likely to join actually enlist at a higher rate than those who believe they are unlikely to join. For the above questions, we followed the literature that indicates that item order does not affect respondents' selection for ordinal measure of intention.[14]

Items Q57 to Q58 and Q69 to Q72 measure the perception of young Brazilians of military careers, including in the Army, Navy, Air Force and Military Police. They were asked the following: "In general, what is your impression of the Armed Forces (Army, Navy, Air Force)?" (Q57) and "What is your impression of the Military Police?" (Q58). Response options were presented as "very positive", "somewhat positive", "neutral", "somewhat negative", "very negative", and "I don't know". Since all these questions use a Likert scale, we were able to apply Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to reduce the shared variance among those items into a unique dimension of positive-negative impression about military service. Questions Q69 to Q72 assess the respondent's previous experience with content related to military careers. The items read as follows: "Have you ever read a text or seen a video that talks, either positively or negatively, about military careers?" (Q69), "Did this text or video talk about the military career in a positive or negative way?" (Q70) and "Thinking about your routine and daily activities, how well does a military career fit into your life preferences?" (Q72).

The third analytical dimension clusters items specifically designed to measure conservative views and attitudes.[15] Survey questions were developed following the 12 item Social and Economic Conservatism Scale (SECS)[16] and included themes such as gender role (Q73), gun ownership (Q74), welfare benefits (Q75), death penalty (Q76), drugs (Q77), religion (Q78), abortion (Q79), traditional values (Q80), traditional marriage (Q81) and crime control (Q82).

We provide more details of each analytical category in the online repository. Replication materials, including raw data and computational scripts, are available online: (link restricted during peer review process). In order to increase the potential of reuse of our data, we provide an English version of the codebook, survey questions and scripts. In what follows, we offer a description of some of the variables, their categories and frequency distribution in the sample (Table 1).

Question ID	Variable	Categories	Percentage (%)
Q26	Studying	Yes No I'd rather not answer I don't know	54 43.6 1.6 .8
Q28	Education	Incomplete elementary school Incomplete high school Incomplete higher education Higher education	3.7 30.8 57 8.5
Q37	Employed	Yes No	55 45
NEET (recoded from Q26 and Q37)	Not in education, employment or training	Yes No	20.1 79.9
Q35	What is your father's education level?	No schooling/illiterate Just read and write Incomplete elementary school Complete elementary school Incomplete high school Complete high school Incomplete undergraduate degree Complete undergraduate degree Incomplete postgraduate degree Postgraduate	4.5 3.8 21.7 7.4 7.1 22.0 3.9 7.0 .3 3.4
Q36	What is your mother's education level?	No schooling/illiterate Just read and write Incomplete elementary school	3.5 3.3 22.3

		Complete elementary school Incomplete high school Complete high school Incomplete undergraduate degree Complete undergraduate degree Incomplete postgraduate degree Postgraduate	7.2 8.5 26.9 5.5 9.5 1.0 5.8
Parents education	Parents' average schooling	Interval (1 to 10)	Mean 5.08
Q56	Covid-19 pandemic effect on job offer	Significantly helped my professional career Helped my professional career Neither negatively affected nor helped my professional career Affected negatively my professional career Affected my professional career very negatively	2.4 5.4 29.9 25.8 36.5
Q59	Propensity to join the Armed Forces	Definitely Probably Probably not Definitely not I don't know	19.9 24.0 22.9 25.4 7.9
Q61	Propensity to join the Military Police	Definitely Probably Probably not Definitely not I don't know	11.9 20.2 25.4 31.8 10.7
Q57	Impression of the Armed Forces	Very positive Somewhat positive Neutral Somewhat negative Very negative	29.1 18.4 29.2 10.5 5.7
Q58	Impression of the Military Police	Very positive Somewhat positive Neutral Somewhat negative Very negative	18.8 21.8 27 15.8 11.2

Table 1. selected dataset variables (N = 2,055)

Career options for young people

When asked about the likelihood of pursuing a military career (Q59), 43.9% of Brazilian youth said that they will "definitely" (19.9%) or "probably" (24%) enter military service. This percentage is more than two times higher than the average CAP in the United States.[13] When asked about the probability of joining the Military Police (Q61), 32.1% of youth reported that they will "definitely" (11.9%) or "probably" (20.2%) pursue a career as Military Police officers. Fig. 3

depicts the CAP to join the Armed Forces and Military Police by gender, race, age group and geopolitical region.

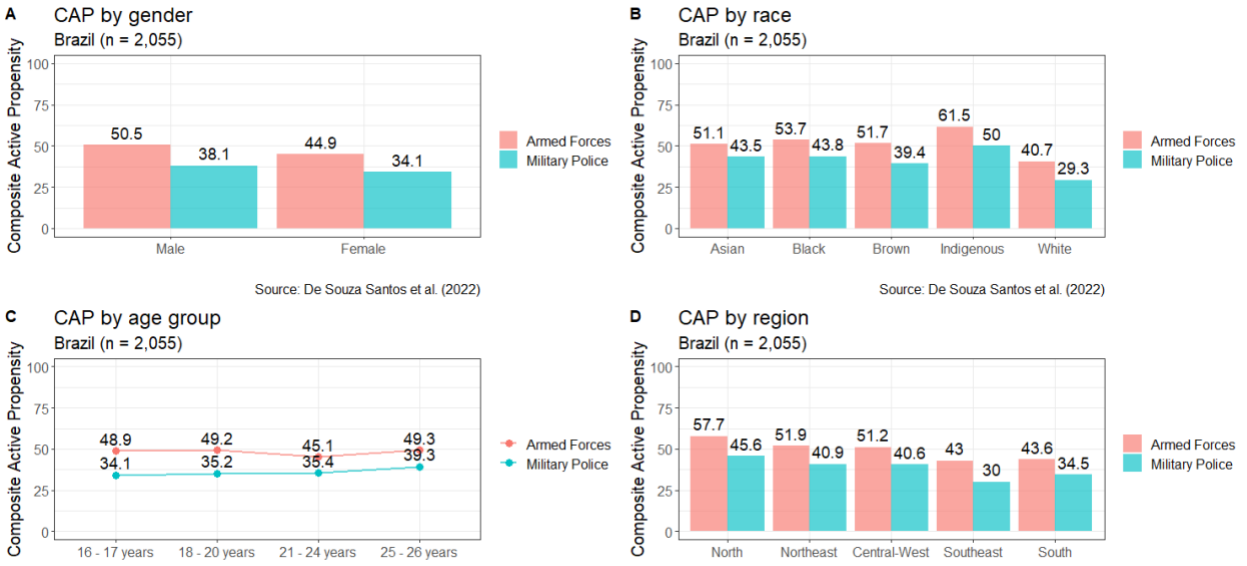

Figure 3: Composite active propensity to join the Armed Forces and Military Police in Brazil by A) gender, B) race, C) age group and D) region[17]

The results show that the propensity to pursue a career in the Armed Forces is higher compared to the predisposition to join the Military Police for all demographic groups. Females are less likely to pursue a career either in the Armed Forces (38.1%) or in the Military Police (34.1%) when compared to male respondents (3A). Similarly to the United States, white citizens display the lowest probability to serve in the military (3B). Differently from the United States – where the propensity to join the Army is negatively correlated with age[13] – data from Brazil suggest that the inclination towards a military career is more stable among age groups (3C). We also provide evidence that residents of the regions with the lowest economic development in the country, namely the North and Northeast, show a higher propensity to join both careers (3D).

When asked about their overall impression of the military, roughly half the participants said they had a positive perception of the military, 29.1% indicated that their view was very positive and 18.4% reported it was somewhat positive. Only 16.2% said they had either a somewhat negative (10.5%) or very negative (5.7%) impression of the military (Fig. 4). The evidence available also suggests that, on average, perceptions of the Armed Forces are more positive than of the Military Police.

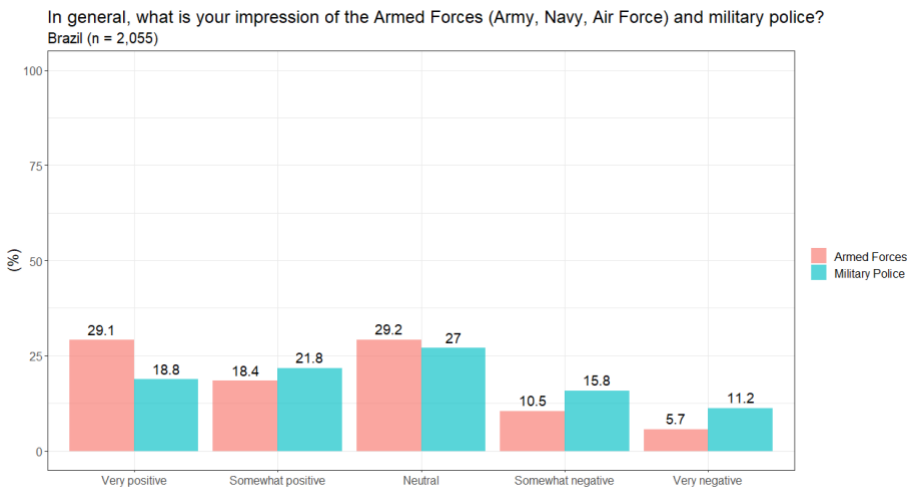

Figure 4: Young Brazilians' impressions of the Armed Forces and Military Police (Q57 to Q58)[7]

We also asked the young people if they had any previous experience with content regarding the military: 54.7% of the respondents reported that they had read a text or seen a video that talks, either positively or negatively, about military careers. In terms of impressions, the overwhelming majority of the youth indicated that the content was totally positive (36.1%) or more positive than negative (46.6%). Finally, when asked about the reasons why military careers were likely to be an employment option, we found that the economic benefits, salary, and stability of military careers explain 54% of the variance of all variables (Fig. 5).

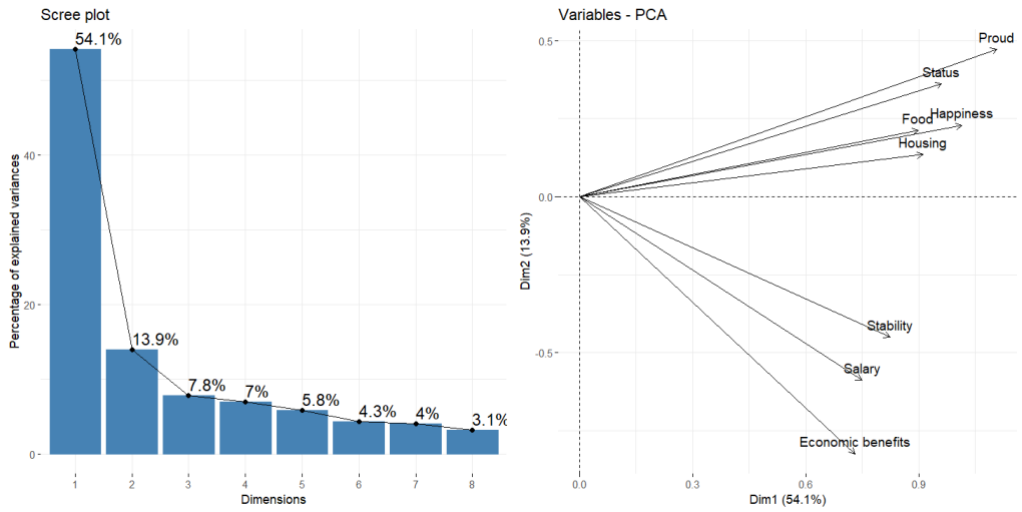

Figure 5: Principal component analysis of items regarding the perception of the military among Brazilian youth (Q71R1 to Q71R8)

In a similar pattern to that of the United States,[13] we find that youths more inclined to join military careers ($\overline{x} = 4.12$ out of 5.0) reported a higher positive impression of the Armed Forces than non-prone youth ($\overline{x} = 3.46$). Similarly, prone respondents ($\overline{x}$ = 4.11) stated a higher positive perception of Military Police when compared to non-prone ($\overline{x}$= 3.6). Contrary to the American

trend – where men are more likely than women to have a positive perception,[13] Brazilian males ($\overline{x}$ = 3.80) and females ($\overline{x} = 3.78$) displayed equally positive impressions of military careers. We find no statistically significant difference in impressions of the military between rural ($\overline{x}$ = 3.81) and urban ($\overline{x} = 3.79$) respondents.

Technical validation

To ensure reliable and valid data, we adopted the following procedures. First, we designed our sample by applying the most up to date and trusted estimate of population distribution, as reported by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics.[7] Table 2 compares the population distribution to the sample statistics according to sex, race, residence area and geopolitical region.

Variable	Population (%)	Sample (%)
Sex	Male (48.2) Female (51.8)	Male (47.5) Female (52.5)
Race	Brown (46.8) White (42.7) Black (9.4) Asian (1.1) Indigenous peoples (1.1)	Brown (44.6) White (40.3) Black (11.2) Asian (2.6) Indigenous peoples (1.4)
Residence area	Urban (84.7) Rural (15.3)	Urban (89.7) Rural (10.3)
Region	North (8.82) Northeast (27.09) Central-West (7.79) Southeast (42.04) South (14.26)	North (8.18) Northeast (26.67) Central-West (11.24) Southeast (39.51) South (14.4)

Table 2. Population versus sample distribution (sex, race, residence area and region)

Regarding sex, the sample proportionally reflect the distribution of males (48.2) and females (51.8) in the Brazilian population. The racial composition of the sample also indicates a representative proportion of brown, white, black, Asian, and Indigenous citizens. While 84.7% of the Brazilian population live in urban areas, the distribution of youth in the sample is slightly more concentrated in urban areas (89.7%). Finally, the sample composition represents the distribution of the population across geopolitical regions with a slight overrepresentation of respondents from the Central-West.

Second, our survey instrument partially replicates the content of the YATS, the most credible source of information regarding enlistment behaviour in the United States. For more than three decades, YATS has been gathering data on attitudes and opinions towards the Armed Forces. The Department of Defence also collects information on youth socioeconomic characteristics and

their interest in joining the military. FPP9 of the YATS survey asks as follows: "In the next few years, how likely is it that you will be serving in the Military?" Youth respondents are given the following options: Definitely, Probably, Probably Not, and Definitely Not. We are aware that cultural and social factors are likely to affect how people answer surveys,[18] but by similarly framing the enlistment question we are confident that our data will offer important insights into how Brazilian youth perceive the military as a career option and the likelihood of their enlisting. Therefore, to the best of our knowledge, our dataset offers a unique opportunity to evaluate comparative enlistment behaviour. Using the most up to date data available, Figure 6 displays the propensity to join the Armed Forces by gender in Brazil and in the United States.

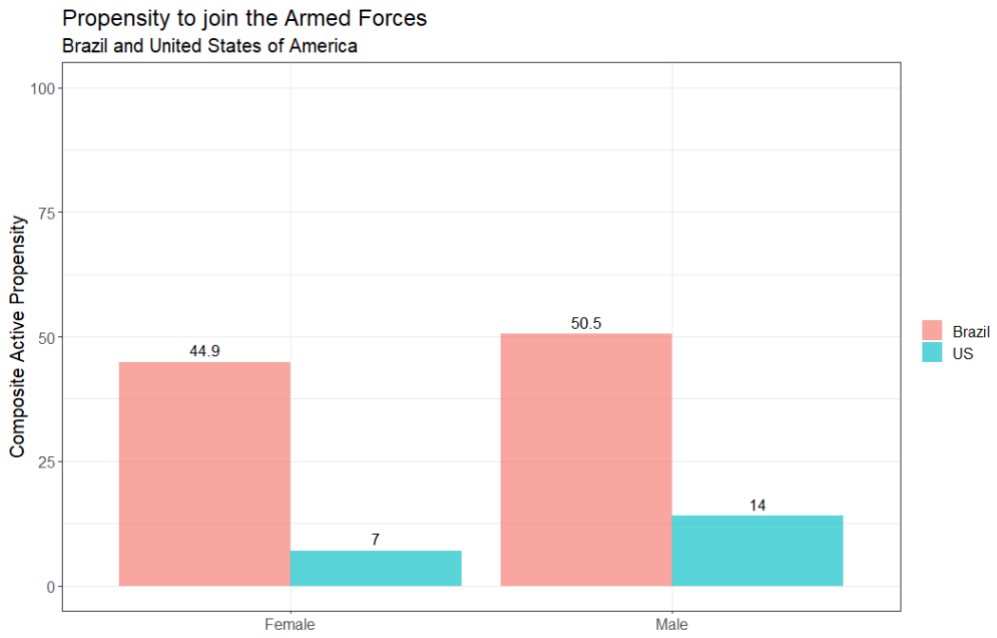

Figure 6: Composite active propensity by sex in Brazil and the United States[17,19]

Brazilian males are three times more likely than US males to respond that they will pursue a career in the military. Similarly, Brazilian females are six times more likely to follow a military career as a job option compared to their US counterparts. As expected, CAP is higher for males than females in both countries. Our data also allows us to explore how CAP varies across age groups and race, to be explored in a future publication.

Finally, we measured the impression of young Brazilians towards the Armed Forces and Military Police by extracting the shared variance of Likert scale items (Q71R1 to Q71R8). Considering motivations such as job stability, wages and societal approval, items display a robust correlation which is a key assumption in applying a principal component model (Fig. 7).

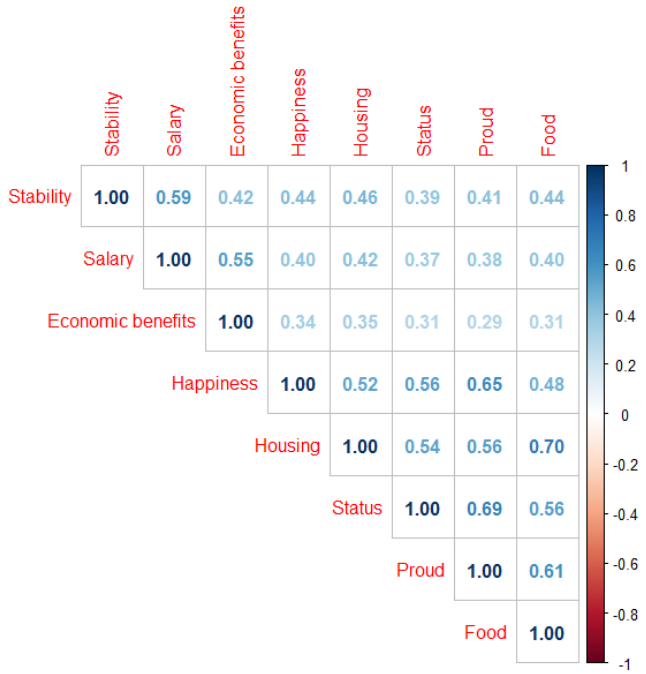

Figure 7: Correlation matrix (Q71R1 to Q71R8)

To test the internal consistency of the survey items that measure the economic and non-economic motivations to pursue a career in the Armed Forces, we used R "psych" package. We could find a .88 Cronbach alpha score, which suggests a high level of consistency. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin factor adequacy also reached a high score of .87. Table 3 depicts the reliability of the scale if each item is dropped from the analysis.

Variable	Alpha if item is deleted
Stability (Q71R1)	.86
Salary (Q71R2)	.86
Economic benefits (Q71R3)	.88
Happiness (Q71R4)	.86
Housing (Q71R5)	.85
Status (Q71R6)	.86
Proud (Q71R7)	.85
Food (Q71R8)	.86

Table 3. Reliability if an item is dropped

Usage notes

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, cities across the world faced economic decline as an unintended consequence of social distancing measures, with young people hit by a combination of school and university closures, shortage of employment positions, a decrease in informal labour options which mainly rely on the circulation of people,[20] and lack of work experience. In situations of high unemployment, military recruitment thrives as it is of relatively easy access, focused on young people, and almost universally present. The growth of militarisation in places like Brazil sorely lacks a nuanced interpretation related to economic opportunity. This research adds to studies on youth, health crisis, and military recruitment in a time of socioeconomic decline. This is especially the case in Brazil, given that it had one of the strongest incidences of Covid-19 cases and deaths in the world (https://covid19.who.int), and also had one of the longest school and university closure intervals.[21] In addition, users of this dataset may want to compare our results with those of countries with military traditions, such as the United States. Although our dataset and research routinely conducted in the US are different in terms of questions asked and period when questionnaires were filled out, the much higher propensity to join the military in Brazil in relation to numbers found in the US presses for analysis. Other Latin American countries which, like Brazil, were governed by a military dictatorship in the recent past, are also comparable. Some Latin American countries with a military past, unlike Brazil, have longstanding truth commissions and persecuted perpetrators of torture; it would be interesting to see whether in those countries military careers are less attractive in a similar context of economic decline and health crisis.

This unique dataset, containing answers from all five Brazilian regions, adds to existing data on military career growth in Brazil, which has been studied mainly in relation to budget allocation,[22] political appointment[23, 24] and electoral growth.[25] Because our data were collected through a survey, answers given by respondents may be inaccurate. Unfortunately, it is not possible to easily conduct ethnography or other validation methods with young people across all regions of Brazil in a short time interval, particularly amid a pandemic that curbed social interactions. To diminish the risk of inaccurate answers to questions that could make young people uncomfortable, particularly in the presence of others, we added the option: “Prefer not to say”. We have also mitigated inaccuracies by designing a questionnaire that was based on an extensive literature review of youth economic perspectives, military recruitment and the Brazilian Armed Forces. We also had expert interviews with members of military units in Brazil and researchers on military careers to enquire about key aspects affecting the choice to enter a military career to make sure that our questionnaire was accurate. We thank those individuals below, in our acknowledgments session.

This dataset represents a baseline for further research as it demonstrates how young people perceived the labour market during the Covid-19 pandemic. In a large country such as Brazil, we were prepared for nuanced views per region and designed a questionnaire that is regionally representative. As discussed above, in poorer regions there is a stronger inclination to join military careers. We asked about religion and religion practices (frequency), aspirations of young

people, views regarding conservative statements and socioeconomic data, which can aid researchers in different fields. This questionnaire is therefore useful for scientists interested in diverse perspectives of youth at a time when employment opportunities were in decline, schools and universities were still largely closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Brazilian economy faced inflation and recession.

One limitation to highlight is that although the Armed Forces and Military Police forces had moments of acting together historically, they are separate forces and each of the 26 states and the Federal District has its own Military Police force that works under state jurisdiction. For this reason, the different states can have a different perception of the police, which can be better paid or use less lethal force in different states. A national survey such as ours is not able to capture perceptions of each state's Military Police.

Code availability

To increase transparency and reproducibility, the code and data are publicly available online (link restricted during the peer review process). All data cleaning and statistical analyses were performed in R, version 4.1.2.

Acknowledgements

Andreza Aruska de Souza Santos thanks the University of Oxford, John Fell Fund, grant number M3D00180 for sponsoring this research. We also thank Rafa, Adilson Paes and Joao Roberto Martins Filho for the expert conversations held that helped us to better understand military careers and practices in Brazil. This work was also supported by CAPES PROEX grant number 1143/2019.

Author contributions

AADSS contributed with the survey design, data interpretation, writing and revisions. AADSS and GF were responsible for the questionnaire design. VCO, AA and DBFF did the analysis of the survey results. DBFF did the data cleaning and statistical analyses. All authors read and revised this manuscript.

Competing interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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