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‘BAD REPUTATION’

Understanding General Reluctance to Voluntary Military Enlistment

ABSTRACT: This exploratory study investigates hesitation towards voluntary enlistment in the military. It seeks to understand the generic underlying factors that deter individuals from enlisting in the military at a time when conscription is less practiced in some countries. By using a qualitative method that involves Google Form and selected follow-up interviews, the findings in this work suggest that hesitancy towards voluntary enlistment in the military stems from a variety of factors that can be intrinsic, conditional/extrinsic, and partly institutional. It also highlights that reluctance to enlist voluntarily in the military is often influenced in some individuals by the behaviors of serving or ex-soldiers and is mediated by the soldiers themselves or by third party platforms.

Keywords: Enlistment, All-Volunteer Force, Reluctance, Military, and Recruitment

INTRODUCTION

Several studies have been conducted to understand why states build military capabilities,¹ and why citizens or some individuals find the prospect of working in the military environment enticing especially as voluntary enlistees.² The work by Kleykamp shows that

¹ J.F. Troxell, “Military Power and the Use of Force,” in J. Boone Bartholomees, Jr (ed.), *U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Issues*, vol. 1: *Theory of War and Strategy*, 2006, pp. 209-226.

² E.M. Ginexi, A.E. Miller, S.M. Tarver, *A Qualitative Evaluation of Reasons for Enlisting in the Military: Interviews with New Active-Duty Recruits*, Wilson Blvd 1994; V. Lecoq, Ph. Manigart, “The Propensity of Ethnic-Cultural Minorities to Join the Belgian Armed Forces,” *Res Militaris*, vol. 19 (2017); W. Murtala, *An Examination of the Willingness to Join the Belgian Military among Immigrants*, Dissertation, Antwerp 2020, PhD thesis.

educational goals and the proximity to military bases play a role in the decision by individuals to enlist in the military. Similarly, the 2017 study by Lecoq demonstrates that job opportunity and satisfaction are important factors that influence the propensity towards enlistment in the military among Belgians (native and non-natives) to a different extent. Other works such as Nieva et al have shown that family background, social and demographic factors are instrumental in the choice by individuals to enlist in the military.³ The research by Tarver, Miller, and Genexi shows that the opportunities provided by the military are influential in the propensity to enlist by individuals. They cite personal development, skill acquisition, floundering, less access to other jobs among others as contributory to the willingness of some individuals to be part of the military.⁴ Thus, it can be suggested that financial wellbeing has been considered as one of the incentives to enlist in the military thereby generating theories and insights into the topic of propensity to enlist. On a more theoretical level, the work by Charles Moskos for example has pointed out that the desire to enlist in the military is influenced by institutional motivation for enlistment or occupational motivations. He identifies the institutional model as emphasizing more on values of service to the motherland while the occupational model stresses the importance of the military as a 'market' place where 'monetary rewards for equivalent competencies' or other extrinsic rewards are the motivation for enlistment.⁵

Although these previous studies have explicitly discussed factors that influence the willingness to enlist in the military, they are not explicit at explaining reluctance towards enlistment. The need to explicitly understand reluctance to voluntary military enlistment has become more important when we observe that across different countries, there have been reports of low-turnout and reduced interest in voluntary enlistment by citizens. This is evident in USA, Belgium, Germany, and some other states where they rely on an all-volunteer force (AVF).⁶ Against this backdrop, this present

³ V.F. Nieva et al., *Enlistment Intentions and Behaviors: Youth and Parental Models*, 1997.

⁴ B.J. Asch, M.R. Kilburn, J.A. Klerman, *Attracting College-Bound Youth into the Military: Toward the Development of New Recruiting Policy Options*, 1999; E.M. Ginexi, A.E. Miller, S.M. Tarver, *A Qualitative Evaluation of...*; M.A. Kleykamp, "College, Jobs, or the Military? Enlistment during a Time of War," *Social Science Quarterly*, vol. 87, no. 2 (2006), pp. 272-290; A. McGlynn, J.L. Monforti, *The Poverty Draft? Exploring the Role of Socioeconomic Status in U.S. Military Recruitment of Hispanic Students*, Washington, D.C. 2010.

⁵ C.C. Moskos, "From Institution to Occupation: Trends in Military Organization," *Armed Forces & Society*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1977), pp. 41-50.

⁶ G. Galindo, "Snubbed by Youth, Belgium's Military Has a Staffing Problem," *The Brussels Times*, 18 July 2019, at <https://www.brusselstimes.com/60962/belgian-army-retiring-officials-young-recruits-not-staying-staffing-problem-almost-half-military-departures>, 9 December 2023; D. Winkie, "Citing Recruiting Woes, Army Will Shed Up to 28,000 Troops in Next Year," *Army Times*, 19 July 2022, at <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2022/07/19/army-will-be-up-to-28000-troops-understrength-vice-chief-tells-congress/>, 9 December 2023; German Bundestag, *Information from the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces*, 2019, at https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/594458/e26b85c43f6fe74f387f488961d9c387/annual_report_2018_60th_report-data.pdf, 9 December 2023; T. Buck, "German Army Struggles to Attract Much-Needed Recruits," *Financial*

study aims to investigate reluctance towards voluntary enlistment in the military from a generic perspective.

Conceptualizing Reluctance towards Enlistment in the Military:

In a broad sense, 'reluctance' implies hesitation towards an activity. In this paper, reluctance towards enlistment in the military is described as hesitation by individuals towards the prospect or idea of serving in the military in different capacities whether as combatants or non-combatants. Within an all-volunteer force premise, reluctance represents freedom to choose not to apply to enlist in the military willingly. In the draft procedure, reluctance can be considered as a form of disobedience. However, the premise for this study is to understand reluctance to military enlistment under the system of All-Volunteer Force (AVF).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

A plethora of studies have established that the idea of serving in the military appeals to individuals to varying degrees. While some individuals can be considered as highly enthused to join the military for different reasons which can either be institutional or occupational,⁷ other studies have hinted at the idea that there are also individuals who abhor serving in the military. Available evidence shows that during the period of conscription in some countries, unwilling members of the society made efforts to dodge military service by different means.⁸ A more recent study has introduced the concept of *distributional (un)willingness* to describe the spectrum within a population of a country that uses all-volunteer force as consisting of individuals that are 'extremely unwilling' to enlist in the military, individuals that are 'conditionally unwilling' and those that are willing to voluntarily enlist.⁹

Times, 29 January 2019, at <https://www.ft.com/content/ffc33796-23ce-11e9-8ce6-5db4543da632>, 9 December 2023.

⁷ C.C. Moskos, *From Institution to Occupation...*

⁸ M. Cardina, S. Martins, "Evading the War: Deserters and Draft Evaders from the Portuguese Army during the Colonial War", *E-Journal of Portuguese History*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2019), pp. 27-47; M.R. Christ, "Draft Evasion Onstage and Offstage in Classical Athens," *The Classical Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 1 (2004), pp. 33-57; S. Daly, "Emigrant Draft Evasion in the First World War: Decision-Making and Emotional Consequences in the Transatlantic Italian Family," *European History Quarterly*, vol. 51, no. 2 (2021), pp. 170-188; J.W. Dellapenna, "The Citizenship of Draft Evaders after the Pardon," *Villanova Law Review*, vol. 22, no. 3 (1977), pp. 531-553; P. Levine, "Draft Evasion in the North during the Civil War, 1863-1865," *The Journal of American History*, vol. 67, no. 4 (1981), pp. 816-834; L. Stewart, "Hell, They'Re Your Problem, Not Ours': Draft Dodgers, Military Deserters and Canada-United States Relations in the Vietnam War Era," *Canadian Studies*, no. 85 (2018), pp. 67-96.

⁹ W. Murtala, "All-Volunteer Force: National Population, Distributional, (Un)Willingness and Martial Tendency," *Lasu Journal of History & International Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2023), pp. 1-22.

Additionally, the concepts of 'Instrumental and Symbolic Characteristics' refer to how a brand is perceived by potential employees. As it relates to the military, instrumental and symbolic attributes suggest that the perception by potential enlistees of the image of the military has an impact on their consideration of the military as a potential employer. According to Lieven, as it relates to the army and indeed, the rest of the armed forces, *instrumental characteristics might refer to pay and benefits, or the opportunities to travel abroad and engage in physical activities.*¹⁰ In converse, *Symbolic attributes are linked to people's need to maintain their self-identity, to enhance their self-image.*¹¹

By combining between 'distributional (un)willingness' which asserts that the national population contains 'unwilling enlistees' on one hand, and 'Instrumental-Symbolic Characteristics' on the other hand, the study projects that potential enlistees who consider the military as incompatible with their values (symbolic attributes) and their instrumental expectations (tangible outcome) may be less willing to voluntarily enlist in the military.

Research Methodology:

This research is exploratory in nature. It adopts a qualitative methodology that relies on non-numeric information, and it was carried out in two stages. At the first stage, the research was advertised on social media platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp, and Messenger) and a link for a simple google form was sent to individuals who showed interest. The participants received questions to understand whether they have considered the military in the past, why they may not 'fancy' working in the military, how they see the military and the relationship between their views of the military institution and the possibility of enlistment. To overcome concerns of different participants, it was made clear that the Google form is intended to collect and analyze responses for a study on recruitment into military services. It is purely anonymous and information from this form will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

In the second stage, 4 individuals (each from Nigeria, Romania, USA, and Indonesia) were selected for further in-depth interviews even though the google responses were generally sufficient for the exploratory study. The in-depth interviews allowed for further enriching questions to corroborate and explicate the initial findings from the Google Form. 19 of the participants responded that they have never considered joining the military. 21 participants have considered joining the military in the past while 2 participants were unsure – they answered with 'maybe'. Other factors that affected participation in the in-depth interviews include lack of access to some participants who only submitted their responses through google form. A participant also preferred textual responses and recorded voices to oral interviews. In the end, I combined the

¹⁰ F. Lievens, "Employer Branding in the Belgian Army: The Importance of Instrumental and Symbolic Beliefs for Potential Applicants, Actual Applicants, and Military Employees," *Human Resource Management*, vol. 46, no. 1 (2007), pp. 51-69.

¹¹ Ibid.

responses from the Google respondents with the in-depth interviews from those who were available for further discussions.

Prior to the in-depth interviews, I read out their earlier responses on Google form to confirm their submissions and as a guide for the one-on-one interviews. Responses from forty-four participants from Nigeria, Belgium, India, Ghana, Indonesia, Canada, USA, Bosnia, Oman, and England where AVF is practiced were used in the study. Some of the participants self-reported as having multiple nationalities (3), while others were long term residents of other countries outside their countries of birth. The entry from a participant from Egypt was removed because the country still practices conscription. The selected participants comprise 30 males which stands at 68.2 percent. The total number of female participants is 14 which is equivalent to 31.8 percent. Their ages range from 24 (being the youngest) to 59 (being the oldest) while some of the participants were not comfortable giving their age but were all over 18 years old.

As an exploratory study, demographic details such as gender, age and nationality are not taken as key determinants of individual predisposition towards reluctance to enlistment, but they have been given here as insights into the demography of the participants. The primary motive of the research at this stage is to understand the generic barriers towards enlistment. It is hoped that further quantitative or qualitative research can be done to understand how age, gender, nationality, and other factors may influence unwillingness to enlist. The multinational approach is useful here because it allows for different insights from individuals with a variety of backgrounds. Since linguistic and cultural sensitivities are important considerations for a multi-national study,¹² I was able to overcome this by focusing on English, Yoruba, and Pidgin speakers from the countries I mentioned. The problem of equivalence i.e., 'to have certain dimensions in common, even though they may differ within them'¹³ which has been mentioned as an important factor in cross-country research is overcome here because all the participants are from countries where voluntary enlistment is practiced. Albeit their individual experiences differ across their respective cultural groups, their perspectives on hesitation towards military enlistment are similar. As such, it can be said that the cross-national nature of the participants has been helpful in this research.

¹² M. Pinto da Costa, "Conducting Cross-Cultural, Multi-Lingual and Multi-Country Focus Groups: Guidance for Researchers," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, vol. 20 (2021); J.H.-C. Tsai et al., "Developing Culturally Competent Health Knowledge: Issues of Data Analysis of Cross-Cultural, Cross-Language Qualitative Research," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, vol. 3, no. 4 (2004), pp. 16-27.

¹³ K. Baistow, "Cross-National Research: What Can We Learn from Inter-Country Comparisons?," *Social Work in Europe*, vol. 7, no. 3 (2000), p. 9.

Table 1. Demography of Participants – Google Form

Participant's ID or Pseudonym	Gender	Age Group	Date of Participation in Study and time stamp	Nationality / Country of Residence	Profession
Tonoiz	Male	30 - 40	10/11/2021 - 20:46:06	Nigerian / Nigeria	Associate Staff Local Government
Agboo	Male	20 - 30	10/11/2021 - 20:49:00	Nigerian / Nigeria	Unknown
Amn	Female	20 - 30	10/11/2021 - 20:49:33	Romanian / Romania	Teacher
Adeyin	Male	30 – 42	10/11/2021 - 20:56:20	Nigerian / Nigeria	University Lecturer
Tade	Male	40 - 50	10/11/2021 - 20:57:38	Nigerian / Nigeria	University non-Teaching Staff Member
Daenen	Male	50 - 60	10/11/2021 - 21:02:14	Belgian / Belgium	Retired
Ahmdo	Male	40 - 50	10/11/2021 - 21:17:34	Nigerian / Nigerian	Unknown
Enpeco	Male	30 - 40	10/11/2021 - 21:31:58	Belgium / Belgian	Technician
Bamphoz	Female	40 - 50	10/11/2021 - 21:31:58	Nigeria / Nigeria	Unknown
Jindel	Male	40 - 50	10/11/2021 - 21:49:11	Nigeria / Nigeria	Doctoral Researcher
Holam	Male	30 - 40	10/11/2021 - 22:01:43	Nigerian / Nigeria	Unknown
Yah	Male	40 - 50	10/11/2021 - 22:09:55	Nigerian-Belgian / Switzerland	Chef
Fresh4g	Male	NA	10/11/2021 - 22:25:25	Nigerian / Nigerian	Unknown
Ademj	Male	40 - 50	10/11/2021 - 22:29:45	Nigerian / Nigerian	Unknown
Ariya	Male	35 - 40	10/11/2021 - 22:29:59	Nigerian / Jamaica	Teacher
Kunleabu	Male	30 - 40	10/11/2021 - 22:33:58	Nigeria / Nigeria	Unknown
Raong	Male	30 - 40	10/11/2021 - 22:39:41	Ghanaian / Slovakia	Customer Service
Muriy	Male	30 - 40	10/11/2021 - 22:46:23	Nigerian / Nigeria	Unknown
Ernitanny	Female	40 - 50	10/12/2021 - 0:20:15	Indonesian / Indonesia	Unknown

Badmus	Male	50 - 60	10/12/2021 - 1:19:17	Nigerian / Scotland	Legal Practitioner
Adeunse	Male	30 - 40	10/12/2021 - 3:39:07	Nigerian / Nigeria	Engineer
Habb	Male	30 - 40	10/12/2021 - 7:19:59	Nigeria / Nigeria	Unknown
Ssilva	Male	30 - 40	10/12/2021 - 9:50:44	Nigerian / UAE	Hospitality
Akaim	Male	30 - 40	10/12/2021 - 10:39:04	Nigerian / Nigeria	University non-teaching staff
Buriis	Male	20 - 30	10/12/2021 - 10:56:03	Nigerian / Nigeria	Teacher
Aragat	Male	30 - 40	10/14/2021 - 8:08:18	Indian / Belgium	unknown
Sardi	Male	30 - 40	10/16/2021 - 14:39:22	Nigerian / Unknown	Teacher
Aask	Male	40 - 50	10/18/2021 - 7:18:11	Omani / Oman	Unknown
Eloby	Female	40 - 50	10/19/2021 - 9:24:42	Dutch / Unknown	Unknown
Kaytetes	Female	30 - 40	10/23/2021 - 19:56:16	British / England	Unknown
Toiordde	Male	20 - 30	10/30/2021 - 17:44:01	Nigerian / Unknown	Unknown
Participant1	Female	40 - 50	1/17/2023 - 15:54:32	Canadian / Canada	Real estate Agent
Participant2	Female	30 - 40	1/17/2023 - 16:08:56	Bosnian / Bosnia	Unknown
Smok	Male	50 - 60	1/17/2023 - 16:14:01	Indigenous American	Massage Therapist
Quee	Female	30 - 40	1/17/2023 - 16:15:22	American / USA	Chef
Anon3	Female	Unknown	1/17/2023 - 16:58:04	United States of America / USA	Unknown
Maff	Male	30 - 40	1/17/2023 - 17:38:23	Bengali-America / USA	Child Development
Participant3	Female	Unknown	1/17/2023 - 18:07:54	American / USA	Unknown
Participant4	Female	30 - 40	1/17/2023 - 18:52:00	American / USA	Unknown
Participant5	Female	30 - 40	1/17/2023 - 22:50:52	Black / USA	Unknown

Participant6	Female	30 - 40	1/18/2023 - 6:16:40	American / USA	Unknown
Sabibiyang	Female	40 - 50	12/8/2023 - 23:30:18	Indonesian / Indonesia	Tailor

Table 2. Demography of Participants selected for follow-up in depth interviews

Participant's ID	Gender	Nationality / Country of Residence	Date of Interview
Tonoiz	Male	Nigerian / Nigeria	05 October 2022, 20:39:09
IySlk	Male	Nigerian / USA	14 October 2022, 03:49:07
Ernitanny	Female	Indonesian / Indonesia	05 October 2022, 15:02:58
Amn	Female	Romanian / Romania	30 October 2022, 20:10:40

Research Findings: Some Factors Responsible for Reluctance to Voluntary Enlistment

From the analysis of the responses, it became clear that refusal to enlist in the military is induced by certain factors which comprise of lack of financial incentives in the military compared to other sectors, preference for a stable family life, negative perception of the military institution and political leadership, and conscientious objection among other factors.

Discussion: Generic Factors against Voluntary Enlistment

Financial Constraints or poor Salary:

From the responses, it is understood that the relatively low payment or salary that low ranked soldiers allegedly receive is considered a major reason for unwillingness to enlist in the military by some individuals. According to one of the participants, when I enquired about why he would not consider joining the military, he simply replied that the military is ‘short paid’¹⁴ compared to other sectors where he has options. Although, the respondent had previously considered enlisting in the military and considers the military environment as ensuring discipline and ‘utmost sanity’,¹⁵ the low salary is a major factor for his hesitancy. In this regard the perceived lack of opportunity for sufficient economic mobility can be highlighted as a barrier to military enlistment among participants who have better prospects for jobs elsewhere – an idea that has been established in other studies.¹⁶ The participant stresses that, not only is the military poorly paid especially because he has a bachelors’ degree which guarantees access to better paying jobs

¹⁴ Tonoiz, Nigeria.
¹⁵ Ibid.
¹⁶ W. Murtala, *All-Volunteer Force...*

elsewhere, but also because there is no guarantee of long-term sufficient financial benefits to the family in case of death during military service. Another participant considers the military as a dangerous profession where they 'risk'¹⁷ their lives. According to one participant, *if I should die in service, my family might be left out (financially). Your life can be taken at any time.*¹⁸ He suggests that members of the military should be among one of the top-paid sectors in any country.

Aversion to Military Risks and Norms:

Some of the participants identify the military system and the jobs of soldiers as very risky and physically demanding. They submit that *It's too risky as one could lose his life*¹⁹ or that it requires *travelling around and endangering family's lives or comfort.*²⁰ The perception of self as physically incapable of undertaking the stress of military rigor is also foundational to the hesitation by some individuals based on responses that signify consideration of self as not being mentally or physically capable of such a demanding task due to 'health issues'.²¹

The need to obey orders in a hierarchical structure like the military also appears to fuel reluctance towards the idea of military enlistment. Some participants identify 'the need to obey every order'²² as inherently incompatible with the level of freedom they aspire to have. In this regard, a participant argues that *I believe everyone should have freedom in their life, in the military you won't have much freedom to choose.*²³

Pacifist Inclinations and Belief in Non-Violence:

One constant factor that other participants point to as fueling their reluctance towards the military is their utmost loathing for war. Individuals who consider themselves as inherently pacifist responded that they hate wars and that we should 'make love not war'.²⁴ For some participants, their reluctance is premised on their religious belief about war and violence regardless of the context. A Jehovah's Witness participant was explicit on this when he strongly argues that:

my knowledge of the scriptures makes it difficult for me to engage in the military or any form of warfare because it is completely wrong to kill anyone deliberately. For whatever reasons... because of that, I would not participate in any form of military exercise... Job of the military is to protect lives and international interests of particular region and

¹⁷ Adeyin, Nigeria.

¹⁸ Tonoiz, Nigeria.

¹⁹ Adeyin, Nigeria.

²⁰ Buriis, Nigeria.

²¹ Kaytetes, England.

²² Ernitanny, Indonesia.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Eloby, Dutch.

*they do it at all costs, even if it could include killing. Because I cannot kill, I do not have intentions to kill. I would not engage in the military.*²⁵

In trying to embed his personal thought as a foundational part of his religious teachings or doctrines, he points to the belief in non-violence as a part of what it means to be a good Jehovah's Witness adherent. Thus, he stresses again that:

*And that is why you never see any Jehovah's Witness in the military and from time to time, that is why we have been prisoners of conscientious objection... in countries like Korea and Russia and countries like Eritrea, Singapore, for the fact that we've refused to join the military. We have been thrown into prisons and most of us are happy to go to prison for that than to join the military. It's been our longstanding belief for years. We do not go to warfare, nobody deserves to be killed for no reason, and most importantly, because we believe that God's Kingdom is the only solution to man's problem. No matter how much you kill from now till next year, it doesn't solve any problem. It's only God's Kingdom that can put an end to man's problem. And we strongly believe in God's government. And so, until then, we refrain from warfare.*²⁶

Although the participant reiterates his respect for the military for instilling personal discipline in others, he still sees that his religious belief carries more weight than the thought of enlistment in the military by all ramifications. At the individual level, outside the authority of the organized military and government, he concedes that self-defense is important even if he kills an assailant by mistake in the process.

Similar to this, some participants who are reluctant towards voluntary enlistment in the military stress that they will not consider the military due to the association of military with 'violence, killing and possible death'²⁷ or as a result of the possibility of killing members of their own religion.²⁸ A particular participant who identifies as a native American and stresses that his religious view is not compatible with military enlistment was more direct in his response by saying *there's nothing attractive about poisoning the earth, destroying people's homes, & murdering innocent human beings who never did a fucking thing to you* [sic].²⁹

Family Commitment

Some of the respondents also perceive the military life and its burdensome requirement as a disservice to an uninterrupted family life and commitment. The response by an individual on why he would not consider a voluntary job in the military was that

²⁵ IySlk, Nigeria/USA.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Participant 1, Canada.

²⁸ Maff, USA.

²⁹ Smok, USA.

*leaving my family*³⁰ behind is a major hurdle. While another respondent says he would not consider the military because *I would like to have more time for the family*.³¹ What is also interesting in terms of the demographic profiles of the respondent in this area is that both males and females consider their family as more important than voluntarily joining the military.

Negative Perception of the Military

Another impediment that was reported by the participants as fueling their reluctance towards the military is the perceived negative images that are held by some of them towards the military. These negative images are mediated in two ways; by relatives or friends who had served in the military or are still serving, and by negative viral news of atrocities that have been committed by soldiers. The first type can be understood as mediated through the different reports from people serving in the military, i.e., gloomy reports coming from soldiers regarding their dissatisfaction with their job or the military institution, such as mistreatment of soldiers, the perceived rigidity of the institution, and lack of freedom. In the second part, negative images are also mediated through despicable news that have been reported by different news agencies especially regarding atrocities that have been committed by members of the military. These negative images include perceived mistreatment of serving soldiers, negative perception of veterans' lives and the effects of exposure to war, negative image of the military institution, personal morality vs institutional norm, lack of trust in political and military leaders (political objection) and perceived arrogance.

The Perceived Mistreatment of Serving Soldiers

Another important hurdle against the desire to join the military is the perception that an individual has regarding the treatment of serving soldiers. A participant was very clear on this when he stresses that he *lost interest when I saw the way the gallant men were treated by the government. (With a) lack of adequate care, compensation, and benefits*.³² The respondent pointed to the military as lacking the necessary equipment. He pointed to this by saying the *inadequate supply of required equipment to military in my country* is a major discouragement towards any attempt to join the military. In this regard, it could be understood that the persistent negative remarks and viral videos on different social media platforms where soldiers fighting in counter-insurgency operations in his country (Nigeria) have complained about neglect has informed this negative image. He complained further that military institution and the soldiers *...are not well taken care of as it is supposed to be* in his country compared to other militaries that use technologically advanced weapons.³³ To quote him further, the participant says:

³⁰ Agboo, Nigeria.

³¹ Enpeco, Belgium.

³² Tonoiz, Nigeria.

³³ Ibid.

*With your phone, half of the world is in your hand, we get our source from the soldiers in the battlefield... Seeing is belief... They send the message back home that they are poorly equipped. This is a primary source of (negative) information about the military. It is not hidden.*³⁴

The proliferation of negative reports against the military has been observed in Nigeria as evident in the disclosure by the military chiefs themselves who stress that negative reports online affect the image of the military and represent a disservice for military campaigns. By extension, these negative images may impact recruitment in the long run among some members of the citizenry – an observation that is also consistent with observations from the United States of America.³⁵

Apart from this, participants also mention ‘highly corrupt’³⁶ officers as a discouraging factor. In fact, some of the participants stress that they would discourage their children from voluntary enlistment until their image of the military institution becomes positive. Thus, I received a response that *I don’t think I can encourage any of my children to pick up the military form... they have lost respect at home. I won’t want to see my child as part and parcel of those that won’t command respect.*³⁷ The participant also argues that the military used to be respected, but they have since become a shadow of themselves, and that *soldiers now die on a daily basis* from insurgencies in his country.

Negative Perception of Veterans’ Lives and the Effects of Exposure to War

Some of the participants also refer to the idea of possibly being exposed to war as something that could lead to a long-term health problem whether physically or mentally. Serving in the military is regarded as an event that will eventually come back to ‘bite them in the butt’.³⁸ According to the participant, soldiers are:

*the ones who come back with all sorts of mental health issues afterwards... very difficult to be part of this normal (civilian) society again, whether it comes to working, or just acting normally in a normal environment. I feel like they are used.*³⁹

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ C.M. Kenney, “US Military: Bad Publicity Is Hurting Recruiting. Lawmakers: Fix Your Problems,” *Defense One*, 22 September 2022, at <https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2022/09/military-bad-publicity-hurting-recruiting-lawmakers-fix-your-problems/377501>, 9 December 2023; E. Onwubiko, “Positive Identification versus Negative Perception: Part 2,” *The Guardian*, 14 November 2019, at <https://t.guardian.ng/opinion/positive-identification-versus-negative-perception>, 9 December 2023; H. Giroux, “Social Media’s Impact on Civil-Military Relations: Balancing the Good with the Bad,” *960th Cyberspace Wing*, 14 December 2021, at <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Wild-Blue-Yonder/Article-Display/Article/2871481/social-medias-impact-on-civil-military-relations-balancing-the-good-with-the-bad/>, 9 December 2023.

³⁶ Ernitanny, Indonesia.

³⁷ Tonoiz, Nigeria.

³⁸ Amn, Romania.

³⁹ Ibid.

The perception of post-service treatment of veterans is also a contributing factor towards reluctance to military enlistment among some of the participants. Even though some studies have pointed to veterans as being considered as exceptional or patriotic members of the society,⁴⁰ some participants have a dim view of veterans' treatment and see it as a major reason for their reluctance to join the military to avoid ending up in the same position eventually. In a sarcastic remark, the participant from Romania puts it thus:

I feel sorry for them. I honestly do. Because they end up being the people who were revered and thanked for their service 'and you were here to protect us (at home by going to fight) there (abroad) in order to save those people (in a foreign land) and free them because look at all the freedoms you have (in your own country). They need it as well. Look at them. Poor (foreign) people. We need to help them, right? We're outside of that world. We see how bad it is for them. We need to help them (the foreign countries) out'. [Sarcastic remark].

And so you (ex-combatants) live with this idea that you're some sort of a hero, and then you come back. And everything; your status stops at 'thank you' for your service. You're still the one with all sorts of (health) issues after. [Emphasis mine]⁴¹

With a background in the advertisement industry, the participant goes further to point out that the prospects of jobs for veterans or ex-combatants might be more difficult due to their health issues among other factors by stressing that *people advertise that they're hiring veterans and, when you do that, you do it because they're probably not hired... so you're trying to place your company at a higher moral place compared to the rest of the people.*⁴²

Negative Image of the Military institution

Another respondent argues that he grew to dislike the military as an institution. Although the respondent had served in the military during the era of conscription in Belgium, he still identifies the military as a detestable institution. In his words:

*I was young in the 70's when there were a lot of dictatorships supported or conducted by the military. I have always identified the military as an austere power nationally – the enemy, big brother, the oppressor... [sic]*⁴³

With this, it can be suggested that although, the participant had served as a conscript in the Belgian military, he would not have enlisted as part of an all-volunteer force. His experience of life in the military remains pessimistic even after serving as

⁴⁰ K. Parker et al., "How Veterans and the Public See Each Other and Themselves," *Pew Research Center*, 9 September 2019, at <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2019/09/10/how-veterans-and-the-public-see-each-other-and-themselves/>, 9 December 2023.

⁴¹ Amn, Romania.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Daenen, Belgium.

a conscript. Thus, it can be suggested that he would find it difficult to recommend voluntary military service to others.

In a similar manner, one of the respondents from Indonesia with four relatives and friends who had served previously in the military, was very critical of the military institution and personnel. Her criticism of the institution was also given as the major reason for seeing the idea of working in the military institution as a serviceperson repugnant. According to her, the requirements for the enlistees to be 'virgins' and being subjected to possible 'virginity test in Indonesia' which was subsequently abolished⁴⁴ are too invasive. She points to other factors such as requiring the permission of the superior authority 'before getting married', seeking their approval on 'the type of person to be married to' and needing 'their permission for divorce' as equally distasteful. The most repugnant image of the military system to her is the atrocity that she described:

Let me tell you this case, six months ago in Indonesia, there was a military colonel, he was off duty, and he brought two of his juniors travelling with him. One of the juniors is driving the car and they were involved in a road accident with a motorcycle driven by a couple; a man and a woman... they were still alive... the accident was in a highly populated area; one officer came to say we will take the victims to the hospital to check and see that he was still alive. So, they take the victim inside a car... and then, a few days later, the victims were found in the river in the next province – the couple finally died because they didn't take them to the hospital... who did this?! At the time of the accident, some took a video, and they finally found the ones who did that were those people who were in the military... two of those junior, they were afraid because the colonel says just throw the body into the river and said, 'I will be responsible'. Where is the conscience!? They (the junior soldiers) cannot say no to the superior. They cannot say anything because they are afraid because he is a superior. Now, those three people involved; the colonel and two of the juniors are in prison for life, I guess. This is not just one case because it happens to civilians.⁴⁵

The colonel Priyanto case that the participant referred to above was sufficiently reported in Indonesia and could be seen as magnified by the media in Indonesia and across the world.⁴⁶ As a result, the participant sees the military personnel as not embedding the best of characters. Apart from Indonesia, another participant who had wanted to join the military points to similar corrupt practices and lack of accountability from the political authority and the armed forces in her country. The participant goes further

⁴⁴ A. Harsono, "Indonesia Military Finally Ends Abusive 'Virginity Test,'" *Human Rights Watch*, 19 April 2022, at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/20/indonesia-military-finally-ends-abusive-virginity-test>, 9 December 2023.

⁴⁵ Ernitanny, Indonesia.

⁴⁶ "Seeing the Stiff and Weak Body, Colonel Priyanto thought the Male Collision Victim in Nagrek Was Dead," *VOI*, 7 April 2022, at <https://voi.id/en/news/154813>, 9 December 2023; A. Rai, "Indonesian Colonel Sentenced to Life in Jail for Throwing Bodies of Teens into River," *Independent*, 8 June 2022, at <https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/southeast-asia/indonesia-colonel-teen-murder-prison-b2096483.html>, 9 December 2023.

to say the political leadership and the military institutions as well as other groups are supposed to uphold higher moral standards which they often do not have. She went further to stress that:

*I have high expectations of whatever authority means... they are supposed to be the people who are of higher morals... right? So, you are supposed to trust their judgment. But then this (corruption) happens. Doesn't it corrupt the whole, like the idea of the whole institution? How? How on earth can we trust them?*⁴⁷ [Sic]

Other responses that cast dark shadows on the assumed behaviors of military personnel include the response that *they kill people. Military of every country kills and rapes civilians (during military operations)*⁴⁸ or that the military has a *very bad reputation*.⁴⁹ As a result, participants that strongly see the military institution in a negative light also stress that they are less willing to voluntarily enlist in the military.

Personal morality vs Institutional norm:

The perception of the military as an institution that does not allow soldiers to disobey the order from above is also seen by some of the participants as incompatible with their personal and religious freedom. A participant is unequivocal about this by saying:

*Actually, in the military law, you have to follow the order of your superior or there would be consequences, and if you follow the order, and it is later stated that the superior is in the mistake, you will be discharged from the consequences because you are following his order. But that is a man-made regulation, man-made law. You still would be held accountable in front of God, in front of Allah. So to me, the law is kind of... WHAT?? It's just a game... When your superior is not following the way of Allah, he is not following God's way, he makes mistakes... the only thing I follow is Allah, not my superior... the problem is systematic, you cannot say "no". You have to follow the order... In this world, whatever we do, we will be held accountable in the aakhirat⁵⁰. Allah will ask us why are you following your superior when you know he is wrong?*⁵¹

As part of perceived systemic complacency in the military as an institution, bullying or abuses was also seen as a major possibility in the military due to the hierarchical nature of the institution which, according to a participant encourages being required to *be on the good sides of your superior otherwise, you may not be promoted*⁵². It is important to note here that different reports and previous studies have also highlighted issues that

⁴⁷ Amn, Romania.

⁴⁸ Quee, USA.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Aakhira means the "end". In Islamic theology, it implies the day of accountability when every humans will stand before Allah to give accounts of their deeds in this world.

⁵¹ Ernitanny, Indonesia.

⁵² Ibid.

relate to bullying and other forms of abuses among the military of different states that some of the participants are from.⁵³

Lack of Trust in Political and Military Leaders (Political Objection)

In terms of the clash of moral values, individuals who expressed admiration for military discipline and training but also express dissatisfaction with the military in terms of the 'moral compass'⁵⁴ of the soldiers and the military as an institution are also less likely to voluntarily enlist. What is also very striking here is that the hesitation to join military service among some participants, despite the association of positive values such as discipline, orderliness and cleanliness with the military is still visible, i.e., the negative views they have of the military and the perceived risks outweigh the positive attributes they associate with soldiers and military institutions. Thus, even though some participants are appreciative of the military as a profession that enforces discipline (understood as hard work), the perceived lack of morality in terms of personnel behavior or occurrence of wars where innocent people die abroad is strong enough to discourage voluntary enlistment.

The behaviors of some soldiers who have narrated their battlefield actions have been criticized as representing moral decadence in the system. A participant who had expressed admiration for the military earlier argues that the video she saw on YouTube of an ex-American soldier who appeared to be interested in just *wanting to kill and civilize others* abroad makes her question the way the military chooses soldiers who end up not valuing human lives.⁵⁵ In terms of trying to *civilize others abroad or fight for their freedom*, the participant stresses that:

⁵³ I. Adeakin, "The Military and Human Rights Violations in Post-1999 Nigeria: Assessing the Problems and Prospects of Effective Internal Enforcement in an Era of Insecurity," *African Security Review*, vol. 25, no. 2 (2016), pp. 129-145; A. Ewang, "Reports Allege Nigerian Army Abuses," *Human Rights Watch*, 13 December 2022, at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/13/reports-allege-nigerian-army-abuses>, 9 December 2023; A. Gregory, "Revealed: Scale of Abuse and Sexual Harassment of Women in UK Military," *The Guardian*, 26 October 2021, at <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/oct/25/revealed-scale-of-abuse-and-sexual-harassment-of-women-in-uk-military>, 9 December 2023; L. Morgan, "Understanding Sexual Offences in UK Military and Veteran Populations: Delineating the Offences and Setting Research Priorities," *BMJ Military Health*, vol. 168, no. 2 (2022), pp. 146-149; "Prevalence of Sexual Assault in the Military: Risk and Protective Factors, Data Sources, and Data Uses," *RAND*, at <https://www.rand.org/pubs/tools/TLA746-2/handbook/resources/data-on-sexual-assault-in-the-military.html>, 9 December 2023; "Nigerian Soldiers Accuse Army Commander in Kaduna of Corruption, Diversion of Allowances, Sahara Reporters," 18 October 2022, at <https://saharareporters.com/2022/10/18/nigerian-soldiers-accuse-army-commander-kaduna-corruption-diversion-allowances>, 9 December 2023; A.E. Street et al., "Sexual Harassment and Assault Experienced by Reservists during Military Service: Prevalence and Health Correlates," *Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development*, vol. 45, no. 3 (2008), pp. 409-419; J.A. Turchik, S.M. Wilson, "Sexual Assault in the U.S. Military: A Review of the Literature and Recommendations for the Future," *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, vol. 15, no. 4 (2010), pp. 267-277.

⁵⁴ Amn, Romania.

⁵⁵ "Marine Dakota Meyer Details What War Is Really Like | Joe Rogan," *YouTube*, 9 October 2019, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXRnNyUnq1A>, 9 December 2023.

When I realized that there is a lot of corruption behind it (wars) as well and that politicians are sacrificing their own people for a purpose that I don't think is worth it. Based on human behavior... There's no way you're sacrificing your own people for the sake of liberating others, for offering them freedom, or for bringing them democracy, which somehow is supposed to be better. Well, compared to whatever they had in mind, or whatever they already had. Without there being some hidden interest in that, because what's the point? Why would you do that, right? There's no way you do something without getting something beneficial to you in return, right? And many times, that whatever beneficial thing you get in return is the actual purpose, while you're doing the quote and unquote good thing, and it's disputable whether it's good or not... Choosing the lesser evil unfortunately, can be used as a cover up for many, many atrocities and it does affect my mood and my well-being when I know that I live in a world that's unfair and that doesn't value human life as it should. [sic].⁵⁶

By extension, it can be suggested here that for some individuals, the idea of foreign wars or trying to grant freedom to people abroad is seen as a pretext for other shielded interests that they consider morally questionable. Thus, those who find it hard to trust the politico-military leadership in this regard appear to be less likely to voluntarily enlist in the military.

Perceived Arrogance:

The feeling of superciliousness is also mentioned as a moral dent on the persons of some soldiers, and by extension, a stain on the institution they represent. A participant referred to soldiers as being particularly arrogant and would not recommend that her children join the military, but *if they have to join, I will pray for their own good.*⁵⁷ The description of military arrogance also involves the perceived exhibition of 'superiority' over the rest of the population. Accordingly, the participant narrates a life experience that:

the people of military are driving this military car and they always have a full convoy... what I see is arrogance... what makes them more important than us (civilians) in using the highway? We have to give them a way (to pass). What is so important about them? For ambulance, I can understand, but for them, I don't really see the need for that. Just be like a common people! [Sic].⁵⁸

Apart from this rather dim view of the military men in terms of being arrogant, the participant also notes that even the relatives of some soldiers or officers tend to be arrogant to others or act entitled. This extended arrogance is also perceived as a negative

⁵⁶ Amn, Romania.

⁵⁷ Ernitanny, Indonesia.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

dent on the institution and as such, makes the likelihood of being associated with the military through enlistment unlikely. In the words of the participant:

*The arrogance is not only (from) the person who is in the military, but also all the family are like that. They want special treatment. The whole family are (wont to say) 'because of my brother in the military, my brother is a General, or my cousin is a General, so I have to be treated special... the military is also in clash with the police... there are many cases of the military personnel (who) refuse being fined by the police when they are violating the regulation. So, it is not correct, it is not fair.'*⁵⁹

The perception that some military officers, including veterans or members of their family act entitled or arrogant in the public is not limited to Indonesia. Primary sources and opinions suggest that this perception has gained attention in other places including the United States of America, Nigeria, and other countries as well.⁶⁰

Theoretical Considerations of Analysis

Previous works that have examined the propensity for enlistment in the military have highlighted the importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations among individuals who enlist in the military.⁶¹ Charles Moskos is credited with the classification of willingness to enlist in the military as influenced by either institutional or occupational motivations to some degrees.⁶² However, from the analysis of reluctance in this study, it can also be suggested that institutional and occupational factors can equally serve as barriers to voluntary enlistment in the military. An example of occupational reluctance (extrinsic or conditional) can be deduced from participants who state that they would not consider the military because it is 'short-paid' or is less financially reward-

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ A. Gift, "Nigerian Army officer Allegedly Beat Police to Death for Lagos," *BBC News Pidgin*, 5 August 2022, at <https://www.bbc.com/pidgin/tori-62435193>, 9 December 2023; D. Duffy, "No Room for Sense of Entitlement among Veterans and Military Families," *The Washington Post*, 16 March 2015, at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2015/03/16/opinion-no-room-for-sense-of-entitlement-among-veterans-and-military-families/>, 9 December 2023; E. Usman, "Soldier, Policeman Clash over Traffic in Lagos," *Vanguard*, 18 January 2023, at <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/01/soldier-policeman-clash-over-traffic-in-lagos/>, 9 December 2023; "Do Military Families Feel Entitled?," *Military.com*, 1 December 2011, at <https://www.military.com/spousebuzz/blog/2011/12/do-military-families-feel-entitled.html>, 9 December 2023; Th.E. Ricks, "Sure, You're a Vet, but That Doesn't Mean You Have License to Act like a Jerk," *Foreign Policy*, 17 June 2011, at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/06/17/sure-youre-a-vet-but-that-doesnt-mean-you-have-license-to-act-like-a-jerk/>, 9 December 2023; Nairaland, "Why Nigeria Army Call It's Citizens Bloody Civilians," *Nairaland Forum*, 7 April 2020, at <https://www.nairaland.com/5791688/why-nigeria-army-call-citizens>, 9 December 2023; S. Reynolds, "'Entitlement' Stereotype Hurts Military Family," *Military Spouse*, 30 March 2015, at <https://www.militaryspouse.com/military-life/entitlement-stereotype-hurts-military-family/>, 9 December 2023.

⁶¹ J. Griffith, "Institutional Motives for Serving in the U.S. Army National Guard: Implications for Recruitment, Retention, and Readiness," *Armed Forces & Society*, vol. 34, no. 2 (2008), pp. 230-258.

⁶² C.C. Moskos, *From Institution to Occupation...*

ing compared to other professional options they have. In terms of reluctance that is motivated by institutional considerations, participants that consider the military as overly controlling or as potentially not giving them freedom in their private lives can be considered as unwilling to join the military for institutional reasons (which can be considered intrinsic) since they see the operational system in the military institution as also fueling their reluctance.

In addition to this, the idea of reluctance can also be construed here as part of the 'distributional (un) willingness' spectrum that was introduced in another work. Distributional (un)willingness has been explained as *the assortment of an entire population and its dispersal regarding their possible willingness or unwillingness towards voluntary enlistment in the military*.⁶³ It holds that the population can be classified into individuals that are extremely unwilling or conditionally unwilling to enlist in the military. By adapting this distributional spectrum, we can deduce that there are participants that are innately unwilling to enlist in the military (extreme reluctance) while some appear to be conditionally unwilling (conditional reluctance).

Table 3. Theoretical Categorization of Reluctance with examples

Intrinsic / Extreme Reluctance	Extrinsic Demotivators or Conditional Unwillingness	Institutional Disapproval
Religious belief, Pacifism, incompatible moral values etc.	Lack of material incentive, low financial rewards, lack of family balance or work / life balance etc.	Political objection, lack of trust in the leadership, etc.

From this brief study, it can be understood that the classification of factors that are responsible for reluctance towards enlistment can be categorized principally into:

1. Intrinsic / Extreme Reluctance
2. Extrinsic Demotivators / Conditional Reluctance
3. Institutional Disapproval

Intrinsic / Extreme Reluctance: This implies innate repulsion towards the military institution due to an inherent factor such as someone's belief (value) or certain elements that can be linked to pacifist tendencies. Thus, individuals who believe absolutely in no-violence may consider the military as incompatible with their moral value and disposition towards politics and violence. In considering hesitation to voluntary enlistment, intrinsic values can be used as one of the explanatory factors.⁶⁴

Extrinsic demotivators / Conditional Reluctance: This can be described as hesitation towards voluntary enlistment in the military which is informed by the absence of material or other external incentives such as low payment, lack of sufficient benefits or time with the family. The perception of the military as a low-paying sector as explained in the body of this work suggests that where the potential enlistees see the financial

⁶³ W. Murtala, *All-Volunteer Force...*, p. 9.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

incentives from the military as comparatively low, they will not consider a voluntary job in the military. This is consistent with the conditional (un) willingness explanation that was put forward in another study.⁶⁵

Institutional disapproval: This connotes the perspectives that individuals or a certain section of the population have towards the military institution or the political leadership. An example in this regard is the perceived lack of trust in the rationale of political authorities to declare a just war without some supposedly hidden interest. Thus, those with no trust in the leadership may decide against voluntary enlistment depending on the nature or level of their disapproval and this may in turn be fueled by intrinsic and, or extrinsic factors.

CONCLUSION

This study has explicitly attempted to investigate reluctance towards military service from a generic perspective. It finds that a combination of factors such as insufficient salary, family commitment, the fear of military risk, devotion to non-violence, religious values and more are some of what the participants cite as responsible for their dislike of voluntary military enlistment. In doing this, the study suggests a model that classifies reluctance to voluntary enlistment into 'intrinsic reluctance' which is consistent with 'extreme reluctance' under the 'distributional (un)willingness' spectrum, 'extrinsic' which can be construed as a form of 'conditional reluctance', and 'institutional' which can have elements of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Although this study was conducted with examples cited by participants from different countries where military-civilian relations may operate differently, and the power of military personnel maybe checked to different extents, it nonetheless attempts to create an understanding of reluctance to voluntary enlistment by identifying useful models for subsequent studies even though, certain factors may be more prominent in some countries than others. For example, the idea of reluctance to enlist in the military due to perceived arrogance of soldiers and officers i.e., personal convoy, refusal to follow traffic laws and fights with police officers as reported in Indonesia may not occur in the same manner in the United States of America, but other intrinsic factors may appear.

Finally, the negative perception of the military is regarded as a key factor for the lack of willingness to enlist among some participants. In this regard, participants that regard these negative perceptions as inherently incompatible with their intrinsic values are seemingly not interested in enlistment and will be willing to discourage their children from enlisting in the military.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

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