

THE PROFESSIONAL SOLDIER IN SPAIN.

Recruitment in Spain: A Sociological Research.

Captain Dtor Narciso MICHAVILA
PhD on Sociology and Degree on Military Statistics
Statistics Unit of the Spanish Army &
University Institute General Gutierrez Mellado
michavila@et.mde.es

Abstract: How are the professional soldiers and sailors of the Spanish Armed Forces? Which is their motivation? Are they really professional? Which is the key difference between a conscript and a professional soldier. The tasks they do, are different from the civil employments?

These are some of the questions I tried to answer in a sociological research developed from 1996 to the present year at the Complutense University of Madrid. The research, titled EL SOLDADO PROFESIONAL EN ESPAÑA, is a Ph D thesis on sociology that analyses: The professionalisation process, from a historic and compared point of view, the profile and motivation of the young people applying for the Armed Forces, and the interaction between public opinion and professionalisation. The main results of the thesis, related to the recruitment of volunteer troops, are presented in this paper which emphasizes on the importance of knowing the socioeconomic characteristics of a society to understand the soldier and candidate's motivation and behaviour.

Key words: Recruitment, Spanish Armed Forces, motivation, professionalisation, volunteer troops.

1. The Research: Sources and Methodology.

- **Quantitative sources**, micro data of analysed **surveys**:
 - *Profile and motivation of enlisted volunteer* (sample: 6,400 of the three branches).
 - *Profile and motivation of recruits volunteer* (sample: 6,000 of the three branches).
 - *The National Defence and the Professionalisation of the Armed Forces I to IV*, four opinion polls designed by the governmental Centre of Sociological Researches (CIS) among the Spanish population (sample: 2,500 every year from 1997 to 2000; 700 devoted to youngsters between 16 and 24).
 - *National Identity and Culture of Defence* carried out by the private Institute of Opinion ASEP (sample: 1,200 every year from 1995 to 1998).

- Apart from this secondary data, I designed several surveys for volunteer forces, and another to youngsters studying in pre-military academies.
- Results of every recruiting call since 1995 with information about: Gender, age, province, educational level, Unit and post requested¹.
- **Qualitative sources:**
 - Deep interviews with soldiers, sailors, relations and commanders².
 - Focus groups among soldiers and commanders.
 - Seven female recruits' live stories.
 - Participant observation as a trainer of volunteer forces and as a captain commanding a company of professional privates.
- From the **bibliography revision**, we could highlight:
 - The materiel produced by the Spanish Parliamentary Commission for the Professionalisation of the Armed Forces (1996-1998).
 - Grey literature produced by Spanish, French and Portuguese Departments of Defence.

The analysis of the professional soldier motivation has to be founded in the knowledge of the transformation of western societies and the role of its armies. The study of conscription birth and death in the modern armies provide an broad vision of professionalisation phenomena. From this point of view I conclude that the complexity to lead the war forced the armies to professionalize the officers corps, the complication to manage it, compelled them to professionalize the intermediate commanders (NCOs, sous-officiers, suboficiales). The difficulty to execute the war presses on the armies to make the troops professional.

In sum, the same way than the 19th century saw the professionalisation of the officers and, in the case of Spain, the 20th century has watched the same process among the *suboficiales*, the beginning century will see the culmination of the professionalisation of the troops. **The way followed by the enlisted in the process of professionalisation is similar to the path walked by their commanders**, in fact, the process is being made by imitation. Imitation in education, culture, labour conditions, benefits, responsibility and so on.

¹ Currently, the Statistics Unit of the Army is data mining a database containing more than 300,000 applications for the Armed Forces from 1994 to the present year.

² The guide of the interview was used also to interrogate via internet some soldiers I didn't actually get to know, the means proved to be very useful.

2. Understanding the Spanish Armed Forces professionalisation.

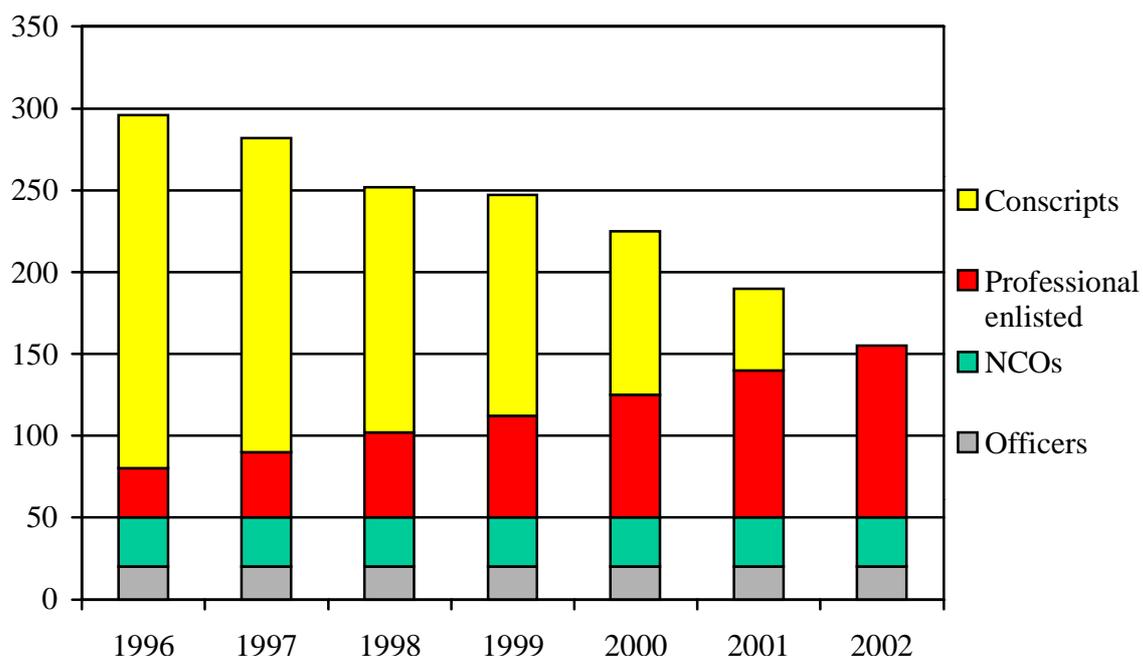
At least three elements have to be present to understand the professionalisation process in Spain: her recent history, the structure of the military personnel and the characteristics of the Spanish society.

The critical dates of the Spanish Armed Forces' recent history are the following:

- 1975 democratic transition begins after General Franco's death.
- 1982 Spain enters NATO. Socialist Party starts governing.
- 1986 Referendum on permanency within the NATO structure.
- 1991 The Parliament approves a mixed model of Military Service: volunteer men and women, and conscripts. Spanish Armed Forces take part in operations abroad.
- 1996 President Aznar announces his decision to complete the professionalisation. At this moment, there were 30,000 professional troops.
- 1998 The great calls begins. It's to be fulfilled some 17,000 new posts every year, apart from the relieves.
- 2001 The Compulsory Service finishes, with more than 80,000 professional enlisted, 3,000 of them assigned in international operations.

The proportion of permanent personnel, both military and civil, has traditionally very small, which means a great effort to replace the conscription with all volunteer enlisted. The transformation into a complete professional Armed Forces requires the recruitment of almost 25,000 youths every year, in an period of decreasing young population (from 1996 to 2006 the amount of Spaniard teenagers will decrease 40 %) and better employment and economics perspectives.

Evolution of the Spanish military personnel.



Source: *Memoria de la legislatura V y VI del Ministerio de Defensa.*

3. Candidate's profile.

Age: Being the legal age to apply, between 18 and 26, the proportions of candidates applying for the first time are as follows³:

	Male	Female
18	29	25
19	23	19
20	16	15
21	11	12
22	8	10
23	6	8
24	4	7
25	3	4
Total	100	100

Gender⁴: The proportion of women has increased from 12 per cent, five years ago, to the current 25 per cent, which means more than 8,000 per year. Female candidates apply, in relative terms, more to clerical, administrative and logistical posts, they are older than their male comrades, have a higher educational level and give more importance to expressive incentives.

Family situation: Nine out of ten candidates still live at their parents' home, which is normal, considering the average age of emancipation to be over 29 years for sons, and one year younger for daughters.

Educational level: Although the current general image of the soldier is that of an unprepared young man or woman, the data confirms the general trend for all the volunteer armies: More homogeneous, but with a higher average than the national one.

On the other side, as candidates who fail the exams have less educational level than the standard candidate, if they try to apply again (which is true in a 60% of cases) the average educational level will be reduced.

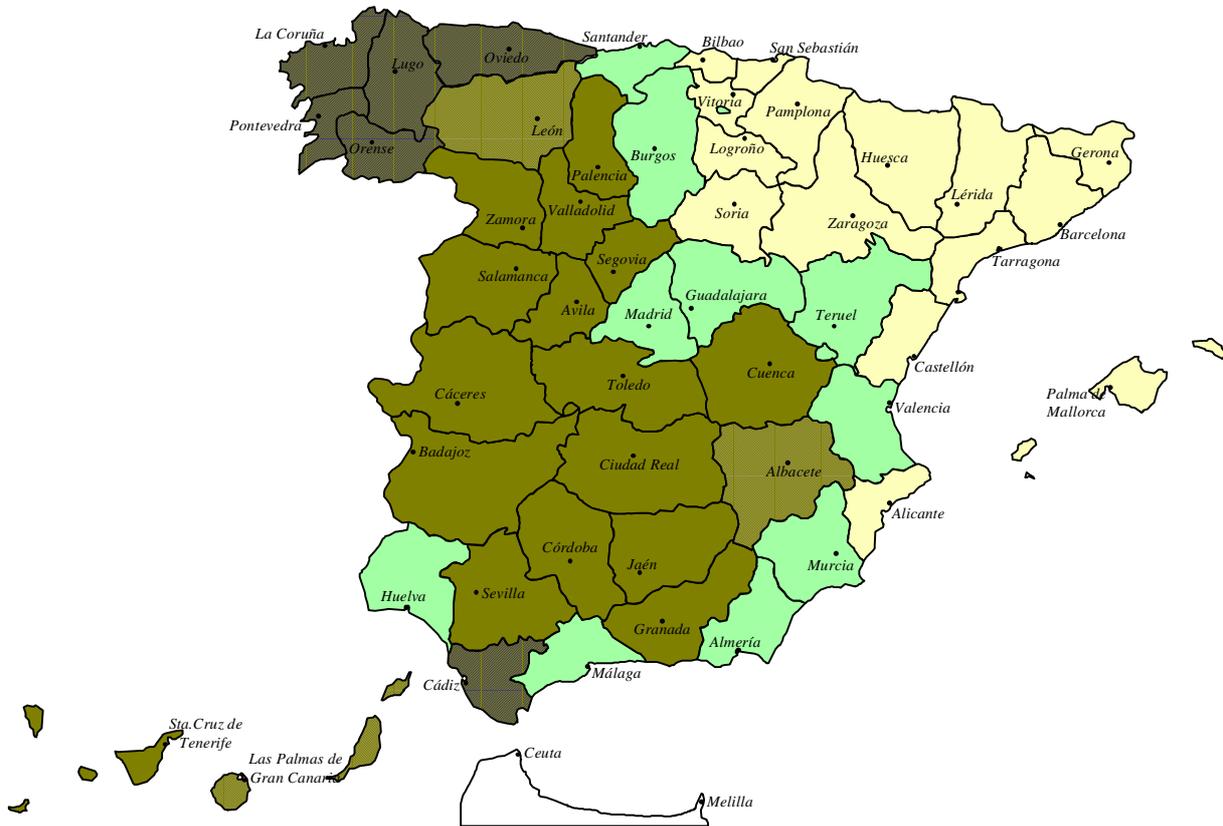
Employment situation: Half of the applicants are unemployed, a proportion that is much higher than the national standard, despite the traditional high unemployment rates in Spain.

The study of factors related to proportions of young people eager to wear the military uniform within the fifty provinces shows that the rate of unemployed youths, the standard of living, and the average sympathy towards the Armed Forces are significantly associated. Statistics models can be implemented to predict the young people proportion applying, in every province, for each branch: Army, Navy and Air Forces. The models based on unemployment and standard of living manage to explain the 53 % of the information, while those based on unemployment and average sympathy towards the Armed Forces explain the 63 %.

³ Not showed here the proportion of age 26, because it depends on the call date, in any case is lower than the preceding 25. In 2000 the upper age was increased to 28 and allowed to apply hundreds of university licensed.

⁴ Since 1999 there are no legal restrictions for any posts due to the gender of the military person.

Geographical distribution: The study of the different factors associated with the attraction towards the military job proposal, allows the segmentation of the Country in three different zones for recruitment purposes⁵. The youngsters of the Southwest zone are more interested in enrolling, while those in the Northeast (the industrial and more economic developed provinces) are less fond of the military life. In the middle there is an intermediate zone.



The different zones (high, intermediate and low attraction) concentrates approximately the 55 , 33 and 11 per cent of all the 180,000 candidates between 1994 and 2000, while their young population is 39, 28 and 32 respectively.

⁵ The segmentation has been developed with cluster analysis and segmentation analysis using, initially, more than 30 parameters. The division seeks to minimize the diversity of socioeconomic parameters within the three zones and maximize those parameters among them.

4. Candidate's motivation.

As the more relevant results on the study of candidate's motivation can be mentioned the following:

- Candidate's **motivation is dual** because it presents expressive (vocational) and instrumental elements, like salary, unemployment benefits, health assistance, and so. Each of the elements, rather than expel, they enforces each other. Vocation has to be considered as a generic attraction towards tasks outdoors, in identified collectives, wearing uniform...
- The itinerary followed by the candidates is more tactical than strategic since it consists of **immediate decisions**. The current youngsters live the present and don't pay attention to the future, labour stability provides him the opportunity to enjoy the present without worrying about the future.
- The crises of young people, nowadays, are **crises of identity**. The work of the young person in rank and files is a fight for finding his/her own identity by means of the current social sign of excellency: The profession.

Cultural characteristics of a society have to be taken into account in order to understand the soldier and candidate's motivation. In Spanish case⁶, the specific social features that explain the recruitment of young people are:

- **The role of the family, as a means of information and support of the youth's labour decisions, is vital.** It has to be taken into account that in the meridian societies, the itinerary of emancipation has these keystones: getting a job and independence from parents, generally to get married. In Spain the emancipation uses to take place at the age of 29, for males, and two years earlier in the case of females. That's the reason why nine out of ten privates selected by the Armed Forces are still living in their parents' home and why most of them stay single for a long period. In this sense, the mother's role is critical, as a provider of information and support (or prohibition) of youngster's decisions.
- **The predisposition of the workers to move to another residence area is getting lower and lower.** So, in the case of the Army, the closeness of the military Unit to the residence is a factor of decisive importance for the candidates. Sixty per cent of the applicants apply for posts in their own province (one of the fifty administrative zones in the Country).
- **The labour market is internal, which means that the workers enter an enterprise developing poorly paid tasks but looking mainly for stability.** In this sense the Armed Forces are looked as a provider of a long-term job, especially important in a country with so many young people on the dole. When they realise that the contract is not eventual and the possibilities to get a vacancy as a NCO or as a permanent soldier are minimal they quit.

All these features can be reduced to one specific characteristic of the Spanish society that I have called the *biographical inertia*. These concept means that in a society where the family links are so strong and the role of the civil society so weak (compare with central and northern European, and Anglo-Saxon societies) the individuals are more reluctant to change their residence place, their marital status or their jobs.

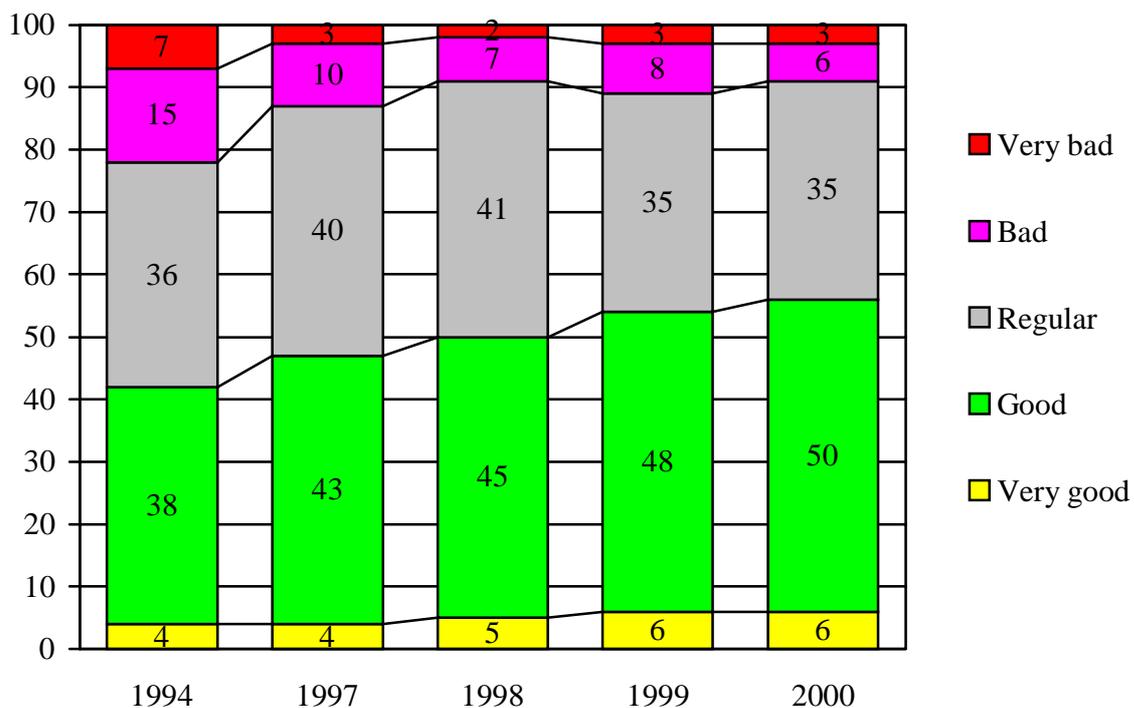
⁶ Also in Portugal, as I've been able to check, and probably in Italy.

5. Public Opinion.

Public opinion has been a key factor in the Spanish Armed Forces professionalisation process. The favorable attitude towards the professional model was spreading across the Spanish society during the 80s and the beginning of the 90s to becoming widely held, specially among the youngsters. The amount of conscious objectors raised every year turning out to be almost half of the draw.

The professionalisation process is, in reverse, shaping the Spanish public opinion. This process, along with the participation in international peacekeeping operations, and the woman's integration, are causes of a better Armed Forces image among the Spanish Society. The most critical age group is currently between 30 and 45, they were teenagers during the democratic Transition (with the would-be *coup de etat* in 1981) and were young during the NATO referendum in 1986. The present juvenile people have a better view of the Spanish military than the preceding generation: they don't see the barracks as a compulsory point of pass, and have an idea of the military people, man or woman, based on his/her participation in international humanitarian missions.

Evolution of the Spanish opinion about the Armed Forces:



Note: 20 % non-respondents.

Source: *National defense and Armed Forces Professionalisation I to IV*, Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (n=2.500 every year).

In general terms, it could be verified a constant trend to a better view of the Armed Forces and its members, the general approval of the permanency in international organizations (NATO, WEU, etc) and the participation in Petersberg missions. Meanwhile the traditional opposition to assign financial resources for the Defense is stable and the attention for the National Defense matters is slightly decreasing. However, my own data confirm the permanent interest of a small minority for international and defense affairs, which turn into majority before specific and critical events, such as the Kosovo conflict.

6. Bibliography.

- BACHMAN, Jerald G. et al. (1998): "Does enlistment propensity predict accession? High school seniors' plans and subsequent behavior" in *Armed Forces & Society* vol 25, nº 1, autumn-98, pp. 58-80.
- MINISTERIO DA DEFESA NACIONAL DE PORTUGAL (2000): *Inquerido sociológico aos Militares Voluntarios e Contratados do Exército Português*, Lisboa, Centro de Psicologia Aplicada do Exército, 89 p.
- DE MIGUEL, Amando (2000): *Dos generaciones de jóvenes 1960-1998*, Madrid, Instituto de Juventud, 446 p.
- ELZO Javier et al. (1999): *Jóvenes españoles 99*, Madrid, Fundación Santa María, 492 p.
- FUNDACIÓN PARA LA MODERNIZACIÓN DE ESPAÑA (2001): *La sociedad española ante la Defensa y los Conflictos Internacionales*, Madrid, 189 p.
- HOCKEY, John (1986): *Squaddies: portrait of a subculture*, Exeter, University of Exeter, 184 p.
- HUESCA, Ana (1997): "Los jóvenes y las Fuerzas Armadas" in *Fuerzas Armadas y sociedad civil. Conflicto de valores*, Cuadernos de Estrategia nº 89, Madrid, Instituto de Estudios Estratégicos, pp.113-122.
- INSTITUTO DE ESTUDIOS ESTRATÉGICOS (1998): *Profesionalización de las Fuerzas Armadas: los problemas sociales*, Cuadernos de estrategia nº 98, Madrid, 221 p.
- INSTITUTO DE ESTUDIOS ESTRATÉGICOS (1999): *La profesionalización de las Fuerzas Armadas*, Cuadernos de estrategia nº 104, Madrid, 281 p.
- KILBURN, Rebecca & Jacob A. KLERMAN (1999): *Enlistment decision in the 1990s. Evidence from individual-level data*, Washington D.C., RAND's National Defense Research Institute, 87 p.
- KIRBY, Sheila Nataraj y Harry J. THIE (1996): *Enlistment personnel management. A historical perspective*, Washington D.C., RAND's National Defense Research Institute, 160 p.
- LADA, Emmanuelle & Chantal NICOLE-DRANCOURT (1998): *Image (s) de l'armée et insertion des jeunes*, París, Centre d'études en sciences sociales de la Défense, 127 p.
- LAGUNA, Francisco (1996): "Factores demográficos y sociológicos que condicionan la profesionalización" in *La profesionalización en los Ejércitos*, Madrid, Fundación Cánovas del Castillo, p. 99-137.
- MANIGART, Philippe (1990): "The decline of the mass armed forces in Belgium, 1900-1985" en FORUM nº 9, Munich, *Sozialwissenschaftliches Institut der Bundeswehr* (SOWI), pp. 37-64.
- MEULEN, Jan S. Van der & Philippe MANIGART (1997): "Zero draft in the Low Countries: the final shift to the All-volunteer Force", en *Armed Forces & Society* vol 16, nº 2, invierno-97, pp. 315-332.
- MICHAVILA, Benjamín (Coord.) (1998): *La sociedad española y su defensa*, Madrid, Fundación para el análisis y los estudios sociales, 274 p.
- MICHAVILA, Narciso (1999): "Análisis de la motivación de la tropa profesional mediante análisis de segmentación" in *Boletín de Estadística del Ejército de Tierra*, nº 77, may-99, pp. 15-26.
- MICHAVILA, Narciso (2000): "¿Existe conciencia de defensa en España?" in *Boletín de Estadística del Ejército de Tierra*, nº 78, sep-99, pp. 15-26.
- MICHAVILA, Narciso (2001): *El soldado profesional en España*, Madrid, Universidad Complutense, Ph D thesis on sociology.
- MURRAY, Michael P. & Laurie MACDONALD (1999): *Recent recruiting trends and their implications for models of enlistment supply*, Washington D.C., RAND's National Defense Research Institute, 83 p.
- ORVIS, Bruce R. & Martin T. GAHART (1990): *Enlistment among applicants for military service*, Washington D.C., RAND's National Defense Research Institute, 174 p.
- ORVIS, Bruce R., Martin T. GAHART & James R. HOSEK (1989): *Predicting enlistment for recruiting market segments*, Washington D.C., RAND's National Defense Research Institute, 30 p.
- RAVIART, Christian (1997): "Les ressources humaines de l'armée de terre: une nouvelle politique" en *Defense Nationale*, nov-97, París, Comité d'études de defense nationale, pp. 49-60.