



Motivation

The composition of armed forces affects battle-field performance, unit cohesion, and the treatment of civilians (Hoover Green, 2016; Hanson, 2021). Force composition is in turn a product of supply — who is willing to enlist — and demand — whom recruiters choose to pursue.

- **Supply** is studied extensively: economic incentives, ideology, social networks, coercion (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008; Oppenheim et al., 2015)
- **Demand** is less studied: recruiters are often state actors and bureaucrats who operate under their own incentive structures, not military logic

This paper provides the first experimental evidence on demand-side preferences in military recruitment.

Case: Russian Bureaucrats at War

- **Russia's war in Ukraine:** after 2022, personnel losses pushed the state to seek new soldiers
- **Quotas and financial incentives:** paying people to enlist, with quotas assigned by region and delegated down to municipalities
- Municipal officials are **civilian bureaucrats**, not military personnel: recruitment became an informal add-on to their existing administrative duties
- **Vertically integrated hierarchy** – the same structure long used to secure electoral fraud on behalf of the regime – in which quotas and directives flow down from above and compliance is expected

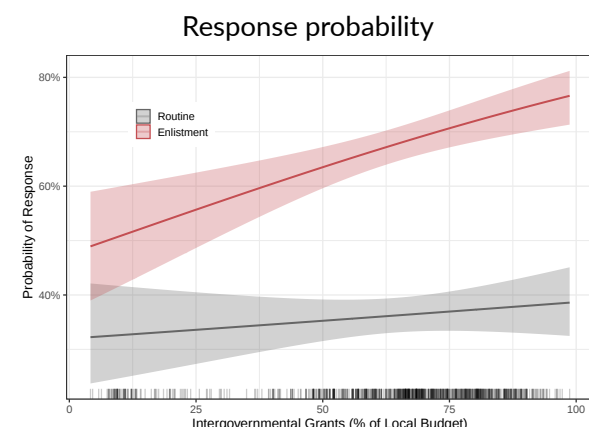
Experimental Design

- Correspondence experiment
- “Fictitious” individuals send standardized email inquiries to municipal administrations, expressing interest in joining the military effort
 - “...I'm considering joining the military to serve in the SMO zone...”
- Two nested experiments:
 - **Benchmarking:** send benign help requests to a subset of municipalities
 - **Enlistment:** vary applicant characteristics (employment status, ethnicity, experience, etc.)
- 2,966 municipal offices in Russia were contacted via public email addresses
- Outcomes:
 - Response (1/0)
 - Response count (up to 5 follow-ups)
 - Time to response

Benchmarking Experiment

- Do civilian bureaucrats serve the war effort?
- 900 municipalities received two emails: an enlistment request and a routine request about everyday responsibilities (housing, utilities subsidies, job search, etc.)
- Bureaucrats strongly prioritize recruitment relative to their everyday responsibilities: **enlistment requests are 1.86 times more likely to receive a response** than routine requests (67.3% vs. 36.2%)

Mechanism: Top-Down Accountability

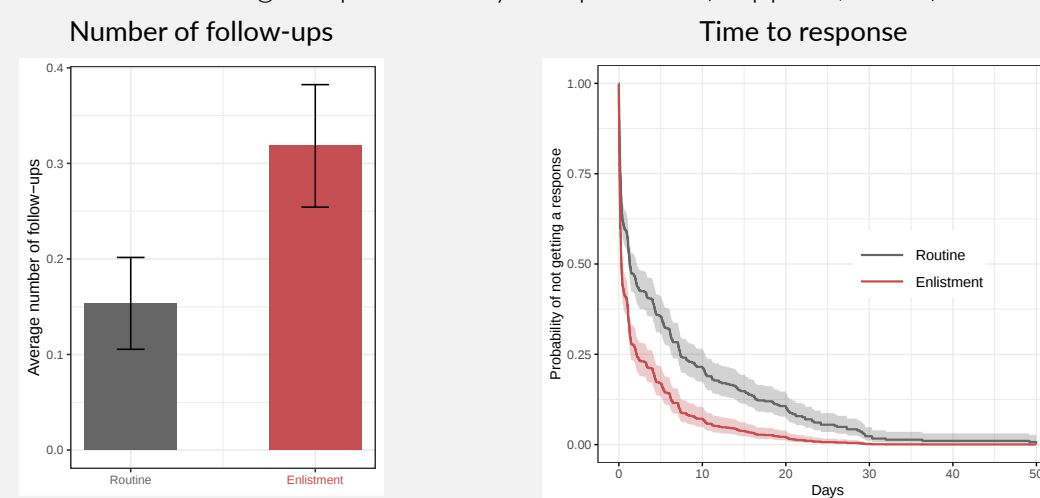


- If the regime's control over a municipality is stronger, bureaucrats are more attuned to the regime's priorities $\Rightarrow$ higher prioritization of recruitment when the municipality can be leveraged
- Proxy for the regime's leverage over a municipality: intergovernmental grants as a share of the local budget

Methodological Contribution: Disentangling Extensive and Intensive Margins

- **Extensive** (bureaucratic responsiveness): how many more municipalities respond
- **Intensive** (bureaucratic effort): how much faster bureaucrats respond and how much more attention they pay via follow-ups

Approach 1: Restricting sample to always-responders (Coppock, 2019)

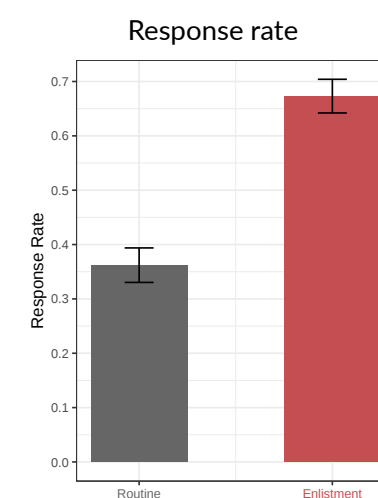


Approach 2: Decompose effects on follow-ups in the spirit of Oaxaca-Blinder and on time-to-response via a Tobit model (McDonald and Moffitt, 1980)

Bureaucrats both respond more and exert more effort when dealing with enlistment requests

Quantity	Response Count	Time to Response
Extensive Margin	0.355 [0.310, 0.406]	-0.922 [-0.987, -0.842]
Intensive Margin	0.105 [0.063, 0.145]	-0.513 [-0.569, -0.457]
Share of Intensive	0.228 [0.148, 0.299]	0.274 [0.254, 0.296]

95% CIs obtained via block-bootstrap by municipality.



Enlistment Experiment

How does bureaucratic discretion shape who ends up in the military? What individual attributes attract more attention?

Military Experience:

- No prior military experience / Combat experience in Syria

Perceived opportunity costs (economic status):

- Unemployed / Small-business owner

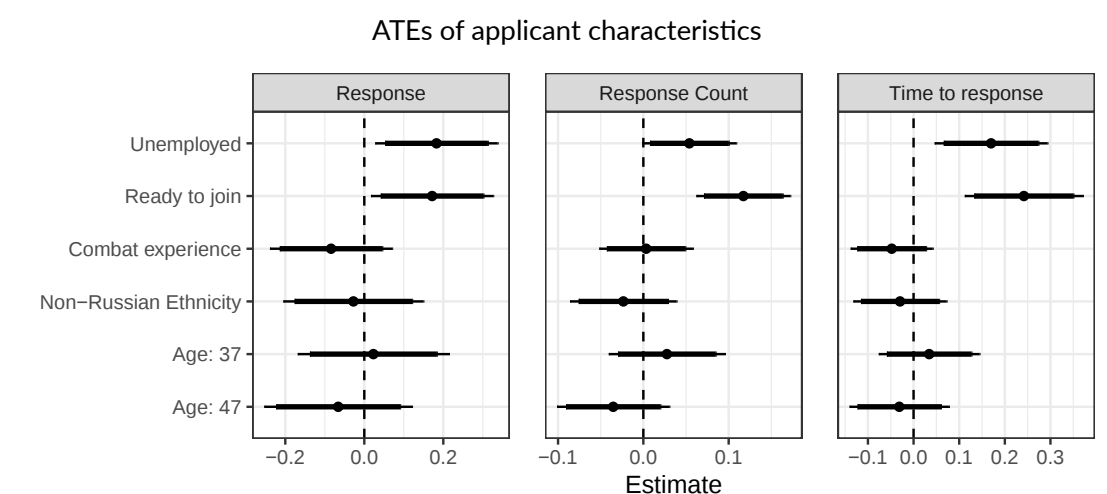
Quota pressure (enlistment timeline):

- As soon as possible / In 4 months [“due to prior commitments”]

Age (27 / 37 / 47) and ethnicity (Russian / non-Russian)

Bureaucrats Prefer Unemployed and Available Recruits

- Being unemployed (low opportunity costs) and being immediately ready (quotas can be filled quickly) each increase the probability of receiving a response by 6.4%
- No effects of combat experience, age, or ethnicity

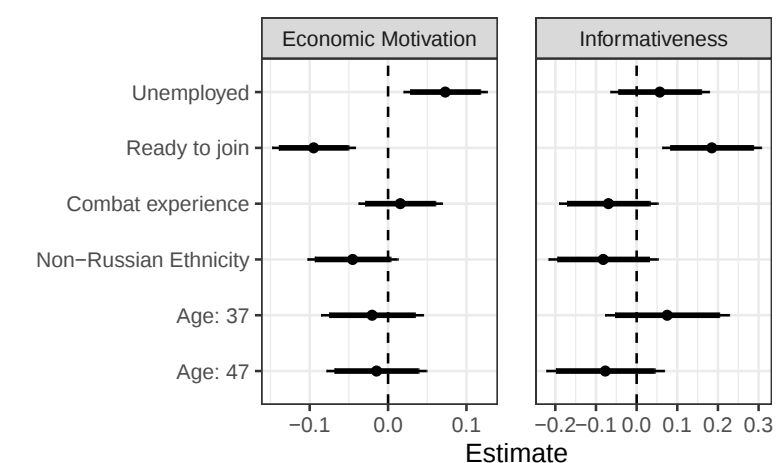


Bureaucrats Strategically Tailor Their Responses

Do unemployment and immediate availability work through different channels?

Construct two indices from response content:

- **Informativeness:** how much actionable information is provided (phone number, list of documents, point of contact, address, etc.)
- **Economic motivation:** how heavily economic benefits are emphasized in a response (sign-up bonus, salary, equipment)



Immediate availability

- Skip economic appeals – no persuasion needed (33% decrease)
- Provide more actionable information (12% increase)

Unemployment

- Lay out the financial value of military service (36% increase in economic motivation)