

The Soldier They Want: Experimental Evidence on Bureaucratic Preferences in Military Recruitment

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Draft version: April 29, 2026

Abstract

How states build their armies shapes how wars are fought, yet we know little about how the officials responsible for recruitment decide whom to pursue. This paper provides the first experimental evidence on this question. Using a large-scale correspondence experiment involving nearly 3,000 municipal offices in Russia, I show that street-level bureaucrats strongly prioritize military recruitment over their everyday responsibilities in both responsiveness and effort, with the effect strongest where regime control over local officials is tightest. Beyond prioritization, bureaucrats exhibit strategic targeting: unemployment and immediate availability drive differential treatment while combat experience does not, consistent with a logic that favors administratively convenient individuals over militarily capable ones. These findings provide the first experimental evidence on demand-side preferences in military recruitment and advance the study of bureaucratic behavior under authoritarian wartime conditions.

1 Introduction

Who fights shapes how wars are fought. A large body of research documents that military effectiveness, unit cohesion, and conduct in war vary systematically with who fills the ranks, with implications for battlefield performance, the treatment of civilians, and the probability of victory (Biddle, 2010; Lyall, 2020; Hoover Green, 2016; Hanson, 2021). Understanding how armed forces are composed is a substantive problem for the study of conflict.

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Despite extensive research on why individuals enlist, we know remarkably little about how state agents decide whom to recruit. Economic incentives, ideological commitments, social networks, and coercion have all been shown to shape individual decisions to join armed forces (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008; Oppenheim et al., 2015; Costa and Kahn, 2003). However, the composition of armed forces is determined not only by the supply of individuals willing to serve but also by the demand constraints on the side of recruiters (Weinstein, 2005). The latter dimension of military formation is often overlooked.

This paper addresses this gap by focusing on street-level bureaucrats and how their incentive structures might affect the military force composition. Individual recruitment decisions are rarely made by those who will fight. In many states, the individuals responsible for identifying and processing recruits are bureaucrats operating far from the battlefield — whether civilian administrators, local officials, or recruitment officers working within institutional hierarchies. Their incentive structures were designed for organizational compliance and output metrics, not military effectiveness. Yet existing research on military recruitment focuses mostly on central policy decisions — the choice between conscription and volunteer systems, the determinants of draft policy, and the organizational design of military manpower (Avant, 2000; Asal et al., 2017) — treating the state as the relevant unit of analysis. The preferences and behaviors of the officials who actually implement recruitment on the ground have attracted comparatively little scholarly attention.

This paper examines recruitment process in Russia during the ongoing war in Ukraine. Following recent developments in the experimental study of bureaucratic behavior (Chen et al., 2016; Slough, 2022; Pfaff et al., 2021; Barceló and Vela Barón, 2024), I conduct a large-scale correspondence experiment in which fictitious individuals send enlistment inquiries to nearly 3,000 municipal offices across Russia. The experimental design varies the characteristics of would-be recruits, including employment status, availability for immediate enlistment, prior military experience, age, and ethnicity, to identify which profiles elicit greater attention from local officials. A benchmarking condition, in which the same municipalities receive routine administrative inquiries unrelated to military service, establishes a baseline for everyday bureaucratic responsiveness and enables a direct comparison between officials'

reactions to regime priorities and their reactions to ordinary citizen requests.

The results reveal that Russian municipal officials strongly prioritize enlistment requests over routine administrative inquiries. They are 1.86 times more likely to respond to enlistment requests relative to inquiries about their everyday responsibilities. I also document higher levels of effort exerted in responses to potential recruits in the form of excess follow-ups and shorter response times. These effects increase substantially in municipalities with higher electoral support for Putin and greater financial dependence on higher levels of government, providing evidence for the proposed mechanism: top-down accountability pressure drives recruitment prioritization at the street level. Among recruit characteristics, employment status and immediate availability drive differential treatment while combat experience does not, consistent with a targeting logic that favors easy-to-get individuals over militarily capable ones. Analysis of response content reveals that officials tailor their replies strategically. They emphasize financial benefits when contacting unemployed applicants and shift to practical enlistment information when applicants signal immediate availability.

This paper makes three contributions. First, this paper advances the study of bureaucratic behavior in authoritarian regimes ([Chen et al., 2005](#); [Rochlitz et al., 2021](#); [Distelhorst and Hou, 2017](#); [Reuter and Robertson, 2012](#)). Consistent with existing findings, it shows that bureaucrats whose career consequences depend on central government evaluation align their behavior with regime priorities ([Chen et al., 2016](#); [Khan et al., 2017](#)). Yet even under tight top-down control, bureaucrats retain discretion that shapes how policy is implemented in practice. Wartime recruitment provides an unusually clear window into both dynamics simultaneously — compliance with regime demands and discretionary targeting of individuals for military service.

Second, it contributes to the literature on conflict processes studying who ends up in fighting forces ([Weinstein, 2005](#); [Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008](#); [Oppenheim et al., 2015](#); [Hanson, 2021](#)). The paper provides the first experimental evidence on demand-side recruitment preferences and shows that bureaucrats act with implicit knowledge of candidates' cost-benefit calculations, targeting individuals whose opportunity costs make enlistment more likely. This directly complements supply-side accounts of who chooses to serve ([Blattman and Annan, 2016](#); [Collier and Hoeffler, 2004](#); [Hall et al., 2019](#); [Dube](#)

and Vargas, 2013). The paper also shifts analytical focus from the state as a unitary actor to the street-level agents who implement recruitment policy.

Third, this research makes a methodological contribution to the study of bureaucratic behavior through audit and correspondence experiments (Pfaff et al., 2021; Barceló and Vela Barón, 2024; Rochlitz et al., 2021). It goes beyond the analysis of bureaucratic responsiveness (extensive margin) and extends the inquiry to bureaucratic effort (intensive margin). The paper recovers clean causal estimates of both margins without conditioning on post-treatment variables (Montgomery et al., 2018; Coppock, 2019).

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. I first review the relevant literature and develop the theoretical argument. I then describe the institutional context of military recruitment in Russia, followed by the experimental design and data. The final sections report the results and conclude.

2 Theoretical Argument

2.1 Answering to the Regime

Bureaucrats are agents delegated to implement policy on behalf of principals, and their behavior is shaped by the incentive structures those principals impose (Gailmard and Patty, 2012). In democratic systems, the politics of governance can be conceived as a chain of principal-agent relationships running from citizens through politicians down to street-level bureaucrats (Moe, 1984). Each link in the chain generates accountability pressure that constrains bureaucratic behavior. This pressure is especially consequential at the street level, where frontline implementers interact directly with citizens and exercise substantial discretion in how they apply policy in practice (Lipsky, 2010). In authoritarian settings, this chain is fundamentally disrupted.

In authoritarian regimes, the bottom-up direction of accountability is structurally suppressed. Citizens lack electoral recourse, civil society is constrained, and bureaucrats face few meaningful sanctions for ignoring constituent demands (De Mesquita et al., 2005). Top-down pressure, by contrast, is strong: career advancement, sanctions, and monitoring flow downward through the hierarchy, tying

bureaucratic behavior to regime priorities (Li and Zhou, 2005; Shih et al., 2012). Top-down oversight drives bureaucratic responsiveness while bottom-up citizen pressure does not, and bureaucrats answer to the regime (Chen et al., 2016).

Under this structure, compliance with regime priorities is individually rational. Performance targets are set from above, and career consequences flow from meeting or failing them (Li and Zhou, 2005; Chen et al., 2005; Khan et al., 2017). Bureaucrats respond to the incentive structure they face, regardless of whether they share the regime's goals (Landa and Tyson, 2017). This alignment is especially pronounced for politically salient tasks, where monitoring is closest and the costs of non-compliance are highest (Buckley et al., 2022).

War represents an extreme case of political salience. Armed conflict concentrates state attention and administrative capacity toward a single overriding goal — prevailing on the battlefield. Under the accountability structure described above, this reordering of regime priorities translates directly into a reordering of bureaucratic behavior. War-related demands become the dominant performance target while routine citizen-facing responsibilities recede. Rational compliance with this shift, rather than ideological commitment to the war effort, drives the behavioral change. One could therefore expect that in a wartime authoritarian regime, bureaucrats will be systematically more responsive to demands aligned with the war effort than to everyday citizen needs, and will exert greater effort in doing so. In pursuit of this goal, bureaucrats will actively seek out and target individuals for military service.

2.2 The Strategic Logic of Recruitment Preferences

Establishing that bureaucrats can be expected to prioritize the war effort leaves open the question of how they pursue it. Within the mandate to recruit, officials retain discretion over whom to target — an inherent feature of the street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 2010). This discretion provides room for strategic behavior and targeted search. Several characteristics of potential recruits plausibly shape bureaucratic attention, and identifying which ones reveals the underlying logic guiding recruitment decisions.

2.2.1 Military Capability

The most straightforward expectation is that bureaucrats will prefer militarily capable recruits. Quality of fighting forces shapes battlefield outcomes, unit cohesion, and the probability of victory (Biddle, 2010; Lyall, 2020; Hanson, 2021). Recruiters in both state and non-state contexts have been shown to seek individuals with prior combat experience and attributes associated with military effectiveness (Weinstein, 2005), a preference that intensifies during active conflict when demand for operationally ready personnel is highest (Perkoski and Worsnop, 2025).

Authoritarian regimes, however, face a different calculus. Unconstrained by democratic accountability, they bear fewer political costs from battlefield casualties, which weakens the pressure to optimize for recruit quality (Debs and Goemans, 2010; Gartzke, 2001; Horowitz et al., 2011). Beyond regime-level preferences, targeted search for capable individuals is costly. Identifying, vetting, and processing high-quality recruits requires time and administrative resources that may simply not be available. Enlisting whoever is willing and accessible is administratively easier, particularly under time and budget constraints. Bureaucrats operating within this environment have little incentive to invest effort in quality-screening. One could therefore expect combat experience and other markers of military value to have little or no role in how much attention recruiters direct toward potential recruits.

2.2.2 Availability

The emphasis on numerical sufficiency established above has direct implications for how bureaucrats prioritize among potential recruits. The preference for raw numbers over selectivity can be rooted in both battlefield strategy — overwhelming the enemy with manpower — and bureaucratic logic. When central government translates this preference into specific performance targets, the metric that matters at the local level is how many individuals are processed and how quickly. Under the pressure to show numbers, bureaucrats adjust their policies as they do with other performance targets imposed from above (Li and Zhou, 2005; Khan et al., 2017; Reuter and Robertson, 2012). In the context of war recruitment, speed and volume are rewarded rather than careful vetting. Local recruitment offices are

thus incentivized to target individuals who are readily available and can be mobilized with minimal delay.

This institutional logic is reinforced by a more basic consideration. Even absent explicit targets, immediate availability functions as a signal of low conversion uncertainty. A potential recruit available only in several months may change his mind or disengage before the process is complete. One who signals immediate readiness can be processed quickly and counted toward targets with greater certainty. Bureaucrats facing recruitment pressure will therefore direct disproportionate attention toward individuals who signal readiness to serve immediately.

2.2.3 Opportunity Costs

Rational bureaucrats seeking to maximize recruitment do not target individuals arbitrarily. They form beliefs about who is likely to enlist and direct their effort accordingly. The conflict literature provides a clear foundation for such beliefs: a large body of research identifies opportunity costs as one of the primary determinants of individual participation in armed conflict ([Collier and Hoeffler, 2004](#); [Fearon and Laitin, 2003](#); [Dube and Vargas, 2013](#)). Individuals with stable employment, higher earnings, or valuable long-term prospects are generally less willing to accept the risks of military service ([Blattman and Annan, 2016](#); [Hall et al., 2019](#)). Those with limited outside options face a more favorable cost-benefit calculation — military service offers relative economic security and a regular income that weigh more heavily when civilian alternatives are scarce.

A bureaucrat informed by this logic will treat economic status as a signal of conversion probability. An unemployed or otherwise economically disadvantaged individual has fewer reasons to decline and more reasons to accept. Persuasion efforts are more likely to be successful — the individual's own cost-benefit calculation makes him receptive to arguments about the financial benefits of military service. Directing effort toward those with limited outside options is therefore the rational strategy for a recruiter operating under pressure to deliver results. Bureaucrats experiencing pressure to show numbers will thus direct greater attention toward individuals with limited outside options, treating low economic status as a marker of high enlistment likelihood.

3 Case Background

3.1 Russia's War in Ukraine and Recruitment

The recruitment apparatus that emerged in Russia after February 2022, when Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, reflects each element of the theoretical argument. The initial invasion relied on the professional army and was designed for a rapid and decisive victory. The early stages of the war exposed significant shortcomings in military planning and execution. Ukrainian forces mounted strong resistance, and Russia's advances toward key targets were ultimately reversed. By the summer of 2022, Russia faced mounting personnel losses, and the conflict transitioned into a prolonged war of attrition ([Gady and Kofman, 2024](#)).

In response, the Russian state escalated its efforts to mobilize human resources. An initial strategy of covert recruitment and volunteer battalions gave way to more formal mechanisms of manpower extraction. In September 2022, the Kremlin initiated a "partial mobilization" of reservists through a presidential decree, legally mandating service and authorizing new administrative tools for enforcement. As public resistance to mobilization grew, the state adopted a more nuanced recruitment strategy based on financial incentives for people willing to enlist ([Rustamova and Tovkaylo, 2023](#)). This shift did not reflect a turn toward quality but rather a quieter way of massing troops. This strategy included assigning recruitment quotas to each region of the Russian Federation which were in turn delegated to local and municipal authorities for implementation ([Meduza, 2026](#)).

3.2 Municipal Authorities as Agents of Wartime Conscription

Under this quota system, municipal governments emerged as critical nodes in the wartime administrative apparatus. Their responsibilities included compiling lists of eligible individuals, advertising military service, hiring HR-style recruiters ([Verstka, 2025](#)). In many cases, municipal officials were expected to meet recruitment targets under pressure from regional governors and federal ministries. In fulfilling these responsibilities, local administrators operate as active participants in the conscription

process (Belovodyev, 2024).

The role of municipal authorities in managing wartime recruitment reflects their broader position in the Russian authoritarian system. Russian municipalities have long served as instruments of central control, executing politically sensitive tasks on behalf of the regime (Reuter et al., 2016; Minaeva et al., 2023). Nominally responsible for local self-governance, they are in practice embedded within a vertically integrated hierarchy in which directives flow downward and compliance is expected (Ross, 2007; Panov, 2016). The clearest illustration of this dynamic predates the war: electoral fraud in Russia has been extensively documented at the local level, with ballot stuffing, turnout inflation, and coerced voting occurring systematically under the informal direction of regional superiors (Kobak et al., 2012; Rundlett and Svolik, 2016; Frye et al., 2019). Wartime recruitment extended this logic into a new domain – one with far more direct consequences for those on the receiving end.

Such practices reflect a system of performance-based authoritarianism, where bureaucrats are evaluated not only on service delivery but also on their ability to produce politically favorable outcomes (Reuter and Robertson, 2012; Reuter et al., 2016). In this context, local administrators become indispensable to regime maintenance, both in peacetime (through electoral engineering) and in wartime (through manpower extraction). Their embeddedness in local communities and their familiarity with populations make them ideal agents of targeted, bottom-up enforcement whether mobilizing voters or conscripts.

4 Research Design

This study employs a randomized correspondence experiment to examine how street-level bureaucrats in Russia respond to prospective conscripts with varying personal and professional characteristics. The goal is to uncover bureaucratic preferences revealed in the implementation of wartime recruitment.

Correspondence experiments are well-suited to studying bureaucratic behavior under naturalistic conditions (Chen et al., 2016; Rochlitz et al., 2021; Barceló and Vela Barón, 2024). By sending standardized inquiries to real public institutions and observing actual responses, one can measure how agents behave when interacting with citizens outside the artificial constraints of surveys or interviews. In

this study, fictitious individuals send email inquiries to public municipal addresses, expressing interest in joining the military effort in the “Special Military Operation” (SMO) zone. This method allows identification of causal effects of applicant characteristics on recruitment-related behavior.

4.1 Enlistment Experiment

The central component of the study involves a correspondence experiment in which fictitious individuals send email inquiries to municipal governments, expressing interest in joining the military service in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine. Each municipality receives a single message from one such individual. The email content is standardized in format and tone, while systematically varying key attributes of the sender. The structure of the information request and treatment conditions are in Figure 1.

Subject: Inquiry about Service in the SMO Zone

Hello,

My name is (1) [FULL RUSSIAN/ NON-RUSSIAN NAME], and I live in [CITY or DISTRICT NAME]. I’m considering joining the military to serve in the SMO zone, so I wanted to learn a bit more and ask for some information.

I am (2) [27/37/47] years old. Previously, I (3) [have not served in the military / completed my conscript service and have combat experience from serving in Syria in 2018]. Currently, (4) [I am unemployed, having lost my job a few months ago / I own a small individual business in the auto repair sector/dining/transportation].

(5) [I am open to options and, if possible, ready to begin the process as soon as possible. /

Due to prior commitments, I would only be able to begin the process in four months, but I’d like to understand in advance how everything works.]

I would appreciate any guidance on whom to contact and what steps to take.

Thank you in advance for your response.

Sincerely,

(1) [FULL RUSSIAN/ NON-RUSSIAN NAME]

Figure 1: Template of the enlistment inquiry message sent to municipal offices.

Three independently randomized characteristics of prospective recruits are of primary interest. First, I manipulate military experience. The applicant either reports no prior military service or states that they completed mandatory conscription and possess combat experience — specifically, from service in Syria in 2018. If local officials take the military value of applicants into account, those with prior experience should be seen as more valuable for the war effort and thus elicit greater attention from bureaucrats.

Second, I vary the economic situation of the applicant, who is either unemployed or the owner of a small private business. This manipulation directly addresses the opportunity cost channel. Local officials seeking to maximize the number of recruits sent to the front can be expected to prioritize unemployed applicants, whose outside options are less attractive relative to military service, which provides significant monetary compensation. I use small business ownership as a signal of high opportunity costs rather than a specific high-earning occupation intentionally: the treatment must be plausible across all municipal environments to minimize suspicion. Signaling high costs through employment in banking, IT, or finance would lack credibility in predominantly rural municipalities, whereas small business ownership is plausible throughout Russia. Within this treatment arm, the specific industry is additionally randomized to avoid confounding the effect of the opportunity costs channel with responses to particular occupations.

Third, prospective recruits vary in their availability for immediate enrollment. The applicant either expresses readiness to begin the enlistment process immediately or indicates availability only in four months. This dimension explores whether officials prefer candidates who can be processed quickly, potentially in response to administrative deadlines or quotas. Applicants signaling future rather than immediate availability may be seen as less reliable and therefore less worthy of effort.

In addition to the main treatments, two demographic characteristics are randomized to increase realism and enable exploratory analysis of baseline heterogeneity in bureaucratic responsiveness. Ethnicity is cued through distinctively non-Russian names associated with ethnic minorities living in Russia. Observational evidence suggests that ethnic minorities suffered disproportionately from mobilization efforts and are overrepresented among those killed at the front ([Bessudnov, 2023](#); [Vyushkova](#)

and Sherkhonov, 2023). A positive effect of minority identity would suggest that this disparity may be partly attributable to the selective efforts of recruiters and ethnicity-based discrimination common in the military (Lyall, 2020). Non-Russian ethnicity is assigned with a probability of 0.25 to reflect the approximate share of non-Russian minorities in the population, ensuring that the demographic composition of inquiries remains realistic while permitting investigation of potential group-based biases.

I also randomize applicant age across three military-age categories: 27, 37, or 47 years old, spanning the range of plausible conscripts under Russia’s expanded mobilization regime.

To minimize the probability of discovery, all emails were sent gradually over the course of one month, from August 17 to September 17, 2025. Randomization checks confirming balance across municipal characteristics are reported in Table A1 in Appendix A.

4.2 Benchmarking Experiment: Civilian Service Inquiries

To contextualize the findings from the enlistment experiment, the study includes a benchmarking condition in which municipal officials receive inquiries unrelated to military service. In addition to providing a baseline for responsiveness to routine citizen requests, this component serves as a test of bureaucratic accountability: it allows for a direct comparison between official responses to demands stemming from the central state’s wartime priorities and responses to everyday requests from the general public.

A randomly selected subsample of 900 municipalities receives a second email on an ordinary administrative matter. These messages are distributed across four topics: housing assistance, employment support, utilities subsidies, and retraining programs. Using multiple topics reduces the influence of any single issue and improves the generalizability of the comparison across service areas. The benchmarking emails mirror the structure and approximate length of the enlistment emails to minimize concerns about comparability¹.

Each municipality in this subsample receives one civilian request, and the order of the two emails is randomized. Half of the municipalities receive the enlistment email first, followed by the civilian

¹The template for a routine request is shown in Figure A1 in Appendix A

request; the other half receive them in reverse order.

4.3 Sample Construction

Russia has a two-tier system of local self-government. The first tier consists of municipal districts, urban okrugs, and municipal okrugs, which are the primary units of municipal governance. All first-tier municipalities are included in the sample with a small number of exceptions. First, “closed cities” - mid-sized towns with travel or residency restrictions due to the presence of military bases or nuclear facilities - are excluded. Second, very small and remote municipalities in the Far North and Far East were removed due to concerns about social visibility: in sparsely populated localities, officials are more likely to personally know most residents, making anonymous enlistment inquiries more conspicuous and less credible. Third, several remote mostly rural districts with nearly homogeneous ethnic minority populations were excluded on similar grounds, as the plausibility of fictitious inquiries may be low in tightly-knit communities organized around ethnic ties.

The sample also includes selected municipalities from the second tier (urban and rural settlements) under two conditions: (1) they are sufficiently populous, and (2) their administrations are institutionally and geographically distinct from those of the higher-level municipality - meaning they maintain separate bureaucratic offices and local governance functions. Finally, the sample incorporates intra-municipal territorial divisions of large cities where city-wide governments delegate administrative authority to local territorial offices. These units frequently serve as the primary point of contact for residents and are therefore relevant targets for measuring localized bureaucratic responsiveness.

The overall sample consists of 2,966 municipalities, covering the vast majority of Russian municipal structures while prioritizing the internal validity of the study. Since some municipalities received two emails, a total of 3,866 emails were sent in the experiment².

²A total of 69 municipalities had emails returned as undeliverable due to an invalid address. A balance check reported in Table A1 confirms that bounce rates are largely uncorrelated with municipal characteristics. One predictor – grants share – reaches conventional significance, though given that only 2.3% of emails bounced, the practical implications of this imbalance for the analysis are limited.

4.4 Outcomes

The primary outcome is a binary indicator for receiving a response from municipal officials. The analysis must account for a degree of bureaucratic discretion introduced by a regulatory change that occurred shortly before the experiment. An amendment to the federal law governing communication between municipal authorities and citizens stipulated that officials are required to register citizen requests only if the requester can be authenticated. This produced additional variation in responses: some municipalities replied with a notification that the information request could not be processed until submitted through a verifiable channel (in person, by post, or via an official e-government portal). Such notifications are typically generic and make no reference to the substance of the original request. I code these procedural denials as 0 in the main analysis. This coding decision is distinct from cases where officials engaged with the substance of the request but indicated they could not assist - those responses are coded as 1. I examine procedural denials separately in a supplementary analysis of bureaucratic discretion.

In line with the preregistration, I include time-to-response as a supplementary measure. I also include a measure not anticipated at the time of preregistration that arose from an unexpected feature of the experiment: although I did not send follow-up messages, municipalities themselves generated a substantial volume of unsolicited follow-ups. In the main experiment, 21% of municipalities that responded also sent follow-up emails (up to 6 emails total) providing additional information or prompting the fictitious recipient to reply. I use the total count of messages received - coding non-respondents as zero - as an additional measure of bureaucratic engagement. Unlike the binary outcome, this measure captures variation in the depth of official effort rather than only whether a threshold of responsiveness was crossed.

4.5 Estimation

In the benchmarking experiment, I estimate the following equation for municipalities that received two emails:

$$Y_{im} = f(\beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Enlistment}_{im})$$

where Y_{im} is one of the outcome variables for municipality m and email i , and Enlistment_{im} is a binary indicator equal to 1 if the email is an enlistment email and 0 if it is a neutral one. I collapse all enlistment conditions into a single treatment since the quantity of interest is the difference in response rates to enlistment and routine requests. $f(\cdot)$ varies depending on the outcome: a logistic function for the binary response indicator, OLS for the message count, and a Cox proportional hazards model with censoring for time-to-response. Since all municipalities enter the sample twice, I cluster standard errors by municipality.

The enlistment experiment excludes routine requests and uses the full sample of municipalities receiving enlistment emails. The estimation equation is:

$$\begin{aligned} Y_m = & f(\alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \text{Military Experience}_m \\ & + \alpha_2 \text{Unemployed}_m \\ & + \alpha_3 \text{Immediate Availability}_m \\ & + \alpha_4 \text{Age 37}_m + \alpha_5 \text{Age 47}_m + \alpha_6 \text{Non-Russian Ethnicity}_m) \end{aligned}$$

All right-hand side variables are binary indicators for characteristics of prospective recruits described in the previous section. Robust standard errors are reported for all results from the enlistment experiment.

In both experiments, the estimated equations can be augmented with a rich set of municipal-level covariates that may affect responsiveness, as well as state fixed effects.

4.6 Ethics

The practical ethical concern raised by this study is the use of public resources arising from time spent by public officials. At the aggregate level, however, these costs are limited. Following the approach used in prior audit studies of public officials ([Barceló and Vela Barón, 2024](#); [Slough, 2022](#)), I estimate the cost of the intervention based on the time required to process and answer each inquiry. The treatment was designed to minimize this burden: responses could often be provided using readily available information, and no follow-up communication was sent. Assuming a maximum of five minutes per response and applying the 2023 average monthly wage of Russian municipal administrative personnel, the estimated cost is approximately 29 rubles per reply. The estimated public cost is closer to 840 USD, which amounts to less than one month's salary for a single municipal employee and is lower than the total public cost reported in several comparable studies ([Barceló and Vela Barón, 2024](#); [Slough, 2022](#)). I believe these limited costs are outweighed by the potential value of advancing our understanding of wartime recruitment practices and the role of bureaucratic decision-making in shaping military composition.

A second ethical dimension relates to the broader context of this research. This study examines bureaucratic behavior during an ongoing armed conflict with devastating human consequences. The processes documented here have direct consequences for individuals sent to the front. I believe the value of understanding how wartime mobilization operates and who bears its costs justifies conducting this research, while acknowledging that the human stakes are real.

5 Results

I begin with the benchmarking experiment, which establishes that street-level bureaucrats strongly prioritize enlistment requests relative to routine administrative inquiries. I then turn to the enlistment experiment, which examines which individual characteristics elicit greater attention from local officials among enlistment requests.

5.1 Benchmarking Experiment

5.1.1 Responsiveness to Enlistment Requests

Table 1 summarizes the main results of the benchmarking experiment. Across all outcomes the results are extremely statistically significant and substantively large. The primary outcome indicates that enlistment requests are 1.86 times more likely to receive a response than routine requests (31.1 pp. difference; 36.2% vs. 67.3%). This finding provides strong support for the hypothesis that bureaucrats prioritize recruitment over their routine responsibilities even when recruitment does not fall under their official mandate.

In line with this result, enlistment requests also elicit more attention from municipal officials. On average, municipalities send 0.46 more emails in response to enlistment requests than to routine requests. They also respond significantly faster: half of municipalities responded to enlistment requests within 1.2 days, while fewer than half responded to routine requests at any point during the observation window. Among the fastest-responding quartile, municipalities replied to enlistment requests within approximately 4 hours, compared to 6.4 days for routine requests. However, these results should be interpreted with caution as the count and time outcomes combine extensive and intensive margins, which I address in the following subsection.

The findings in Table 1 are robust to the inclusion of municipal-level covariates, state fixed effects, and controls for design effects arising from the email sending schedule (all emails were sent over the course of a month on different days). These models are presented in Appendix B. I also test for order effects that might arise from the fact that half of municipalities received the enlistment email first and half received the routine email first. Order effects are negligible — neither the sequence of emails nor its interaction with treatment content reaches conventional significance levels (Table B4).

5.1.2 Intensive Margin: Bureaucratic Effort

These results provide strong evidence that Russian municipal officials prioritize enlistment-related requests over routine administrative inquiries. The binary outcome offers a clean estimate of the ex-

Table 1: Effect of Enlistment Request on Response Outcomes

	Response	Response Count	Time to Response
<i>Enlistment Request</i>	1.289*** (0.086)	0.460*** (0.029)	0.992*** (0.060)
N	1762	1762	1762
Model	Logit	OLS	Cox PH

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors are clustered at the municipality level. Intercept estimates are omitted from the table. The Cox proportional hazards model does not estimate a separate intercept.

tensive margin: enlistment requests elicit responses more often than routine requests. The response count and time-to-response outcomes also document significant effects, but both bundle extensive (bureaucratic responsiveness) and intensive (bureaucratic effort) margins in ways that complicate interpretation. With response counts, one cannot distinguish how much of the effect is attributable to more municipalities responding versus more messages per responding municipality – a significant effect is entirely consistent with a pure extensive margin story in which more units respond but each sends exactly one message. Similarly, in the survival analysis the estimated hazard ratio conflates the probability of responding at all with the speed of response among those who would respond regardless.

Disentangling the two margins requires additional assumptions. The key quantity of interest is the ATE among always-responders – municipalities that would have responded regardless of which email they received. This stratum is fundamentally unobservable ([Frangakis and Rubin, 2002](#)). I re-estimate the models in two restricted samples that approximate this stratum under progressively stronger assumptions. The first includes all municipalities that provided any response (informative or a procedural denial, 451 municipalities). The second imposes a more demanding restriction, retaining only municipalities that provided an informative response to both emails (267 municipalities). The latter follows [Coppock \(2019\)](#), who subsets to units responding under both treatment conditions as a practical estimator of always-responder effects. This approach rests on the unverifiable assumption that municipalities in the subset would have responded regardless of which email they received.

Figure 2 depicts the results for the subsample of informative responders³. Within this group, en-

³Estimates for both restricted samples are reported in Table B5.

listment emails receive on average 0.165 more follow-ups⁴ than routine requests ($p < .001$), indicating that officials sent more follow-up messages in response to enlistment-related inquiries. The estimated hazard ratio of 1.71 ($p < .001$) indicates that municipalities receiving enlistment requests respond at a rate 71% higher than those receiving routine requests at any given point in the observation window. Together, these results provide suggestive evidence that the enlistment treatment affected the intensive margin as well, prompting officials to exert more effort by writing more and responding faster.

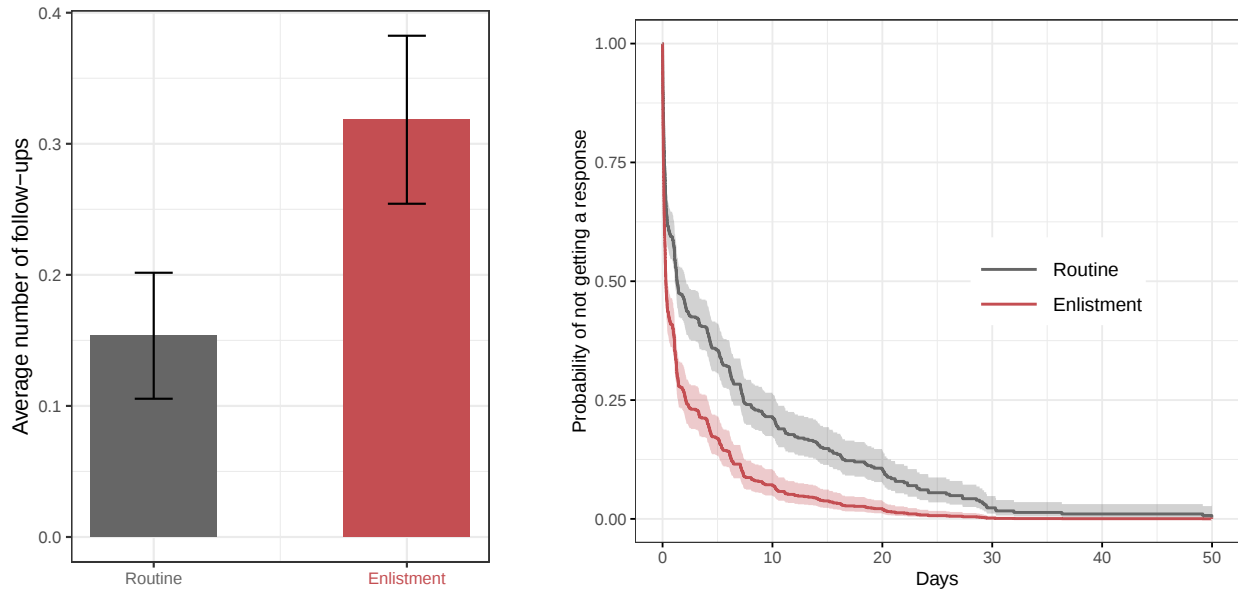


Figure 2: Response patterns by request type. The left panel shows the average number of follow-ups (response count–1) by treatment condition with 95% confidence intervals. The right panel shows Kaplan–Meier survival curves for time to response by treatment condition, with shaded 95% confidence intervals. The sample is restricted to municipalities that provided informative responses to both information requests.

While the always-responder analysis establishes that the intensive margin is meaningful, it does not permit a precise assessment of its relative contribution to the total effect. To address this, I turn to a formal decomposition which is possible with the response count outcome. To do so, I return to

⁴Since I condition on receiving at least one response, the response count cannot be less than 1. Hence, I transform the outcome to the number of follow-ups.

the full sample and estimate two regression equations:

$$R_m = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \text{Enlistment}_m + \varepsilon_m$$

$$Y_m = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Enlistment}_m + \nu_m$$

where R_m is a binary response indicator estimated via OLS (LPM) to keep α_1 on the probability scale, and Y_m is the message count estimated via OLS. The decomposition exploits the identity that for any group:

$$\bar{Y} = \bar{R} \times \bar{Y}_{R=1}$$

where $\bar{R}$ is the response rate and $\bar{Y}_{R=1}$ is the average count among responding units. Superscripts 1 and 0 denote the treatment and control groups respectively. Applying this identity to each group and taking the difference:

$$\beta_1 = \bar{Y}^1 - \bar{Y}^0 = \bar{R}^1 \times \bar{Y}_{R=1}^1 - \bar{R}^0 \times \bar{Y}_{R=1}^0$$

Adding and subtracting $\bar{R}^0 \times \bar{Y}_{R=1}^1$:

$$\beta_1 = \underbrace{(\bar{R}^1 - \bar{R}^0) \times \bar{Y}_{R=1}^0}_{\text{extensive margin}} + \underbrace{\bar{R}^0 \times (\bar{Y}_{R=1}^1 - \bar{Y}_{R=1}^0)}_{\text{intensive margin}} + \underbrace{(\bar{R}^1 - \bar{R}^0) \times (\bar{Y}_{R=1}^1 - \bar{Y}_{R=1}^0)}_{\text{interaction}}$$

Noting that $\bar{R}^1 - \bar{R}^0 = \alpha_1$, and grouping the intensive margin and interaction into a single residual term:

$$\beta_1 = \underbrace{\alpha_1 \times \bar{Y}_{R=1}^0}_{\text{extensive margin}} + \underbrace{\beta_1 - \alpha_1 \times \bar{Y}_{R=1}^0}_{\text{intensive margin}}$$

The extensive margin captures how much of β_1 is attributable to more municipalities responding at all, holding effort per responder fixed at the control group level. The residual is recovered without conditioning on response, avoiding post-treatment bias (Coppock, 2019), though it combines the pure intensive margin with an interaction term reflecting the additional effort of marginal responders. Confidence intervals are obtained via block bootstrap to account for the two-observation-per-municipality

structure of the benchmarking sample.

Table 2 contains the results of the decomposition exercise. The extensive margin accounts for the dominant share of the total treatment effect on response count, with municipalities responding at all explaining between 70 and 85% of the total effect. The intensive margin contributes the remaining 15-30%. It confirms that the enlistment treatment induced not only more municipalities to respond but also greater follow-up effort among those who did. The estimate of 0.105 is broadly consistent with the intensive margin estimate of 0.165 obtained from the always-responder subsample. The convergence of the two approaches suggests that the intensive margin result is robust to the choice of estimation strategy.

Table 2: Decomposition of Treatment Effect on Response Count

Quantity	Estimate	95% CI
Extensive Margin	0.355	[0.310, 0.406]
Intensive Margin	0.105	[0.063, 0.145]
Share of Intensive	0.228	[0.148, 0.299]

Note: 95% confidence intervals obtained via block-bootstrap by municipality with 1,000 replications.

5.1.3 Bureaucratic Discretion

One of the key features of street-level bureaucrats is the discretion they possess in everyday policy implementation. They typically have some room to interpret policy, prioritize cases, and tailor responses to specific situations. This discretion is especially relevant when bureaucrats must make decisions under budget or time constraints. In the case of Russian municipal officials, war recruitment is an additional informal responsibility imposed by the central government, adding to the list of duties already prescribed to the municipal level by law. Facing constant resource constraints, bureaucrats may allocate their attention selectively based on discretion they have.

The legal ability to deny a substantive response on procedural grounds provides a useful setting to test how bureaucrats exercise this discretionary power. A large share of responses from municipalities took the form of procedural denials, which were coded as 0 in the previous analysis. In principle, offi-

cials could deny all requests on the grounds that they do not comply with the procedural requirements of the law. The data, however, suggest they are strategic in how they invoke it. To investigate this, I recode the outcome into a three-category variable: no response, procedural denial, and informative response.⁵ I estimate a multinomial logit regression of this outcome on the enlistment dummy.

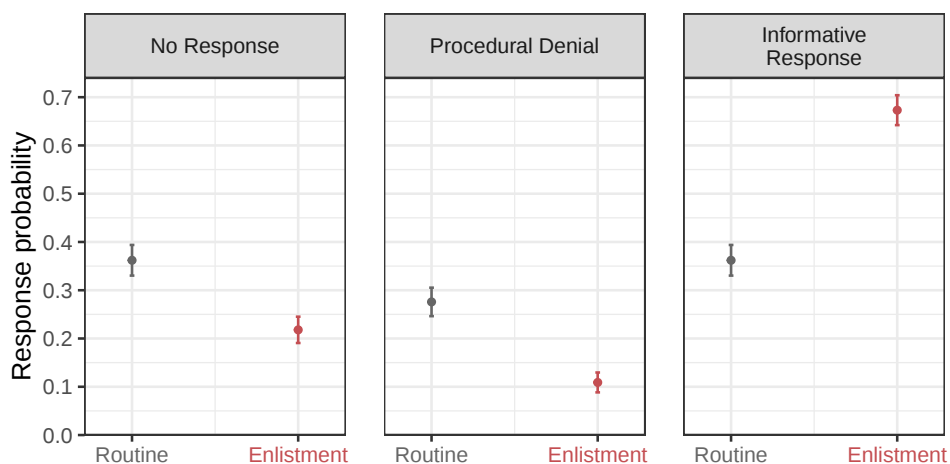


Figure 3: Response types by request type. The panels show predicted probabilities of different responses as a function of request content with 95% confidence intervals estimated via multinomial logit.

Figure 3 plots predicted probabilities of each outcome as a function of request content⁶. The results reveal that bureaucratic discretion accounts for a substantial part of the gap in informative response rates between routine and enlistment requests. Enlistment requests are 31.1 percentage points more likely to receive an informative response. Less than half of this effect is attributable to non-response (14.4 pp. difference in non-response rates). The remainder is driven by procedural denials: routine requests are approximately 2.5 times more likely to be denied on procedural grounds (16.7 pp. difference; 27.6% probability for routine requests vs. 10.9% for enlistment requests). This difference is both substantively large and statistically significant. In other words, when faced with a routine inquiry about their everyday responsibilities, local officials are more likely to invoke the procedural regulation — effectively shielding themselves from providing a substantive answer — than when faced

⁵In practice, 118 responses contained both a reference to the law's authentication requirements and the requested information. In the main analysis, I treat informative responses as dominating. The results are unchanged when the outcome is coded as a four-category variable.

⁶Tables B8 and B9.

with an enlistment request. Given that recruitment falls outside their formal mandate, this pattern reveals strong incentives among bureaucrats to prioritize the war effort over the everyday needs of their constituents.

5.1.4 Mechanism

A common limitation of audit and correspondence experiments is that they operate as a black box: they can detect unequal treatment, but it is difficult to identify the underlying mechanism (Bertrand and Dufllo, 2017; Pedulla, 2018). I address the mechanism indirectly through the analysis of treatment effect heterogeneity, following the approach common in such studies (Rochlitz et al., 2021; Beazer et al., 2022).

My theory suggests that bureaucratic prioritization of military recruitment relative to everyday functions of local self-government arises from weak bottom-up and strong top-down accountability, which forces bureaucrats to align their behavior with regime priorities. One could therefore expect the degree of recruitment prioritization to be a function of the regime's control over a particular local office. Where the regime's grip is strong, officials should be more sensitive to directives from higher levels of governance. Where bureaucrats retain some independence, they may be less inclined to fully comply with pressure to maximize recruitment.

Despite its centralized government structure, Russia retains significant variation in local independence. I exploit this variation to test the theoretical expectation using two measures. First, I use Putin's electoral performance in the 2024 presidential elections as a proxy for regime control at the local level. Putin won with 88.5% of the vote according to official results — a figure widely regarded as the product of electoral fraud and forced voter mobilization rather than genuine popularity. Prior to the war, delivering strong electoral results was among the key performance targets for officials, so municipalities with very high results can be interpreted as localities where bureaucrats exert substantial effort to satisfy the regime. Second, I use the share of intergovernmental grants in the local budget as an indicator of financial independence. The municipal level is highly underfinanced overall, but some municipalities rely less on transfers from higher levels. Lower grant dependence increases the

likelihood that a municipality can sustain itself with some insulation from regime pressure.

I augment the models in Table 1 with an interaction between the enlistment treatment and each independence measure. Predicted probabilities are depicted in Figure 4. Both measures reveal the same pattern: the enlistment-routine differential increases with the loss of political or financial independence. In municipalities with below-average Putin vote shares and low grant dependence, the response rate to enlistment requests is only slightly higher than the response rate to routine requests. At the opposite end, the gap increases substantially. The same pattern holds for the supplementary outcomes (Table B6).

The results are robust to the set of tests described in the main results section (see Appendix). I also estimate models clustering standard errors at the regional level to account for within-region correlation. Finally, intensive margin models restricted to the always-responder sample show similar patterns in models with grants model, suggesting that regime control operates through both higher responsiveness and greater effort (Table B7). Taken together, these results provide indirect support for the theory of bureaucratic alignment with regime priorities.

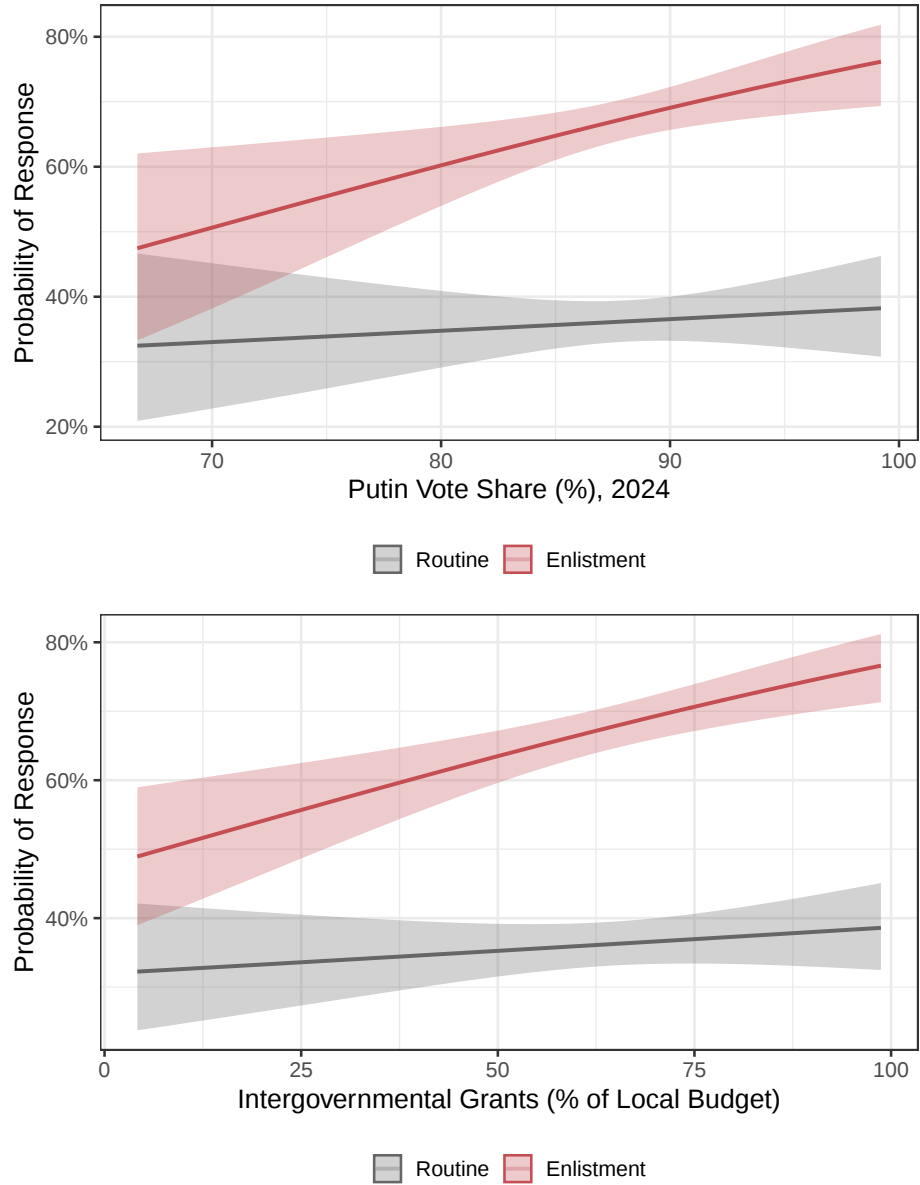


Figure 4: Predicted probability of response by request type and regime control. The upper panel plots predicted probabilities as a function of Putin's vote share in the 2024 presidential election. The lower panel plots predicted probabilities as a function of the share of intergovernmental grants in the local budget. Shaded bands represent 95% confidence intervals. Predictions are based on logit models.

5.2 Enlistment Experiment

5.2.1 Who Deserves a Response?

In the previous section, I established that Russian municipal officials prioritize recruitment efforts over their everyday responsibilities. I now turn to the enlistment experiment, which aims to uncover which characteristics of potential recruits drive bureaucratic attention.

Figure 5 depicts the ATEs of various treatments across different outcomes. Two characteristics are predictive of bureaucratic attention. Unemployed applicants and those who express immediate availability for military service consistently elicit more attention from bureaucrats in the form of responses, their quantity, and faster response times. Both effects are nearly identical on the response margin: being unemployed and being immediately ready each increase the probability of receiving a response by 6.4%. The survival analysis corroborates these findings: municipalities receiving inquiries from unemployed applicants and those signaling immediate availability respond at rates 11.7% and 19.9% higher at any given point in the observation window, respectively. While both effects are similar in magnitude on the response margin, the response count outcome suggests a potential asymmetry — availability generates more follow-up effort (0.117) than unemployment (0.05). I return to this asymmetry in the decomposition analysis that follows.

All other applicant characteristics show no meaningful correlation with either outcome. The effect of combat experience is indistinguishable from zero and points in the opposite direction from what one would expect of officials who care about the military value of potential recruits. Taken together with the significant findings, this result strongly suggests that bureaucrats operate according to a logic of targeting “easy-to-get” individuals - those likely to enlist due to low opportunity costs and those who can be enrolled immediately.

The same pattern holds for applicant age and signaled ethnicity. The null result for ethnicity is especially relevant given the disproportionate burden of the war on ethnic minorities in Russia (Bessudnov, 2023; Vyushkova and Sherkhonov, 2023). It provides some evidence that the overrepresentation of non-Russian minorities in the military and among casualties may not be attributable to

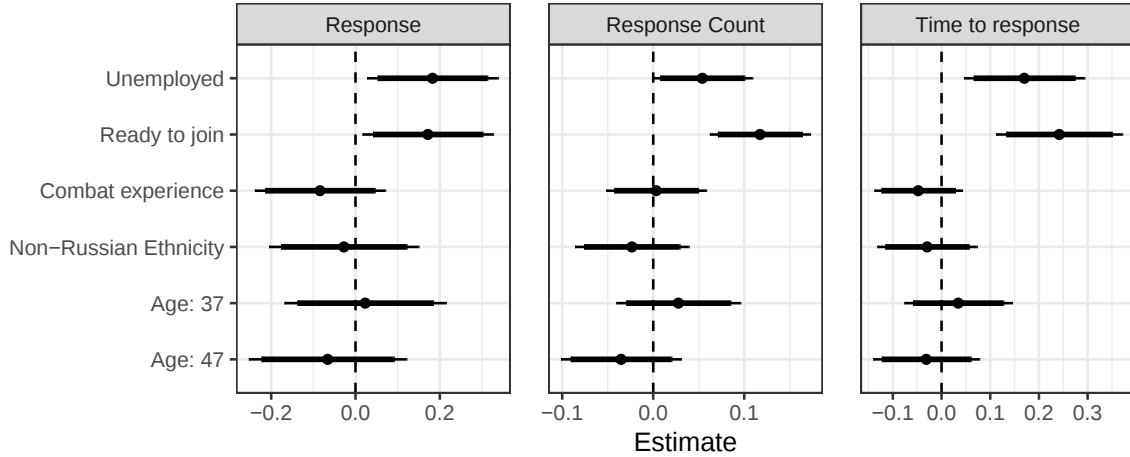


Figure 5: Treatment effects of applicant characteristics on response outcomes. Point estimates represent regression coefficients from models estimated simultaneously on all characteristics. Response is estimated via logit, response count via OLS, and time to response via Cox proportional hazards. Lines represent 90% and 95% confidence intervals.

deliberate targeting based on ethnicity. Instead, it may arise from the targeting of economically disadvantaged individuals who are more likely to be non-Russian. Ethnic republics of Southern Siberia, the Volga region, and the Northern Caucasus consistently rank lowest on measures of living standards and economic outcomes (Zubarevich, 2015, 2019). Structural economic inequality — rather than ethnicity-based discrimination — may therefore be the primary driver of elevated casualty rates among minority populations (Yusupova, 2026).

Unfortunately, it is unclear how to approximate the always-responder stratum in the enlistment experiment. Disentangling bureaucratic responsiveness from bureaucratic effort is therefore restricted to the decomposition analysis of the response count outcome. I employ the same strategy as described in the benchmarking experiment. Table 3 presents the results. The estimates reveal an asymmetry in the treatment effects across the two characteristics of interest. For immediate availability, the intensive margin accounts for approximately 60% of the total effect on response count (point estimate: 0.601, 95% CI: [0.377, 0.934]). This estimate is imprecise and the confidence interval is wide, reflecting substantial uncertainty about the relative contribution of each margin. For the unemployment treatment, the intensive margin estimate is indistinguishable from zero (0.002, 95% CI: [-0.032, 0.036]). Substantively, this asymmetry suggests that local officials exert additional effort in nudging individ-

uals who express immediate availability by sending more follow-up messages to prompt them to enlist. They do not exhibit analogous behavior toward unemployed applicants. Officials are still more likely to respond to unemployed applicants than to small business owners, but this effect operates entirely through the extensive margin. One possible interpretation is that officials perceive immediately available individuals as having already made their decision and invest more effort in converting their expressed interest into action.

Table 3: Decomposition of Treatment Effect on Response Count

Quantity	Ready to Join	Unemployed
Extensive Margin	0.047 [0.005, 0.086]	0.052 [0.008, 0.095]
Intensive Margin	0.070 [0.037, 0.104]	0.002 [-0.032, 0.036]
Share of Intensive	0.601 [0.377, 0.934]	—

Note: 95% confidence intervals obtained via bootstrap with 1,000 replications. Share of intensive margin is not reported for employment status since the total effect on response count is small and imprecisely estimated, making the share decomposition unreliable.

5.2.2 Targeting Strategies

Preferential treatment of applicants available for immediate enlistment is consistent with the expectation that bureaucrats operate under a quota system and have incentives to collect recruits quickly. Interest in unemployed applicants can be interpreted as a validation of the opportunity cost channel: upon receiving information about an applicant’s limited outside options, officials treat him as a likely enlistee.

To further validate the presence of both mechanisms, I analyze the content of official responses. The informativeness index was included in the preregistration as a secondary outcome. The economic motivation index was not preregistered and emerged from inspection of the response data: a substantial share of officials spontaneously invoked financial benefits in their replies, a pattern that was not anticipated at the time of preregistration but maps directly onto the opportunity cost channel. Based on response text, I construct an informativeness index measuring whether the response contains specific actionable information such as a phone number, a point of contact, or the address of an

enlistment center. The economic motivation index proxies the intensity of economic argumentation through mentions of sign-up bonuses, wages, debt forgiveness, or other financial benefits.⁷ I regress both indices on the full set of recruit characteristics.

Since always-responders are unidentifiable in this experiment, I estimate models on the full sample, coding missing, uninformative, and non-economic responses as 0. Results are presented in Table 6. The estimates reveal a clear divergence in how officials tailor their responses to different applicant profiles. When contacted by an unemployed individual, officials mention more economic benefits in their responses. The point estimate of 0.073 (on a 0–3 scale) represents a 36% increase relative to the business owner baseline of 0.20 — a substantively meaningful difference. Officials likely deploy economic framing to ensure that applicants with poor outside options are aware of the financial value of military service, thereby increasing the probability of contract signing. For immediate availability, the effect runs in the opposite direction: officials mention significantly fewer economic benefits when contacted by immediately available applicants (0.095 point decrease, a 33% decrease relative to the deferred enlistment baseline of 0.286). This is consistent with the interpretation of the intensive margin result: officials treat an expressed intention to enlist immediately as a signal that the recruit has already made his decision and requires no persuasion. Accordingly, they provide significantly more practical details about the enlistment process (12% increase from a baseline of 1.536 on a 0–3 scale), since a committed individual needs actionable information to complete the process of signing a contract. No other applicant characteristics trigger differential response content — none of the remaining estimates reach conventional significance levels.

6 Conclusion

This paper provides the first experimental evidence on demand-side preferences in military recruitment. Russian municipal officials strongly prioritize enlistment requests over their everyday responsibilities — in both responsiveness and effort — and this prioritization is strongest where regime control over local officials is tightest. Among recruit characteristics, bureaucrats favor the unemployed and

⁷Details on the construction of both indices are provided in Appendix C.

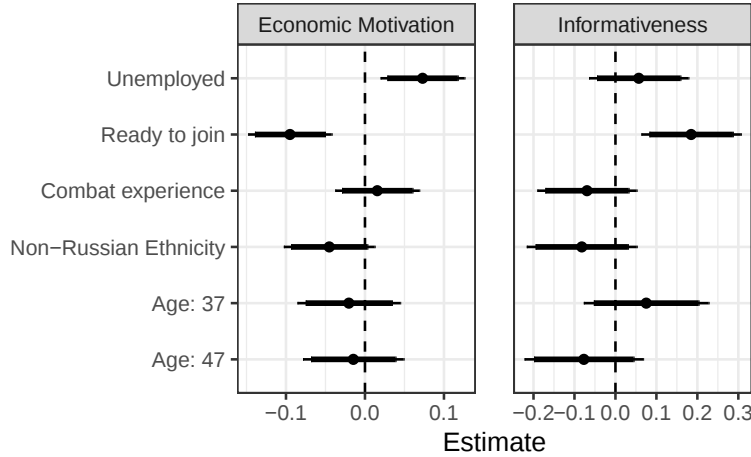


Figure 6: Treatment effects of applicant characteristics on response content indices. Point estimates represent regression coefficients from models estimated simultaneously on all characteristics, estimated via OLS. Lines represent 90% and 95% confidence intervals.

the immediately available while remaining indifferent to combat experience, consistent with a targeting logic organized around administrative convenience rather than military merit.

These findings speak directly to the study of bureaucratic behavior in authoritarian settings. The results show that top-down accountability operates not only through formal sanctions but through the informal reweighting of task priorities: war becomes the dominant performance dimension, and bureaucrats adjust accordingly. At the same time, compliance with regime priorities does not crowd out strategic discretion – officials actively calibrate whom they pursue, deploying economic arguments toward the unemployed and practical information toward those signaling immediate readiness. Alignment with regime goals and individual-level strategic behavior coexist within the same bureaucratic encounter.

The targeting logic documented here also has implications for the composition of fighting forces. Recruitment organized around low opportunity costs and immediate availability selects individuals on dimensions that may correlate with attributes relevant to battlefield conduct — educational attainment, civic values, psychological stability. If so, bureaucratic optimization for administrative convenience may systematically produce forces that are less disciplined and more prone to misconduct. This offers a micro-level, bureaucratic foundation for existing findings linking force composition to the treatment of civilians and the incidence of war crimes (Weinstein, 2005; Hoover Green, 2016; Lyall,

2020).

Two scope conditions deserve emphasis. The recruitment apparatus examined here reflects a specific model of waging war: keeping the conflict limited, relying on financial incentives rather than full conscription, and avoiding the kind of total societal mobilization that would make the war existential for the domestic population. This design is not universal – regimes pursuing mass conscription or total war operate under different logics. The findings speak most directly to states adopting this model of quiet, quota-driven, street-level recruitment.

The study also captures bureaucratic behavior in a reactive setting – officials responding to expressed interest rather than proactively approaching individuals. It is possible that active outreach follows somewhat different dynamics. The core targeting logic, however, should operate in both directions: a bureaucrat who favors the unemployed when responding to an inquiry has little reason to ignore unemployment when searching for recruits. The content analysis results, which show strategic tailoring of responses, suggest that officials are already thinking instrumentally even in the reactive setting examined here.

Taken together, the results suggest that the composition of fighting forces is shaped not only by who chooses to serve but by whom bureaucrats choose to pursue – and that this choice follows bureaucratic rather than military logic.

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A Appendix

Subject: Information about Housing Programs / Employment Assistance / Retraining Programs / Utilities subsidies

Hello,

[1] Could you please tell me whether the administration of our district provides any assistance in finding employment?

My name is [NAME] and am a [27/37/47] year old man who has lived in the district several years. I have been working in the same place for a long time, but now I am considering changing jobs. I thus would like to learn about the available opportunities and types of support. I am interested in what programs or forms of assistance are provided for residents who are planning to look for new work, and how they can be accessed. /

[2] Could you please tell me if there are any programs in our district for citizens in need of improving their housing conditions?

My name is [NAME] and am a [27/37/47] year old man who has lived in the district several years. I have been living in the same apartment for a long time, and at present it has become too cramped for my family. I thus have begun to think about the need to expand. I am interested in what programs or forms of assistance are available for residents who need to expand or improve their housing, and how they can be accessed. /

[3] Could you please tell me whether there are any benefits or support measures in our district for residents to help pay for housing and utility services?

My name is [NAME] and am a [27/37/47] year old man who has lived in the district several years. After the most recent tariff increase last month, my utility expenses have risen significantly. I thus would like to learn about the available opportunities and options for subsidies or benefits. I am interested in what forms of assistance are available for residents who are experiencing difficulties in paying their utility bills, and how they can be accessed. /

[4] Could you please tell me whether any professional training or retraining programs are held in our district for residents? My name is [NAME] and am a [27/37/47] year old man who has lived in the district several years. I have been having difficulties finding a new job, and I am considering undertaking training to acquire a sought-after profession. I thus would like to learn about the available courses or other types of support. I am interested in what forms of assistance are available for residents wishing to undergo training or improve their qualifications, and how they can be accessed.

I would appreciate if you could please provide information on whom I should contact and how this process usually takes place, including the first necessary steps.

Thank you for your attention and time.

Sincerely, [NAME]

Figure A1: Template of the routine inquiry message sent to municipal offices.

B Appendix

Table A1: Balance Check: Treatment Assignment on Municipal Covariates

	Combat exp.	Unemployed	Ready to join	Non- Russian	Age: 37	Age: 47	Invalid Email
Intercept	0.551 (1.911)	-1.351 (1.903)	-2.132 (1.905)	1.086 (2.184)	-0.219 (2.345)	-0.661 (2.291)	-11.953** (5.827)
Pop. (log)	0.056 (0.047)	0.011 (0.047)	0.070 (0.047)	0.012 (0.054)	0.018 (0.058)	0.013 (0.057)	0.076 (0.150)
Urban (%)	-0.099 (0.136)	0.026 (0.136)	0.276** (0.136)	0.221 (0.158)	-0.270 (0.167)	-0.039 (0.164)	-0.090 (0.494)
Wage (log)	-0.202 (0.136)	0.063 (0.135)	-0.017 (0.135)	-0.194 (0.156)	0.005 (0.166)	0.020 (0.163)	0.522 (0.430)
Grants (%)	-0.208 (0.382)	-0.448 (0.384)	0.268 (0.382)	-0.057 (0.437)	-0.023 (0.470)	0.308 (0.461)	2.398*** (0.853)
Income p.c. (log)	-0.015 (0.042)	0.062 (0.041)	-0.029 (0.041)	-0.022 (0.049)	-0.016 (0.051)	-0.037 (0.050)	0.003 (0.148)
Russians (%)	-0.153 (0.157)	-0.212 (0.157)	0.043 (0.157)	-0.128 (0.179)	0.037 (0.193)	0.014 (0.190)	-0.170 (0.503)
Putin % (2024)	1.569* (0.841)	0.816 (0.835)	1.123 (0.834)	-0.140 (0.953)	0.222 (1.026)	0.307 (1.008)	1.328 (2.608)
Pop. dens. (log)	0.002 (0.026)	-0.007 (0.026)	-0.021 (0.026)	-0.002 (0.030)	0.023 (0.032)	0.003 (0.031)	0.108 (0.104)
Unemployed	0.036 (0.074)		0.103 (0.074)	0.052 (0.085)	0.069 (0.091)	-0.069 (0.089)	0.251 (0.247)
Ready to join	0.024 (0.074)	0.103 (0.074)		0.038 (0.085)	0.039 (0.091)	0.026 (0.089)	-0.273 (0.248)
Non-Russian	0.021 (0.085)	0.052 (0.085)	0.038 (0.085)		-0.010 (0.103)	-0.151 (0.103)	-0.020 (0.284)
Age: 37	0.111 (0.091)	0.069 (0.091)	0.040 (0.091)	-0.011 (0.103)			0.128 (0.310)
Age: 47	0.049 (0.089)	-0.069 (0.089)	0.026 (0.089)	-0.151 (0.103)			0.220 (0.297)
Combat exp.		0.036 (0.074)	0.024 (0.074)	0.021 (0.085)	0.111 (0.091)	0.050 (0.089)	-0.000 (0.245)
N	2966	2966	2966	2966	2966	2966	2966

* p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Binary treatments estimated via logit. Age estimated via multinomial logit (Age: 27 is the baseline). Robust standard errors in parentheses.

Table B1: Robustness: Response Outcome

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Enlistment</i>	1.336*** (0.090)	1.348*** (0.091)	1.409*** (0.097)	1.515*** (0.106)
N	1762	1762	1762	1762
Municipal	+			+
Timing		+		+
Region FE			+	+

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors are clustered at the municipality level. All models estimated via logit. Municipal controls include variables listed in Table A1. Timing controls include day-of-week fixed effects, an indicator for whether the request was sent during working hours, and a cubic time trend.

Table B2: Robustness: Response Count Outcome

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Enlistment</i>	0.460*** (0.029)	0.467*** (0.030)	0.460*** (0.030)	0.465*** (0.031)
N	1762	1762	1762	1762
Municipal	+			+
Timing		+		+
Region FE			+	+

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors are clustered at the municipality level. All models estimated via OLS. Municipal controls include variables listed in Table A1. Timing controls include day-of-week fixed effects, an indicator for whether the request was sent during working hours, and a cubic time trend.

Table B3: Robustness: Time to Resonse Outcome

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Enlistment</i>	1.015*** (0.062)	1.042*** (0.064)	1.055*** (0.064)	1.109*** (0.068)
N	1762	1762	1762	1762
Municipal	+			+
Timing		+		+
Region FE			+	+

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors are clustered at the municipality level. All models estimated via Cox PH. Municipal controls include variables listed in Table A1. Timing controls include day-of-week fixed effects, an indicator for whether the request was sent during working hours, and a cubic time trend.

Table B4: Robustness: Order Effects

	Response		Response Count		Time to Response	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<i>Enlistment</i>	1.182*** (0.123)	1.344*** (0.166)	0.409*** (0.044)	0.487*** (0.053)	0.904*** (0.088)	1.025*** (0.113)
<i>First</i>	-0.084 (0.141)		-0.034 (0.040)		-0.074 (0.109)	
<i>Enlistment</i> × <i>First</i>	0.201 (0.172)		0.094 (0.058)		0.165 (0.122)	
<i>Time</i>		-0.002 (0.007)		-0.001 (0.002)		-0.001 (0.005)
<i>Enlistment</i> × <i>Time</i>		-0.005 (0.011)		-0.003 (0.004)		-0.003 (0.008)
N	1762	1762	1762	1762	1762	1762

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors are clustered at the municipality level. *Enlistment First* is a dummy variable equal to one when the enlistment email was sent first. *Time* is a time trend.

Table B5: Intensive Margin Results: Always-Responder Samples

	Always-Responder		Always-Informative-Responder	
	Follow-up Count	Time to Response	Follow-up Count	Time to Response
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Enlistment</i>	0.410*** (0.037)	0.839*** (0.067)	0.165*** (0.040)	0.539*** (0.089)
N	902	902	534	534

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors are clustered at the municipality level. Intercepts are omitted from the table. The always-responder sample consists of municipalities that responded to both emails. The always-informative-responder sample consists of municipalities that provided informative responses to both emails.

Table B6: Treatment Effect Heterogeneity: Regime Control Moderators

	Response		Response Count		Time to Response	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<i>Enlistment</i>	-1.446	0.658**	-0.765	0.154*	-0.644	0.566***
	(1.363)	(0.275)	(0.474)	(0.082)	(1.009)	(0.214)
<i>Putin (%)</i>	0.008		0.003		0.004	
	(0.014)		(0.004)		(0.011)	
<i>Enlistment</i> × <i>Putin (%)</i>	0.031**		0.014**		0.019	
	(0.016)		(0.005)		(0.011)	
<i>Grants (%)</i>		0.003		0.001		0.002
		(0.003)		(0.001)		(0.003)
<i>Enlistment</i> × <i>Grants (%)</i>		0.010**		0.005***		0.007**
		(0.004)		(0.001)		(0.003)
N	1762	1762	1762	1762	1762	1762

* p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Standard errors are clustered at the municipality level. *Putin 2024 (%)* is the percentage of votes cast for Putin in the 2024 presidential election. *Grants (%)* is the percentage of intergovernmental grants in the local budget.

Table B7: Treatment Effect Heterogeneity and Bureaucratic Effort: Regime Control Moderators

	Follow-up Count		Time to Response	
	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<i>Enlistment</i>	-0.782	-0.111	-1.689	0.004
	(0.578)	(0.098)	(1.479)	(0.270)
<i>Putin 2024 (%)</i>	0.002		-0.011	
	(0.004)		(0.011)	
<i>Enlistment</i> × <i>Putin 2024 (%)</i>	0.011		0.025	
	(0.007)		(0.017)	
<i>Grants (%)</i>		-0.001		-0.006**
		(0.001)		(0.003)
<i>Enlistment</i> × <i>Grants (%)</i>		0.004***		0.008*
		(0.002)		(0.004)
N	534	534	534	534

* p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Standard errors are clustered at the municipality level. *Putin 2024 (%)* is the percentage of votes cast for Putin in the 2024 presidential election. *Grants (%)* is the percentage of intergovernmental grants in the local budget.

Table B8: Bureaucratic Discretion: Effect of Enlistment Request on Response Type

	Procedural Denial	Informative Response
<i>Enlistment</i>	-0.421*** (0.151)	1.128*** (0.115)
N	2966	2966

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Model is estimated via multinomial logit. Baseline category – No Response. Standard errors in parentheses.

Table B9: Bureaucratic Discretion: Effect of Enlistment Request on Response Type (4-fold)

	Procedural Denial	Informative Response	Denial & Informative
<i>Enlistment</i>	-0.421*** (0.151)	1.124*** (0.116)	1.177*** (0.283)
N	2966	2966	2966

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Model is estimated via multinomial logit. Baseline category – No Response. Standard errors in parentheses.

C Appendix