



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

**The Ultimate Citizen:**

**Bourdieu & Gramsci on Military Service and Acculturation Among Latino Men**

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by

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## **The Ultimate Citizen:**

### **Bourdieu & Gramsci on Military Service and Acculturation Among Latino Men**

The 2024 presidential election saw a massive turnout in favor of the Republican candidate among Latino men; 54% voted for Donald Trump in 2024, compared to 36% in 2020 (Edison Research 2024). Indisputably, Latino men are increasingly leaning toward conservative ideologies and policies. This comes at a crucial turning point when historically, Latinos aligned themselves with the Democratic Party, due to policies that aimed to serve the interest of the broader Latino community (Manuel Krogstad, Edwards, and Hugo Lopez 2022). Considering previous studies, scholars have pointed out that individuals who serve in the military are far more likely to vote conservatively (Chatagnier 2022). Synthesizing this all together, Latino men in the military may offer insight as to why this conservative shift is occurring in the United States. Military service causes Latino men to reproduce conservative narratives as a means to legitimate citizenship and protect themselves from discrimination primarily due to their marginalized status in the United States. Latinos<sup>1</sup> in the military seeking to overcome their marginalized identity in American society, become disillusioned with social ideals that may prove to be ineffective, but continue to invest in this “pseudo-naturalization process.” The militarization of Latinos can be analyzed through the theoretical frameworks of Pierre Bourdieu and Antonio Gramsci. These frameworks aid this case study by analyzing how militant Latinos reproduce militant social structures with conservative beliefs—done both at the conscious and unconscious levels—along with racially dominant beliefs that become internalized upon the social actor. In addition, these frameworks can divulge how these beliefs become impenetrable, causing Latinos to invest heavily in conservative notions that assume genuine results. The following theoretical concepts

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<sup>1</sup> The word *Latinos* here is defined as a male individual who identifies as Latiné hereafter. Not meant to be used as a panethnic label.

highlight how militant Latinos are deeply committed to proving their American identity. Their solution is to enlist in the military, where they transform themselves via military interaction, as the military catalyzes fostering a sense of belonging in the United States.

Latinos join the military as a pathway for social mobility, later embracing assimilation archetypes and adopting conservative narratives. Military service is beneficial to individuals who derive from working-class backgrounds as service increases economic mobility. Bradford (2021:5) notes that “Latinx men and women join the military to gain technical training, secure a steady income, and obtain health insurance.” The military offers Latinos resources that may be difficult to obtain based on limited social capital. This new profound relationship with the military becomes intimate, as military service compensates Latinos with the chance to move up on the social mobility ladder. In addition to this economic advantage, military service also provides Latinos with a path to elevate one’s citizenship. While Latinos are ascribed a marginalized status in the American hierarchy, the military portrays itself as attractive, “[...]seducing young people into its ranks precisely because it is seen as an important avenue for social mobility and full citizenship rights (Pérez 2020:181). Pérez observes military service as a path to citizenship as a necessary mechanism of Latino inclusion in the nation as citizenship has been constructed to be exclusionary and Eurocentric. The highest symbolic realization of American patriotism is equated with a straight white, native-born warrior (Bradford 2021), whereas Latinos are seen as foreign. To overcome this exclusion, Latinos seek to embody the role of a citizen-soldier, viewed as the epitome of the American citizen hierarchy. Academic research on Latinos in the military has found that Latinos not only join the military to overcome their foreign identity but that military service is also associated with acculturation. Leal (2003) indicates that military service promotes the acculturation of Latinos as English becomes the

dominant language at home and a higher density of Anglo friends. From this perspective, Latinos are subordinate in a multicultural setting, subsequently changing original cultural patterns to a hegemonic one. Latino acculturation can be viewed as a survival mechanism to avoid discrimination and create an American persona, as Bradford (202:7) notes:

“[.]Latin American immigrants and US-born Latinx people continue to be lambasted for everything from taking away from white American citizens to laziness and reliance on state-funded education, healthcare, and welfare benefits, as well as their hyper-fertility, criminality, and supposed refusal to assimilate or learn English.”

In *Proving Patriotismo* (2021), Ramos-Zayas examines the relational dynamic between Puerto Ricans and the United States to explore what she coins as the “politics of worthiness.”

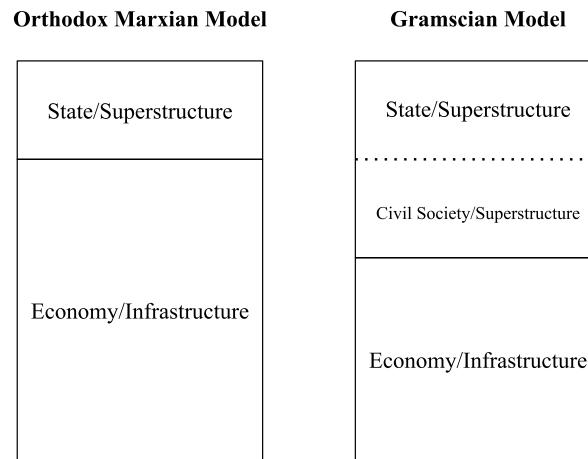
Ramos-Zayas notes how Boricuas are evaluated and judged on their loyalty, identity, and contributions to the U.S., the same mechanism that Latinos encounter in American society, being perceived as domestically foreign, acculturation is necessary to overcome discrimination. With limited opportunities to express patriotism and loyalty, the military allows Latinos to display their “[.]rights of citizenship in ways that would be less intensely questioned by the non-Latino population in the United States.” (Monforti and McGlynn 2021:100). As Latinos find themselves in dominant white culture, so comes the adoption of conservative values. With a political party that praises itself on preserving American values, conservative ideologies are idealized for patriotism and an invitation to American society. Chatagnier (2022) argues that military service transforms soldiers, noting that even those who do not enter the military with conservative views may adopt them as a result of their experiences during service. This political shift can be attributed to the military's promotion of conservatism, as the armed forces instill patriotism and enforce conformity, making authoritative positions appealing to conservative leaders. As a result, many Latinos are voluntarily enlisting in the military, often with a predisposition to uphold and honor conservative values.

Perceptions and attitudes are shaped by the military, causing Latino men to ingrain conservative values and norms to affirm their American identity and citizenship. Bourdieu (1977:78) defines the habitus as the internalized, embodied structure of thought-feeling, and actions that shape a social actor's behaviors and perceptions. The habitus is formed through a series of interactions among individuals in a social milieu; encompassing both norms and values. The habitus operates at both the conscious and unconscious levels, in this case, guiding Latino soldiers' actions and social responses. Integrating this, Latino men are shaped by the military as Latinos internalize their new social environment so thoroughly, that they act in ways that reproduce militant social order unknowingly. Individuals in social structures are both producers and reproducers of objective meaning, their "[...]actions and world are the product of a *modus operandi* of which he is not the producer and has no conscious mastery, they contain and 'objective intention' [...]" (Bourdieu 1977:79). Actions and understandings of the world are shaped by implicit processes and patterns that the individual themselves didn't construct but a continuation of what was there before. Once acculturation has been fully achieved, Latino soldiers find themselves in a dominant (white) culture, creating a homogeneous social unit with no differences that further internalizes this structure. As Bourdieu mentions, "[t]he objective homogenizing of group or class habitus which results from the homogeneity of the conditions of existence is what enables practices to be objectively harmonized without any intentional calculation or conscious reference to a norm and mutually adjusted in the absence of any direct interaction or, *a fortiori*, explicit co-ordination." (Bourdieu 197:80). Soldiers altogether share similar social conditions in the military, behaviors and practices naturally align with one another. This conformity happens effortlessly as each soldier parallels what the other one values. This is seen in Bradford's (2021:17) participants who served in the Armed Forces, where she found that

60% of veterans said that the military transformed them to become more patriotic with a deeper appreciation for U.S. history and “nation’s founding principles and institutions.” Consistent with the points made, Latino soldiers internalize military cultural and ideological constructs, which are subconsciously imposed upon them as they strive to prove their American citizenship and belonging. Outlined above, authoritative positions appeal to conservative leaders along with conservative militant values. Gramsci notes that individuals exist in what is known as ideological production. Members of a dominant class produce ideas that are materialized as homogenous and democratic, however, these ideas are coercive and imposed in nature. This process is hegemony, where members of a subordinate class are robbed of consent to produce ideas and naively adopt dominant ideals as their own. Gramsci’s comparative study between Russia and the West effectively demonstrates hegemony in praxis.

“In Russia the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was proper relation between State and civil society, and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was revealed. The State was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks[..]” (Gramsci 1971:238).

In this excerpt, Russia rules by force, where power is vested in the ruling classes. Subordinate members in society can effectively trace where power originates and the root cause of social inequity. Because the State was practically exposed, Russia was met with a Marxist coup d’état that overthrew the State. However, in the West, we see the complementary roles of the State and civil society.

**Figure 1**

Contrary to Russia, the West rules via social and political order as a seamless combination of force and consent. Dominant interests are popularized to be the interests of society, allowing them to run rampant by relying on consent. Interests in military service are subjected upon Latino soldiers as they value these ideas to be natural and fair. Latinos in “[..]military service promises to redeem those who possess[..]‘deficient citizenship,’ by imbuing them with the Machiavellian virtues of patriotism, selflessness, and a willingness to sacrifice oneself for the ‘military glory’ of the nation.” (Pérez 2020:170). Ideals like patriotism and nationalism are shaped by what the military considers socially acceptable. As an extension of the state, the military not only popularizes these constructed ideals of citizenship but also reinforces their influence, embedding these values within Latino soldiers.

Latino soldiers blindly invest in the military based on presupposed promises to achieve belonging and American citizenship with no assurances of success. Outcomes of military service motivate Latinos to join the military, as seen with economic and social mobility but also provide the opportunity to prove their American citizenship as marginalized individuals. It is here where Latinos become disillusioned with the military, not only are they involved in a risky investment,

but also partake in these socially constructed truths because everyone deems them to be natural. This is what Bourdieu considers *illusio*, the investment in the game and outcome. *Illusio* becomes the driving force that motivates social actors to engage in fields, driven by their belief in the promised benefits. Just as Latinos strive to become the epitome of a citizen social hierarchy, it's never really promised, yet the idea of it is enough for many to enlist. As Pérez mentions, “[t]hese neoliberal visions shape people’s active attempts to lay claim to first-class citizenship, but also exact a high price for respectability and belonging. The dreams of social mobility[...]are often what animate young people to consider military service.” (Pérez 2020:182). Latinos seeking to rebuttal racialized scripts depicting them as “illegal” and “lazy”, use the military to be seen as equals once service is over. However, the probability of being seen as equal among white citizens is unknown, despite serving and adopting conservative narratives to ensure the outcome. There is this cathartic need to be included in the American binary, where one sits with citizens and the other is outcasted for being foreign. Latinos utilize patriotism to deepen their connection with citizenship in American society as it is attributed to Bourdieu’s concept of *doxa*, the unquestioned truth in societies. Bourdieu defines *doxa* as “[...]the relationship of immediate adherence that is established in practice a habitus and the field to which it is attuned, the pre-verbal taking-for-granted of the world that flows from a practical sense.” (Bourdieu 1990:68). Bourdieu explains that *doxa* are beliefs that are not questioned due to them being internalized in everyday life and can be seen in patriotism. *Proving Patriotismo* distinguishes between two types of patriotism: blind and constructive. Whereas constructive patriotism is a sense of questioning the American government to achieve positive change, blind patriotism “[...]involves demonstrating allegiance to the country without questioning a nation’s policies or politics.” (Monforti and McGlynn 2021:98). Latinos in the military are involved with *doxic*



procedures as their patriotism are derived from service, making their involvement in the government be a source of pride. Placed in civil societies, ideas imposed upon Latinos appearing to be their own, are never questioned, and assume what the government does is sincere and in the interest of the citizens in the United States. This is demonstrated in blind patriotism as scholars found it to be related to:

“[...]‘perceptions of foreign threat, perceived importance of symbolic behaviors, and selective exposure to pro-U.S. information,’ as well as conservative ideology and Republican Party identification [and] defer to an authority figure and support them unconditionally.” Monforti and McGlynn (2021:99)

The applications of *illlusio* and *doxa* among Latinos in the military implicitly internalize these conservative narratives, as their actions prove to be committed to this sector of citizenship by unrealistic expectations and unattainable goals. The more Latinos buy into this field and normalize these behaviors, the less they will be aware of themselves being deposited. This inherently affects Latino men as they perceive the world to be against them and equate the military as the sole answer to have them be on the *right* side of society.

The military serves as a “pseudo-naturalization” process for Latino men in the military, aiming to prove their citizenship in the United States. There is a far more complex process that happens in the military that goes beyond Latinos attempting to find their place in society. Latino enlistment is the predisposition for the integration and internationalization of conservative narratives and rebranding themselves as true American citizens. Military service is believed to grant full citizenship among Latinos and remove their foreign identities. Latinos are acculturated into adopting hegemonic conservative practices. Though initially conservative practices may not seem ideal, military service allows Latinos to adopt these beliefs gradually. Latinos reproduce social structures in the military as seen with Bourdieu and Gramsci’s notions of the *habitus* and civil society. Latino soldiers internalize military norms that implicitly align with a conservative

culture. These dominant ideas are imposed on Latinos to embrace fully and appear as their own. Enlistment is done to achieve a sense of belonging in the United States, driven by the promise of proving the worthiness of being a citizen. It is not guaranteed that military service can deliver these outcomes as Latino soldiers blindly follow a mirage of what could be. Anticipating the benefits, Latinos internalize patriotism without questioning it because it's deemed to achieve acceptance. Latino men are transformed into the very people who resist their recognition and reproduce the discriminatory systems that marginalize them. Latino men in the military seek refuge in conservative ideals hoping to hide their marginalization and portray themselves as equals to a dominant class. The United States was originally founded on the principle of freedom from oppressive rule. In their conquest to fully embody American ideals, Latino men in the military fail to uphold the values that they so desperately seek to hold.

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