



Sir! I'd Rather Go to School, Sir!

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Key Highlights

- Although **Military service** is a popular method of army recruitment for governments of developing countries that are particularly prone to conflict, it has been under-researched.
- This study uses a **discontinuity** in military service exemption law in an **under-researched country, Iran**, to measure fear of conscription at **peace times**.
- In Iran, sole sons whose father is above 59 will get exemption from the service.
- Sole sons whose father's age is less than 59 can use a loophole: they can go to college until their father gets to 59 and then get exemption.
- Using **reg. discontinuity**, this paper shows that as a result of the law, sole sons whose father is a bit younger than 59 are 13 percentage points (20%) **more likely to go to college**.
- It then uses this result to estimate the returns to college education free of bias.

Why is this important?

Although **Military service** is a popular method of army recruitment for governments of developing countries, it has been under-researched.

Despite the importance of military service in **developing** countries, there is almost no research on it. The literature on developed countries is also mostly during **wartime**. It includes the seminal work by Angrist (1990), and all the subsequent research, as well as Card and Lemieux (2001), Bauer et al. (2012), and Card & Cardoso (2012).

This is the first estimation of fear of conscription in a developing country (and any country at peace times). This paper also provides the first estimation of return to education in the MENA region free of bias. Returns to college education is an **important policy issue** in MENA as they are widely perceived to be low.

Method and Data

Between 1999 and 2010, sole sons whose fathers were 59 and above, when they were 18, got exemption from military service in Iran.

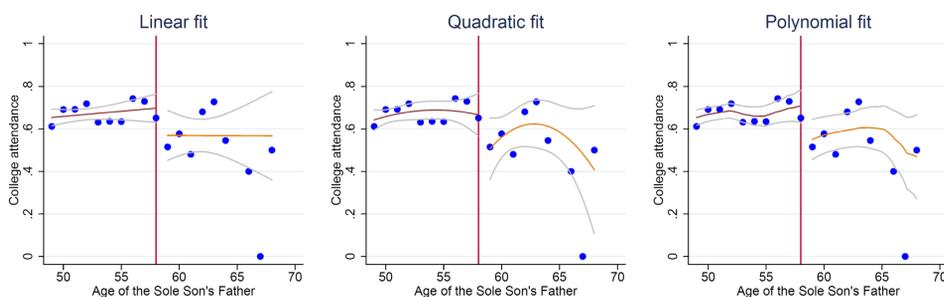
Sole sons whose fathers were 58 or younger could go to school until their fathers get to 59 and then get exemption.

So there should be a discontinuity in college attainment rate at father's age of 58-59 for sole sons.

Data: Iranian 2011 Census. Over 1.5 million observations, but we need sole sons above age 18 whose father is old enough and the sons are still living with their parents: only **1431 sole sons** were found. The sample of identified sole sons are more educated than the average population of their age.

The Most Important Result

College Attendance Rate of Sole Sons
(LATE: 13 percentage points)

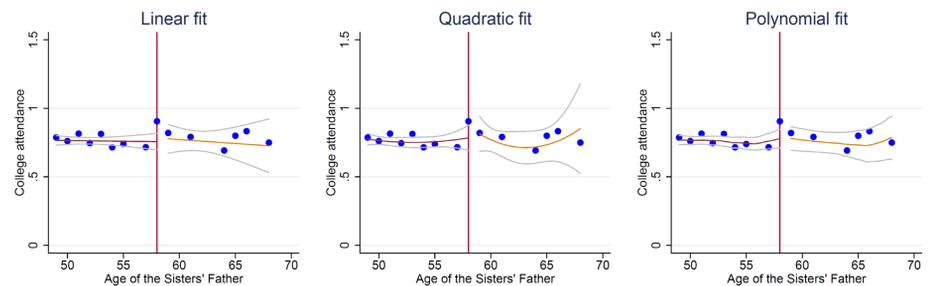


Robustness Check 1

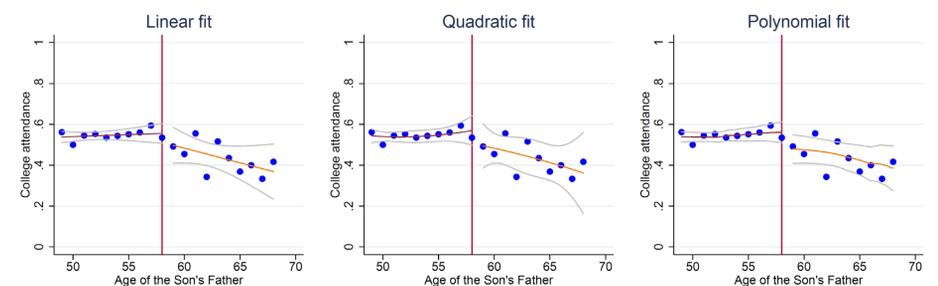
Since the law only applies to sole sons:

- There should be **no effect** for sisters of sole sons.
- There should be **no effect** for sons in multiple-son households.
- There should be **no effect** for sisters of sons in multiple-son households.

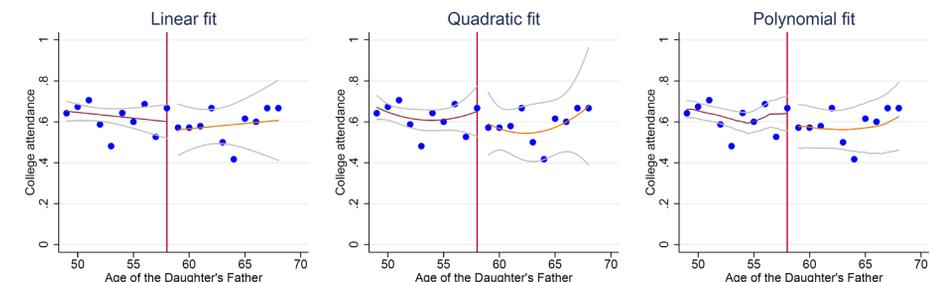
Sisters of Sole Sons (no effect)



Sons in Multiple-Son Households (no effect)



Sisters of Sons in Multiple-Son Households (no effect)



Robustness Checks 2, 3, and 4

No discontinuity in the **number of observations** at the threshold.

All the results above are robust to **changing the bandwidth** to ± 6 , ± 8 , ± 10 , ± 12 , ± 15 years around the threshold.

The results are **robust** to using difference-in-discontinuity.

Returns to Education

Using this discontinuity in college education as an IV, I find the return to college education to be about 37.5%. This is about 60% larger than the OLS estimate.

Conclusions

There is a fear of conscription among the youth even during peace times that entices them to get more education despite their will in order to qualify for exemptions.

Using this natural experiment setting, I estimated the returns to college education, which contrary to the popular belief, turned out to be high in Iran.

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