

The Impact of the Pandemic on Military Enlistment

The economic effects of the pandemic caused an increase in the military enlistment rate.

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Introduction

- Military enlistment has been on a slow decline since 2001 when the attack on 9/11 incentivized thousands to serve.
- In the past two decades, recruiters have come to advertise a position in the military as an occupational opportunity rather than as a service to the armed forces, making the military more reliant on the job market to reach its enlistment goals.
- The 2020 pandemic can be seen as key time to recruit new soldiers due the high unemployment rates.
- Despite this, the pandemic is also different from previous recessions in that government trust is at an all-time low, creating a situation in which more people may not desire a position that directly serves the U.S.

Theory and Hypothesis

- The pandemic has lost thousands of people their businesses, employment positions, and housing.
- It is possible that the economic effects of the pandemic have caused an increase in military enlistment rates over the course of 2020 due to the dependence the military has developed on the job market.

Research Design

- The dependent variable in this study is Military enlistment. It was measured by the number of enlisted members shown in September annually, which can be found in CSV files on the DMDC website.
- The independent variable is unemployment, in which months in the third quarter were averaged together and used as an annual estimate in September. Data can be found on the BLS website.
- Two control variables are also used – the number of fatalities from terrorist attacks and the frequency of natural disasters. Both were measured quarterly in order to assess their impact on enlistment in 2020 since both variables were higher in frequency during the pandemic. The fatalities data can be found on the New America website and the natural disasters data was taken from a dataset created by the NCDC.
- Lack of government trust was also measured in Gallup Polls and is used as an independent variable in order to better analyze the impact of unemployment on enlistment rates when government trust is at a historical low.

Results

- *Figure 1* shows that unemployment and enlistment rates have had a significant positive relationship over the last 15 years, but that unemployment had less of an impact on the enlistment rates in 2020.
- The lower significance level is also shown in *Figure 3* as the unemployment in 2020 resulted in an increase of 68814 soldiers, which is significantly lower than previous years.
- The reason for this can be attributed to a high lack of government trust, as shown in *Figure 2*, which became more significant in 2020.
- The control variables are not included in the regressions shown as neither of them proved to be significant.

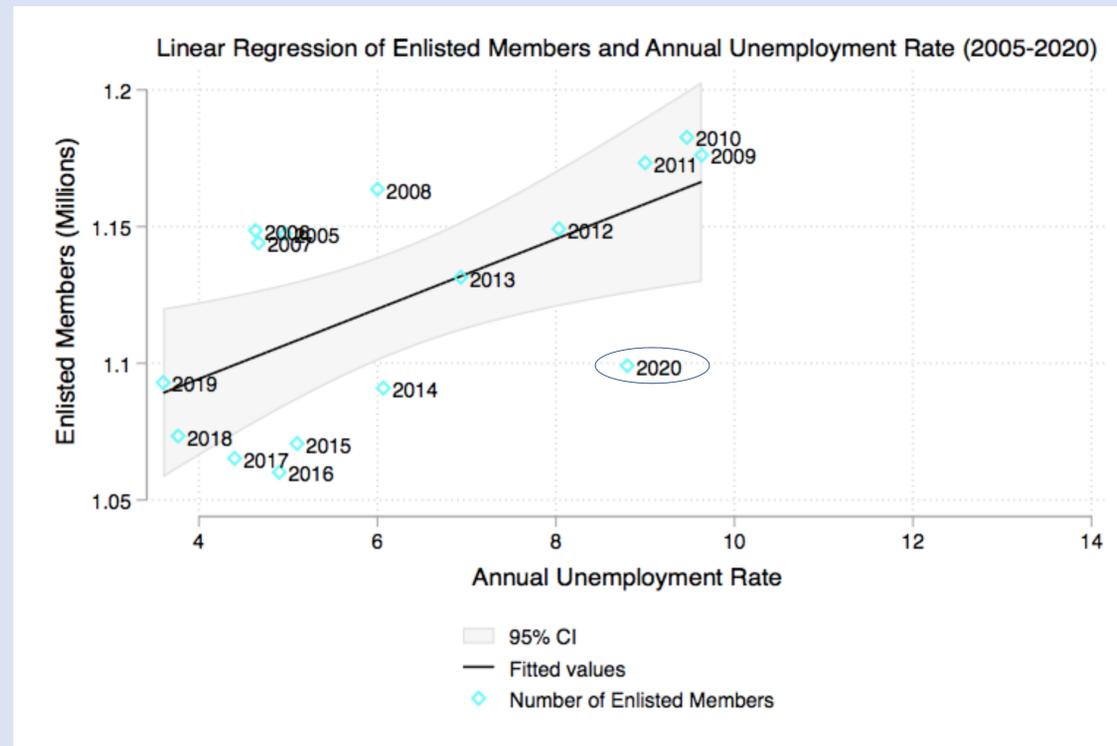


Figure 1

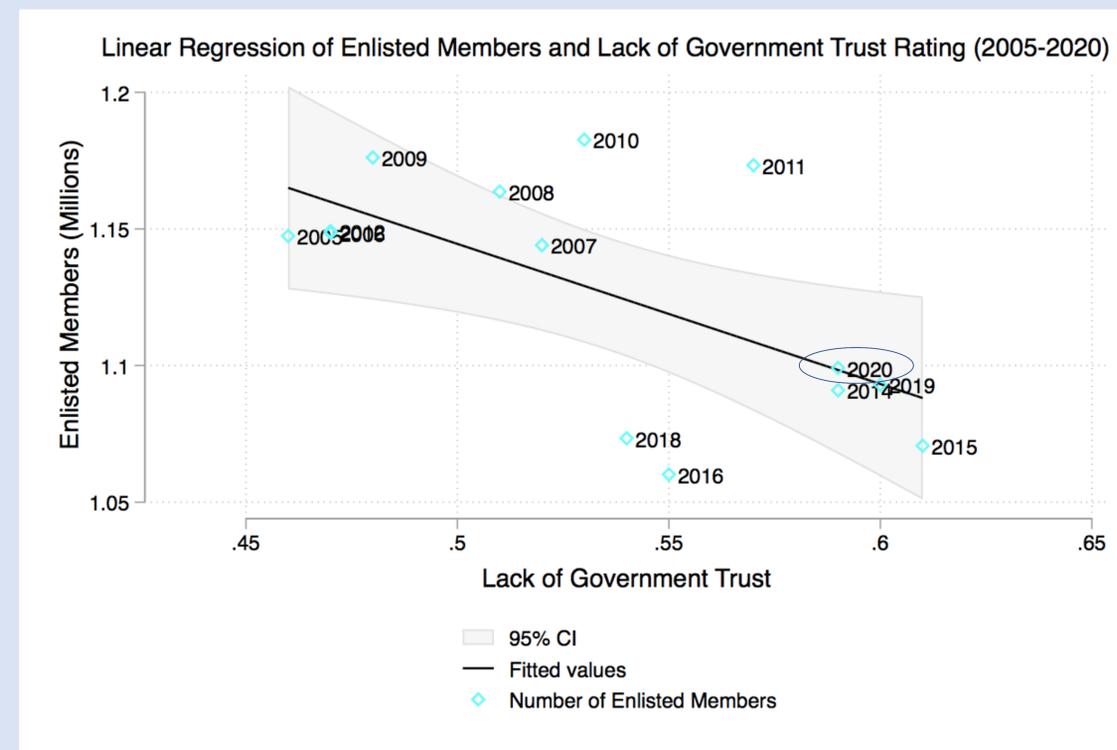


Figure 2

	(1) active dut-s
Lagged Unemployment	17089.2*** (3199.9)
2020 Lagged Unemployment	68814.9* (35648.8)
Interaction Effect	-15792.9*** (4874.6)
Constant	1014750.0*** (18417.2)
Observations	26

Standard errors in parentheses
* p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.005

Figure 3

Discussion

- While the military does have a dependence on the job market, the regressions show that it also has a dependence on how the public feels towards the government and its leaders.
- In future studies it might be useful to see the impact the party of the administration has on the military or how the digital recruitment during the pandemic affected rates of enlistment since recruiters couldn't attend high schools in person.
- Overall, it can be concluded from this study that the pandemic created a different recession than the one in 2008, but despite the high levels of government distrust affecting enlistment rates, the number of enlisted members did increase significantly due to the economic effects that occurred.