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DRUŽBENO-VOJAŠKA (NE)SKLADJA V SLOVENIJI: DRUŽBENOSTRUKTURNA POIZVEDBA

SOCIETAL-MILITARY (MIS)ALIGNMENTS IN SLOVENIA: A SOCIO-STRUCTURAL INQUIRY

Povzetek Avtor v članku sistematično preučuje družbenostrukturne razlike med Slovensko vojsko (SV) in slovensko družbo ter ugotavlja morebitna neskladja med njima. Analiza, ki se opira na podatke ankete reprezentativnega vzorca civilnega prebivalstva in vzorca pripadnikov SV, obravnava različne demografske dejavnike, med drugim starostno in spolno porazdelitev, regionalno zastopanost, ideološka stališča, zakonski stan, versko pripadnost, volilne vzorce in zaznani družbeni status. Ugotovitve kažejo, da so pripadniki SV nekoliko bolj desno usmerjeni kot širše prebivalstvo, častniki pa izražajo bolj centristične usmeritve. Regionalna neravnovesja se kažejo tudi v čezmerni oziroma premajhni zastopanosti nekaterih območij.

Ključne besede ***Civilno-vojaška razmerja, Slovenska vojska, javno mnenje, demografija, civilno-vojaška vrzel.***

Abstract This study systematically examines socio-structural disparities between the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) and Slovenian society to explore potential misalignments. Drawing on survey data from a representative sample of the civilian population and a sample of SAF service members, the analysis explores demographic factors, including age and gender distribution, regional representation, ideological position, marital status, religious affiliation, voting patterns, and perceived social status. The findings indicate that SAF service members tend to be somewhat more right-leaning than the broader populace, with officers exhibiting relatively centrist orientations. Regional imbalances also highlight over-representation of certain areas and under-representation of others.

Key words ***Civil-military relations, Slovenian Armed Forces, public opinion, demographics, civil-military gap.***

Introduction

The study of military institutions, their structures, and their relationship with society has once again gained significance in the contemporary social and political imaginaries. As the world navigates an era of resurgent conflict and geopolitical rivalry, the military's role as both a guarantor of state sovereignty and a participant in broader societal dynamics demands renewed attention. The war in Ukraine has reintroduced large-scale conventional warfare to Europe and prompted a reassessment of NATO's defence posture among the Allies. Concurrently, the conflicts in Gaza and Syria, now with the fall of the Assad regime, have shown the complexity of regional conflicts and their capacity to influence wider security architectures. Meanwhile, the resurgence of great power politics, like the US-China rivalry over Taiwan, reflects a broader shift in the international order. The Indo-Pacific has emerged as a theatre of potential confrontation, as China's increasingly assertive posture may challenge the status quo and the US resolve with regard to Taiwan. Yet, the relevance of studying military institutions extends beyond external conflicts; domestic political turbulence has equally brought up the salience of civil-military relations. South Korea's recent self-coup, where allegations of unconstitutional overreach by the president tested the democratic governance, is a reminder of the military's potential role in both stabilising and disrupting political orders.

Further accentuating the need for scholarly focus are the changes in defence policy across NATO as a consequence of the aforementioned ruptures to world stability. Historically reticent states, such as Slovenia, have reversed longstanding trends of minimal defence investment, responding to escalating security demands with substantial increases in military expenditure. The renewed emphasis on military readiness within NATO has spurred debates over the reintroduction or expansion of conscription in various forms. While some member states have recently reinstated compulsory service – such as Sweden in 2017 – and others (like Croatia and Germany) have signalled or discussed plans to do so, Lithuania and Latvia have introduced partial conscription while continuing to rely primarily on professional armies. It is also important to recognise that several NATO countries, including Norway, Estonia, Greece, Turkey, Finland, and Denmark, have continuously maintained a form of mandatory military service.

In this context, researching the military as a societal institution is as necessary as ever, since it is embedded in the cultural and socio-political fabric of nations. This, in turn, raises questions about representativeness, cohesion, and the broader implications of civil-military relations. In this article, we will focus on understanding and explaining civil-military relations in the Republic of Slovenia.[1] One of the research foci of the

[1] *The renewed importance of studying armed forces is increasingly evident in Slovenia, as reflected in the longitudinal Slovenian Public Opinion Survey. Slovenia's society appears to be undergoing a perceptible shift in its attitudes toward defence, security, and military matters. The data on public interest in national security and military information demonstrate a growing engagement with these issues. While fluctuations exist across years, the latest survey (SJM23) shows an increase in those 'very interested' or 'somewhat interested'. Similarly, perceptions of the necessity of Slovenia's military shows an increase in respondents who believe it is 'very likely' or 'likely' that Slovenia will need a military in the future. Compared to earlier years, the data suggest that the public is increasingly conscious of external threats and the evolving security environment. Furthermore, the data on values worth sacrificing show that causes such as 'world peace', 'defence of Slovenia', 'protection of the environment', and 'human rights' show substantial increases.*

study of civil-military relations concerns the degree of civil-military (dis)integration, also identified in the 'civil-military gap' between the armed forces and its parent society. The civil-military divide is rooted in the historical separation between the military and broader society, whereby the military is supposed to be a separate entity with its own unique culture, values and norms (Huntington, 1957), and refers to the perceived growing disconnect between the civilian population and the military in a given society (e.g. Feaver, Kohn, 2001; Schake, Mattis, 2016). Such a gap can affect mutual understanding, policymaking, and integration within society.

In Slovenia, there is limited research exploring these differences, particularly in terms of socio-structural factors. This article addresses this gap by examining the demographic differences between the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) and broader society, and additionally, differences between the ranks in the SAF.[2] The article contributes to the literature on civil-military relations by providing empirical data on the demographic characteristics of military personnel in Slovenia. Understanding these differences has practical implications for policymakers and military leaders, who can use these insights to improve integration and cohesion between the military and society.

1 CIVIL-MILITARY (DIS)INTEGRATION

Civil-military (dis)integration issues initially emerged in discussions between Huntington (1957) and Janowitz (1960), although the study of the military and its relationship with civil society was a secondary issue (see Cohn, 1999; Garb, 2005). These discussions addressed whether the inherently conservative military, due to the functional imperatives of war, should adapt to increasingly liberal societal values, or whether society should become more conservative to strengthen the military (Feaver and Kohn, 2001, pp 2–3). In other words, should the military be different from civilian society, and if so, to what extent, or does the military have the right to be different?

The first wave of thought development can be placed post-World War II, during the 'classic' debate on civil-military relations between Janowitz and Huntington. Huntington (1957) saw the problem in the ideological gap between the conservative officer corps and the more liberal, individualistic society. The extent of this gap depends on the external threat levels and the actions of civilian leaders, who may try to shape the military in their image. Huntington (Ibid.) argued that such 'fusion' efforts would be detrimental to military effectiveness. He suggested that at least tolerating, if not accepting, the conservative values of military culture is necessary. Janowitz (1960) agreed with some claims but saw the resolution in the military's adaptation to societal values and needs and technological advancement. He believed that an overly isolated military would become unresponsive to civilian control, reducing public trust and support, which could separate the military from the values of the society it serves, endangering its effectiveness. Therefore, the military should

[2] *We observed soldiers, non-commissioned officers (NCOs), and officers.*

align more with civilian culture and values, as a military reflecting and connected to civil society would be more trusted and effective in its duties.

The trauma of the Vietnam War brought public attention back to civil-military relations. The Vietnam experience incited hostility between military and civilian elites (Feaver, Kohn, 2001, p 3). Military service increasingly resembled civilian jobs, a change welcomed by some and regretted by others (see Moskos, 1977). The divisions caused by the war and the end of conscription led to demographic changes in the military, making it more divergent from society. The military had to compete for 'employees' like any other employer. The feared consequences mirrored previous concerns: society would not understand or support military needs; the American public would not elect officials knowledgeable about the military; military effectiveness would suffer; an isolated military would neglect its obligations to society and become hostile (Feaver, Kohn, 2001, p 3). The feminist movement of the time contributed to the debate, offering diametrically opposed solutions: boycotting the military or fully integrating women into all parts of the organisation (Ibid.).

After the geopolitical changes at the end of the Cold War, the debate revived. Janowitz's intellectual heirs now saw the professional military as increasingly distant from civil society (Bacevich, Kohn, 1997; Ricks, 1997; Holsti, 1998), while Huntington's followers argued that civil culture had strayed so far from traditional values that it sought to eradicate necessary civil-military differences (Hillen, 1998; Webb, 2000). From this period, Feaver and Kohn (2001, pp 2–4) deduced four main arguments from each camp. Janowitz's 'heirs' argued that: (i) the military ideologically diverges from the civil environment – disproportionately right-wing and more religious (and fundamentalist or evangelical), mainly aligned with the Republican Party (Bacevich, Kohn, 1997; Holsti, 1998); (ii) the military becomes more alienated from and even hostile to the civil environment (McIsaac, Verdugo, 1995; Maslowski, 1990); (iii) the military resists change, especially the inclusion of women and 'homosexuals', and the more 'constabulary' duties which prevailed post-Cold War (Hutcheson, 1996; Kier, 1998); and (iv) if the military seeks to expand its autonomy and avoid civilian control, it will lose civil respect and support (Danzig, 1999). Conversely, Huntington's 'heirs' argued: (i) the military is 'mainstream', with values differing from the political and cultural elite, who do not represent the broader public (Webb, 1997; 1998; 2000; Hillen, 1998); (ii) the ruling political and social elite is ignorant, indifferent, and hostile towards the military, using it as a laboratory for social change – attacking its warrior culture (Kitfield, 2000; Murchison, 1999); (iii) micromanagement and political correctness stifle military effectiveness (Sarkesian, 1998; Webb, 1999); and (iv) since public support for the military is solid, any value gap is insignificant; the problem lies with the ruling elite, alienated from public opinion due to Vietnam-era prejudices and relativistic values, while the public highly respects the military (Maynes, 1999). These authors clearly distinguish the nature of the gap between the military and the civilian elite[3] and the military and mass society.

[3] *The sample of 'civilian elite' or 'civilian leaders' was drawn from eight subsamples: Who's Who in America and the directories of prominent Americans in the categories of 'Clergy', 'Women', American Politics', 'State Department', 'Media', 'Foreign Affairs', and 'Labour' (Feaver, Kohn, 2001, p 6).*

A key impetus for the current debate was a Triangle Institute for Security Studies (TISS) project, which identified the civil-military gap between the US armed forces and their society and its impact on military effectiveness and civil-military cooperation (Feaver, Kohn, 2001). They found that officers were more conservative than civilian elites but not more than the general public, while also being more supportive of civil liberties and free speech than the public (Feaver, Kohn, 2001, pp 459–460). The officer corps was also much more aligned with the Republican Party than the Democrats – eight times as many identified as Republicans (Ibid.). Feaver and Kohn (Ibid., p 471) highlighted the "massive ignorance" of the public with regard to civil-military relations as the most critical result of the study.

This prompted research in Europe, largely following the finding of a gap between the civilian population and the armed forces (see Strachan, 2003; Vennesson, 2003; Caforio, Kummel, 2005; Caforio, 2007). Strachan (2003) identified a civil-military gap between British society and the military, rooted in historical continuity rather than recent changes, with the end of conscription widening this gap. Vennesson (2003) noted that civil-military relations in France had improved post-World War II, but potential gaps and weaknesses remained. There was a gap between the public perception of the military and official military doctrine, as the public prioritised social security, employment, and defence (peace policy), while the French armed forces focused on power projection abroad and deterrence (Ibid.). Furthermore, an ERGOMAS international comparative study of civil-military relations looked at cultural differences in democratic societies (Caforio, Kummel, 2005; Caforio, 2007). The researchers studied cadets at military academies and their generational peers at civilian universities ("future elites"). With regard to previous tensions, the authors found that in several countries (France, Italy, Romania, Slovenia, and Spain), the abandonment of conscription and transition to volunteer forces had caused past tensions which often still persist (Caforio, 2007, p 328). For European countries, where conscription had been an instrument of integration and exchange between the civil and military spheres for nearly two centuries, its abandonment reduced societal representation within the military (Ibid.). In other countries, historical tensions resulted from factors related to military and political dynamics. In Sweden and Germany, military reform was the main source of disagreement (Ibid.). Conversely, in South Africa, the use of armed forces for internal security purposes had contributed to past tensions (Ibid.). Other causes of historical tensions include social unrest due to significant political-social transitions, such as Spain's post-Franco transition, Slovenia's independence, and the transition from communist regimes in countries such as Bulgaria, Poland, and Romania. In Turkey, historical tensions stemmed from repeated military intervention in politics. In Switzerland, past disputes arose from conflicts over the military budget, procurement processes, and related scandals between political leaders and military officials (Ibid.).

The researchers found a trend towards decreasing tensions in most countries, including Slovenia (Ibid., pp 328–331). However, minor tensions remain in common areas of contention: military budgets, the modernisation of the armed forces, and the

status of military personnel (Ibid., p 331). Caforio (Ibid.) classified existing tensions between the civil and military spheres into structural and conditional causes. The structural causes mainly involve cultural and cognitive differences between the civil and military spheres in general, and, stemming from this, conflicts between the political and military leadership due to politicians' poor understanding of national security issues (Ibid.). Conditional local causes range from ideological issues, such as the presence of strong pacifist (Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden) or religious (Turkey) extremist groups, to legislative deficiencies (Bulgaria, Poland), poor public information (Italy, Romania), procurement scandals (Sweden), and the unique case of Switzerland, where changing international conditions question the country's foreign policy stance and the mission of its armed forces (Ibid.). Caforio concluded that while cultural differences exist, there is a trend towards convergence.

The debate on the convergence and divergence of society and the military has progressed to the point where Rahbek-Clemmensen et al. (2012) have further conceptualised and operationalised the civil-military gap. They argued (Ibid., p 670) that despite widespread claims about the serious consequences of the civil-military gap, authors sometimes refer to entirely different phenomena when discussing it. They conceptualised the civil-military gap in terms of four distinct dimensions, representing four ideal types which do not necessarily exclude each other, but which are divergent enough to justify such a classification. These dimensions are: (i) cultural; (ii) socio-structural (demographic); (iii) policy-preferential; and (iv) institutional (Ibid.). The ‘elite’ dimension focuses on differences in political preferences between military and civilian decision-makers. The institutional dimension highlights the differing interests between the armed forces and other public institutions (Ibid., pp 673–674). Within the cultural dimension, beliefs and values differ between military personnel and the civilian population (Ibid., pp 671–672), while in the socio-structural (demographic) dimension, the military increasingly recruits people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds (Rahbek-Clemmensen et al., 2012, pp 672–673; also see Bacevich, 2013). Hines et al. (2015) examined public opinion data on the relationship between the public and the UK armed forces.Despite societal changes and reduced direct contact, the British public continues to value the armed forces, maintaining stable opinions over time, even when opposing certain military missions (Ibid.). They distinguish between military deployment policies and the personnel serving in the armed forces, viewed as professionals competently carrying out their duties (Ibid.). Overall, while there are differences in attitudes between the armed forces and the broader British society, the results do not support claims that the ‘gap’ has become a ‘chasm’ (Hines et al., 2015, pp 704–705).

Schake and Mattis (2016), in their systematic study of the US civil-military gap, identifed the following determinants: (i) public ignorance about the armed forces; (ii) strategic differences due to the lack of veterans among political decision-makers; (iii) isolation of the armed forces from society; (iv) cultural differences between the armed forces and society; (v) undermining of military effectiveness; (vi) changing civil-military relations; (vii) gaps in the perception of casualties; (viii)

military self-aggrandisement; (ix) civil-military alignment versus civilian elite; (x) non-military operational forms; and (xi) personal acquaintances. Their findings indicated that gaps exist. Public respect for the US military is widespread, but public understanding of it is superficial, posing problems such as strategic inefficiency, hindering sustained support for war efforts, reinforcing veteran victimisation, and distancing veterans from the broader community while introducing social policies which reduce battlefield lethality (Ibid., pp 216–217). Furthermore, they did not find that civil-military tensions are at a historically high level, as indicated by the TISS study; rather, public support for leaders has decreased, while respect for the military remains high. The more critical issue is the military's own view of its separation from civil society (Ibid.). The study also found that the gap is not necessarily between civilians and the military, but between the general public and civilian elites, who often impose changes on the military not aligned with public opinion. With regard to cultural dimensions, the authors found that despite political leaders' pressures to use the military for broader social change, the public generally respects the military's uniqueness. Finally, the authors highlighted the crucial role of veterans in bridging the gap, emphasising the importance of integrating veterans into civilian life (Ibid.).

Thomson et al. (2019) approached narrowing the gap between the Canadian armed forces and society by conducting an inter-organisational educational seminar in the form of a semi-structured forum. His findings suggested that interagency education and training can positively affect improving cooperation between the military and NGOs, thus reducing the gap. De Angelis et al. (2020) explored differences in social media usage and satisfaction among military cadets, the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) cadets, and civilian postgraduate students. Civilian students reported the highest daily social media use, averaging 4.08 hours, ROTC cadets 2.62 hours, and military academy cadets 1.87 hours (Ibid., p 22). Zwald and Berejikian (2021) examined the supposed gap in foreign policy beliefs between the US military and the public. They assessed beliefs about militarism, internationalism, and perceptions of future threats and military conflicts (Ibid.). They found no significant differences between the public and military views on militarism, indicating similar perspectives on the role of military force in foreign policy. With regard to internationalism, military officers are more likely than the public to support US involvement in international affairs. The military also perceives threats more acutely and believes national security will decline over the next decade more frequently than the public (Ibid., pp 16–17).

1.1 The Case of Slovenia

Civil-military relations in Slovenia developed against the backdrop of former Yugoslavia, whose experiences mirrored certain dynamics common among European socialist states. These relations unfolded through intermittent political liberalisation and were shaped by historical determinants of socialist state formation (Garb, 1998, p 71). A central characteristic was strict party control over the armed forces, which remained effective while the ruling party was strong (Jelušič, 1998, p 77). In Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA) served a dual function,

encompassing both national defence and the safeguarding of socialism and territorial integrity.

Civil-military relations in Yugoslavia went through three phases (Remington, 1978, pp 263–264). Initially, during the post-war period, the party and the army were virtually inseparable. Subsequently, in the 1960s, the JNA underwent professionalisation – partly in response to Soviet threats – and this reinforced military interests. In the 1970s, the military's status was revitalised amid internal party disputes, culminating in the constitutional recognition of the JNA's political role. The anti-fascist tradition and the Cominform conflict further enhanced the army's prestige, while a high level of politicisation legitimised the party's authority.

The JNA's unusual position gave it considerable influence over domestic and foreign policies. As independence movements gathered momentum in various republics, trust eroded between the military leaders and the civilian authorities. During Slovenia's drive for independence, the army perceived insufficient civilian control, leading to the breakdown of civilian oversight (Furlan, 2012, p 85). The paralysis of the federal presidency, marked by the withdrawal of its Serbian, Vojvodinian, and Montenegrin members, aggravated this situation (Furlan, 2012, p 86). A confluence of economic, social, political, and moral crises, along with the collapse of federal government structures and demands for JNA intervention, expanded the military's political role (Bebler, 1992, in Furlan, 2012, p 86).

Awareness of civil-military relations grew among those shaping an independent Slovenia, including politicians and specialists (Furlan, 2012, p 86). Civilian control of the armed forces was explicitly raised at the inaugural meeting of the Slovenian Democratic Union on 15 December 1988, with the goal of creating mechanisms for civilian oversight of the armed forces, police, and intelligence agencies (Rupel, 1992a, in Furlan, 2012, p 86). During the constitution-drafting process, defence matters were not initially prioritised; instead, legislative definitions were deferred, reflecting the divergent viewpoints on the military's appropriate role (Furlan, 2012, p 89). Following the establishment of Slovenia's first democratic government in May 1990, efforts to consolidate democratic civil-military relations began (Furlan, 2012, p 90).

In the wake of independence, scholarship in military sociology and civil-military relations has evaluated the integration – or lack thereof – of the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) into broader society. Legality and legitimacy underpin the military's social role (Jelušič, 1997). The legitimacy of military involvement in politics depends on conformity with the prevailing political culture (Jelušič, 1997, p 14). Failure to align with the societal imperative leads to the alienation and delegitimisation of the armed forces (Jelušič, 1997, p 68). In the 1980s and 1990s, two opposing trends were identified: societal penetration of the military, leading to civilianisation, and isolation which generated alienation between the military and society (Jelušič, 1997, p 62). After independence, the SAF solidified social legitimacy through political

neutrality – such as prohibiting party membership among soldiers – and humanitarian engagement in major natural disasters (Jelušič, 1997, p 217).

According to Bebler (2005, pp 87–100), civil-military relations in Slovenia operate within a democratic framework yet are not 'healthy'. Key issues include broad civilian dominance, numerous overlapping oversight mechanisms, excessive civilianisation of defence, declining military professionalism, the absence of any pro-military lobby, and low levels of civil militarism (Bebler, 2005, p 99). Public interest in the SAF remains modest, as does political debate on defence (Ibid.). The institutionalisation of civilian oversight after independence has been studied extensively (Grizold, 1997; 2001), and the findings suggest that democratic civil-military relations have stagnated (Furlan, 2012). Tighter oversight is meant not only to subordinate the military to the civilian authorities, but also to increase its operational efficiency, yet underperformance can undermine the oversight process (Furlan, 2012).

Garb and Jelušič (2005) position Slovenia's transition to an all-volunteer force and emerging security challenges in relation to the civil-military gap thesis. By surveying both civilian university students and officer candidates, they uncovered attitudinal differences with regard to national security priorities, the role of the military in humanitarian versus combat operations, and the depth of military engagement with political processes (Ibid.). Although the SAF enjoyed heightened esteem after the country's independence and subsequent NATO membership, certain perceptions – particularly around democratic control, willingness to serve, and societal support for defence expenditure – remained contested (Ibid., pp 188–191). The findings showed that public trust in the military, while generally strong, can fluctuate in response to generational shifts, policy changes, and media narratives, highlighting how broader social values both converge with and diverge from military culture.

Divergent and convergent tendencies in military-society relations were further examined by Garb (2009; 2017), who argued that the armed forces should reflect the broader society's structure and values (Garb, 2009, p 106). The form a military assumes partly depends on the society itself (Garb, 2009, p 107). Debates on convergence, civilianisation, postmodernity, and civil integration persist, but these shifts are neither uniformly progressive, nor universally applicable, as social, cultural, and political contexts vary (Ibid.). Some societies even undergo remilitarisation by dedicating the armed forces primarily to combat tasks and outsourcing non-combat support to civilian agencies (Ibid., p 122). Furthermore, military education in Slovenia encompasses both civilian programmes and specialised military training (Kotnik-Dvojmoč, 1999; Garb, 2017, pp 37–39). Although there is general approval of the current education structure, criticisms centre on the need for a more military-focused curriculum, practical skill development, and earlier officer engagement (Garb, 2017, pp 37–39). These criticisms indicate efforts to reinforce a distinctively military professional ethos.

Slovenian public opinion surveys have explored views on national and international security, the role of the SAF, and perceptions of the military profession (Jelušič et al., 2005; Malešič et al., 2007, 2009, 2012; Malešič and Vuga, 2014). Preserving public trust is regarded as vital for sustaining the SAF's legitimacy, achieved by bridging civilian and military values (Malešič et al., 2015, p 65). Trust in the SAF remains relatively high compared to other public institutions, suggesting that societal imperative remains largely met (Ibid., p 66). However, public knowledge of the SAF's purpose and operations appears limited (Malešič, 2012). Studies on Slovenian security culture identify a 'security bubble' characterised by risk aversion and a narrow scope of activity deemed worth significant sacrifices (Vuga Beršnak, 2014, pp 375–376; Vuga Beršnak, 2021, pp 42–57). Research has also examined everyday life differences between civilian and military communities, exploring stereotypes and family relationships within the SAF (Vuga Beršnak et al., 2019–2023).

1.2 The argument

Demographic factors are important in shaping both how the military views itself and how society perceives it in return. A military whose members diverge significantly in age structure, education, gender, ethnicity, ideology or regional representation from those of the broader society may experience strains in legitimacy or recruitment and retention. Research in the United States shows how such demographic cleavages affect everything from policy-making and public trust to broader questions of legitimacy and effectiveness. Analyses of survey data in that context point to the officer corps' tendency to be disproportionately republican (conservative), rural, and regionally concentrated, a pattern that reflects sociopolitical rifts (Feaver, 2001; Dempsey, 2010; Urben, 2013). Schake and Mattis (2016) highlighted the public perceptions of the military and demonstrated that demographic imbalances in the armed forces can reinforce or undermine its legitimacy in civilian eyes. Similarly, Liebert and Golby (2017) traced how the all-volunteer force has accelerated certain demographic patterns within the US military, such as over-representation of specific regions and socioeconomic groups, potentially creating recruitment and retention challenges. Longitudinal findings suggest that demographic transformations also shape fluctuations in public confidence along partisan lines, especially when societal expectations about the armed forces' representativeness are unmet (Burbach, 2019).

Although these findings derive primarily from a US context, they show the broader relevance of studying the demographic composition of the military. In Slovenia, where existing research on the socio-structural differences between the SAF and civilian society is very limited, our forthcoming analysis responds to an important empirical gap. If the SAF's demographic makeup reveals patterns of under or over-representation it may echo the concerns raised by scholars, namely that a military shaped by distinct demographics risks detaching from its parent society. While the subsequent analysis explores whether demographics in the SAF mirror or diverge from the patterns observed in the general population, assessing the full impact of the gap is beyond the scope of this article – we must first explore the potential presence of the gap.

2 METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

We followed a basic research question: *If and to what extent are there socio-structural differences between the Slovenian Armed Forces and society, and additionally, what is the relationship between military ranks?*

Study design

Our study is a quantitative analysis of demographic data.

Variables

Dependent variables: Demographic representation by region; ideological self-identification; religiosity; social hierarchy perception; voting participation; and marital status

Independent variables: General population (SJM 2023); Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF-total); further divided into military rank (soldiers, NCOs, officers)

Sampling and data collection

For the purpose of this article, we analysed and compared two samples: a representative public opinion sample of the adult population, and a sample of military personnel. A survey was carried out in the autumn of 2023 by the Public Opinion and Mass Communication Research Centre and the Defence Research Centre, both of the University of Ljubljana's Faculty of Social Sciences, on a representative sample of the adult population of Slovenia (N=1089). The survey was carried out based on self-completion using an online or a written questionnaire.

For the military sample we opted for non-probability quota sampling, defining the quotas based on the proportion of soldiers, NCOs, and officers in the military population. We carried out a hybrid survey in the spring of 2024, through the online survey service 1KA and in situ in the barracks (N=459).[4] The link to the survey was disseminated through official military and MoD channels. The sampling strategy aimed to proportionally reflect the key characteristics of the military population; we therefore made a preferred sampling list from each barracks which was sent to the military officials who were assisting with the research.

Age and gender demographics

Considering all the respondents, the average age of the SJM sample was 50.22 years with a median age of 50 years. In contrast, the SAF sample had an average age of 38.10 years, with a median age of 38 years.

[4] *We strove for 150 responses of officers, 277 responses of NCOs, and 329 responses of soldiers. The actual sample consisted of 459 servicemembers of which 412 identified themselves based on rank: 89 officers, 104 NCOs, 194 soldiers, and 25 no rank.*

Of the men in the general population sample (49.8% of total respondents), the average age was 50.79 years, with a median age of 52 years. Women comprised a slightly larger proportion (50.2%) with an average age of 49.75 and a median age of 49 years. In contrast, men constituted the majority (88.1%) of the SAF respondents, with an average age of 37.89 years, and a median age of 38 years. The female SAF members (11.9%) had an average age of 39.45 years, with a median age of 39 years. The soldiers, constituting the largest group (53.2% of SAF respondents), had an average age of 34.29 years, with a median age of 34 years. The Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs), comprising 28.5% of the SAF sample, were generally older, with an average age of 44.45 years and a median age of 44 years. The officers, making up 18.3% of the SAF respondents, had an average age of 42.39 years, and a median age of 41 years.

Data analysis

The data analysis for this study was conducted using a combination of descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. In our analysis we first compared the general population sample with the SAF sample, and then compared and analysed the data between the ranks.

Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the basic features of the data. Inferential statistical methods were used to assess differences between groups (Chi-square Tests, ANOVA, T-Test, Post-hoc Analysis).

All the statistical analyses were conducted using R software.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Geographical representation

In examining the geographical distribution of military personnel in Slovenia, significant disparities emerged when comparing the SAF to the general population across various regions (see Table 1). Statistical analysis using a chi-square test confirmed a significant difference in regional distribution ($\chi^2 = 498.1$, $p < 0.01$). The SAF sample exhibited a substantial over-representation from the Podravska and Pomurska regions, where there were significantly more military personnel (24.04% and 10.82%, respectively) than would be expected based on population size (15.56% and 5.35%) alone. Conversely, regions like Jugovzhodna Slovenija and Zasavska are notably under-represented in the SAF sample, indicating potential challenges in recruitment.

The analysis of regional representation within military ranks revealed some further insights. While there was no statistically significant difference in regional distribution between soldiers, NCOs, and officers overall ($\chi^2 = 32.64$, $p = 0.0672$), specific deviations highlighted localised trends, so we conducted a post-hoc test.

For instance, the Osrednjeslovenska region showed a marked over-representation of officers; in contrast, Podravska showed a significant under-representation of officers.

Table 1: Demographic representation by Slovenian regions

Which statistical region are you from?					
	Percentage	Percentage checking each option			
	General population	SAF – total	Soldiers	NCOs	Officers
Osrednjeslovenska	26.62	17.79	12.57	19.42	29.27
Podravska	15.56	24.04	30.37	23.3	12.2
Savinjska	12.33	11.06	12.57	13.59	6.1
Gorenjska	9.86	6.97	4.71	7.77	9.76
Obalno-kraška	5.61	5.05	4.19	6.8	4.88
Goriška	5.57	2.88	2.62	2.91	3.66
Primorsko-notranjska	2.55	4.33	5.76	3.88	3.66
Pomurska	5.35	10.82	13.61	10.68	8.54
Koroška	3.32	4.57	4.71	1.94	3.66
Jugovzhodna Slovenija	6.96	5.53	4.71	2.91	8.54
Zasavska	2.69	2.4	1.57	2.91	3.66
Posavska	3.58	4.57	2.62	3.88	6.1
		Valid N=416	N=191	N=103	N=82
			Valid N=376		

3.2 Ideological self-identification

In measuring ideological self-identification, we asked respondents where they saw themselves on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is left and 10 is right (see Table 2). Overall, the SAF tends to lean more towards right-wing ideological positions than the general population. Specifically, the mean ideological score was higher for SAF members (6.9) than for the general population (5.2). This trend was further reflected in the distribution across different ideological scores, where SAF members showed higher percentages at scores 7 to 10, while the SJM sample exhibited a more even distribution across the scale. Additionally, there was variability within the SAF ranks, with soldiers demonstrating the strongest right-leaning tendency (mean score 7.46), followed by NCOs (mean score 6.99) and officers (mean score 5.97), suggesting varying ideological orientations across different military ranks.

Table 2: Ideological self-identifications

In politics, people often talk about the left and the right. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is left and 10 is right, where would you put yourself?					
	Percentage checking each option				
	SJM 2024	SAF – total	Soldiers	NCOs	Officers
0	5.7	2.2	0.9	4.2	1.7
1	3.7	1.1	0	0	3.4
2	5.5	3.2	3.6	2.8	3.4
3	8.4	4.3	3.6	1.4	5.1
4	7	5.7	3.6	6.9	10.2
5	33.9	9	5.5	6.9	15.3
6	8.8	12.5	10.9	12.5	18.6
7	8.8	16.5	19.1	15.3	16.9
8	5.5	18.6	16.4	23.6	13.6
9	2.3	6.8	8.2	8.3	3.4
10	10.2	20.1	28.2	18.1	8.5
Mean	5.2	6.9	7.46	6.99	5.97
	Valid N=844	Valid N=279	N=110	N=72	N=59
			Valid N=241		

The Welch Two Sample t-test reveals a significant difference in ideological self-identification between the general population and the military (p-value < 0.01). The mean ideological score for the general population was 5.20, while the mean for the SAF was significantly higher, at 6.90. This suggests that the SAF tends to identify significantly more with right-wing (higher) ideological positions than the general population, whose ideological distribution is more centred in the middle range. A chi-square test further supported the fact that the distribution of ideological self-identification significantly differed between the military and general population groups (X-squared = 146.98, p-value < 0.01). The post-hoc analysis using standardised residuals further clarified the nature of the differences. For the general population, the residual for level 5 was 3.40, indicating a significant over-representation. Conversely, levels 8, 9, and 10 had negative residuals (-1.74, -3.20, -2.07), suggesting an under-representation in these higher ideological positions. On the other hand, in the SAF, level 5 had a negative residual of -5.88, showing a significant under-representation of military personnel. At the same time, levels 8, 9, and 10 showed positive residuals (3.01, 5.52, 3.57), indicating a significant over-representation in these more right-wing ideological positions. These results highlight a shift towards more extreme ideological positions in the SAF, while the general population is more centred around the moderate position.

Furthermore, we were interested in whether there were significant differences between ideological self-identification based on rank, i.e. soldiers, NCOs, and

officers. An ANOVA test was conducted to examine the differences. The results revealed a statistically significant effect of rank on ideological self-identification ($p = 0.0007$), indicating that the mean ideological self-identification differed across the ranks. Levene's test for homogeneity of variances was not significant ($p = 0.925$), confirming that the assumption of equal variances was met.

A post-hoc Tukey's HSD test was conducted to identify specific group differences. Officers were found to have significantly lower (more left-leaning) ideological self-identification scores than soldiers (mean difference = -1.49, $p = 0.0004$) and NCOs (mean difference = -1.02, $p = 0.042$). On the other hand, no significant difference was observed between soldiers and NCOs (mean difference = -0.47, $p = 0.400$).

3.3 Religion

The data on religious self-identification (see Table 3) revealed that within the general population, 57% identified as religious, 23.6% as non-religious, and 12.1% as convinced atheists. In contrast, 51% of SAF personnel described themselves as religious and 23.3% as non-religious, while a higher proportion (17.2%) identified as convinced atheists. The individual ranks in the SAF showed that 60.8% of soldiers considered themselves religious, with 15.1% identifying as convinced atheists. Among NCOs, 57.4% said they were religious, 16.8% convinced atheists, and 25.7% non-religious. Officers displayed the lowest proportion of religious self-identification at 46.9%, while 27.2% identified as convinced atheists, the highest percentage in the SAF. These trends suggest that although the majority of SAF personnel remain religious, there is a notably larger segment identifying as convinced atheists compared to the general population, particularly among officers.

Teble 3: Religious self-identification)

Regardless of whether you attend religious services or not, would you say that you are ...					
	Percentage checking each option				
	SJM 2024	SAF – total	Soldiers	NCOs	Officers
Religious	57	51	60.8	57.4	46.9
Non-religious	23.6	23.3	24.2	25.7	25.9
A convinced atheist	12.1	17.2	15.1	16.8	27.2
N.A.	7.3	8.5	/	/	/
	N=1089	N=459	N=186	N=101	N=81
			Valid N=368		

In comparing religious self-identification between the SJM and the SAF total sample, a chi-square test yielded a statistically significant p-value of 0.0159. Specifically, the post-hoc test revealed that the »Convinced atheist« category showed a standardised residual of 2.17, indicating that the SAF sample had a significantly higher proportion of convinced atheists than the general population. No significant differences were found in the other religious categories.

When comparing religious self-identification across ranks within the SAF, the chi-square test was not statistically significant (p = 0.152). Additionally, none of the standardised residuals from the post-hoc test were greater than ±2, confirming that there were no significant deviations in the observed versus expected counts for religious categories across ranks.

3.4 Social hierarchy

We also asked the respondents to self-assess their position in the social hierarchy (see Table 4). The distribution of self-placement on a societal 'top-to-bottom' scale revealed the mean self-placement to be similar for the general population (5.77) and the SAF – total sample (5.65), indicating a shared tendency to identify with the middle portion of the scale. However, closer examination by rank showed some meaningful differences. Soldiers reported a mean of 5.49 and NCOs 5.48, suggesting both groups view themselves around the mid-range. Their distribution was spread across levels 5 to 7, which aligned closely with overall societal averages. In contrast, officers stood out with a markedly higher average self-placement of 6.53, the only mean score above 6. Nearly half the officers (49.2%) chose level 7, signalling a stronger perception of occupying a position closer to the 'top' of society, relative to the other SAF ranks.

Teble 4: Self-identification of social hierarchy status)

In our society, there are groups of people who are near the top and groups who are further down. Below is a scale from the top (10) to the bottom (1). Where would you place yourself on this scale?					
	Percentage checking each option				
	SJM 2024	SAF – total	Soldiers	NCOs	Officers
10	1.2	2.6	6.1	0	3.2
9	2.2	2.6	4.1	2.7	4.8
8	9.1	6.5	5.4	12.3	12.7
7	15.2	17.6	21.6	23.3	49.2
6	17.3	3.1	3.4	9.6	1.6
5	22.7	15.9	27	21.9	14.3
4	4.7	9.4	14.2	16.4	7.9
3	5.1	5.9	10.8	6.8	6.3
2	1.6	2.6	4.7	2.7	0
1	1.9	2	2.7	4.1	0
Don't know	12.4	10.2	/	/	/
No response	6.6	/	/	/	/
Mean	5.77	5.65	5.49	5.48	6.53
	N=1089	Valid N=360	N=148	N=73	N=63
			Valid N=284[1]		

[1] *In responses based on rank, missing values and answer don't know have already been omitted.*

Further t-test analysis showed that while the mean social hierarchy rankings of the general population and the SAF were statistically indistinguishable ($p = 0.245$), the overall distribution of how individuals place themselves on the social ladder does differ significantly. A chi-square test ($p < 0.001$) revealed disparities at ranks 10, 6, and 4. Specifically, an over-representation of SAF personnel identified themselves at the top (rank 10), fewer appeared in the mid-level (rank 6), and more clustered in the lower-middle tier (rank 4). In other words, while the average perception of social status seems similar between the SAF and the general population, the way each group is spread across the hierarchy scale varies significantly.

Within the SAF itself, an ANOVA test ($p = 0.00596$) found that soldiers (mean = 5.49), NCOs (mean = 5.48), and officers (mean = 6.53) do not share the same average sense of social standing. Officers clearly distinguish themselves by placing higher on the social hierarchy ladder than soldiers and NCOs. A corresponding chi-square test ($p = 0.00219$) confirmed this distributional difference, pinpointing an over-representation of officers specifically at rank 7 (standardised residual: 3.14). Taken together, these findings indicate that while the SAF sample as a whole does not deviate from the general population sample in terms of mean hierarchical placement, officers tend to perceive themselves on a higher rung of society than soldiers and NCOs.

3.5 Marital status

Marital status is another demographic dimension studied (see Table 5). In the general population, 50.2% reported being married, compared to only 38.8% in the total SAF sample. However, this figure varied widely across the ranks. Among NCOs, the proportion of married individuals is significantly higher at 70.5%, followed by officers at 57.5%, while soldiers have the lowest rate of marriage at 38.5%. Conversely, soldiers are over-represented in the 'Single – never married' category, with 52.1% identifying as single, compared to 32.9% of officers and only 18.2% of NCOs. This suggests that marital status is closely associated with rank, with NCOs being the most likely to be married and soldiers the least likely. The 'Separated' and 'Divorced' categories show relatively small proportions across all groups. Among soldiers, 4.7% report being separated and another 4.7% divorced, while NCOs and officers have slightly higher rates of divorce at 8% and 8.2%, respectively. Widowed respondents are present in the general population (7.5%) but are absent in the SAF.

Teble 5: Marital status

What is your official marital status?					
	Percentage checking each option				
	SJM 2024	SAF – total	Soldiers	NCOs	Officers
Married	50.2	38.8	38.5	70.5	57.5
Separated (I am married but separated)	1.5	2.8	4.7	3.4	1.4
Divorced (separated)	5.8	5.2	4.7	8	8.2

What is your official marital status?					
	Percentage checking each option				
	SJM 2024	SAF – total	Soldiers	NCOs	Officers
Widower/widow	7.5	0.5	0	0	0
Single – never married or in a registered civil partnership	25.7	33.3	52.1	18.2	32.9
N.A.	9.2	19.4	/	/	/
	N=1089	N=459	N=88	N=73	N=73
			Valid N=243		

The chi-square test reveals a statistically significant difference in marital status distribution between the general population (SJM 2024) and the SAF total sample ($p < 0.001$). Post-hoc analysis identifies two categories driving these differences. In the 'Widowed' category, the SAF shows a significantly lower proportion of individuals compared to the general population (standardised residual = -4.30). Conversely, the 'Single – never married' category is significantly over-represented in the SAF (standardised residual = 3.22), indicating a higher proportion of single individuals in the military.

When comparing marital status across soldiers, NCOs, and officers in the SAF, the chi-square test also shows a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.001$). Post-hoc analysis highlights that soldiers reported a significantly lower proportion of married individuals (standardised residual = -2.02) and a significantly higher proportion of single individuals (standardised residual = 2.61). NCOs, on the other hand, are significantly less likely to be single (standardised residual = -2.49), reflecting their notably high percentage of married individuals (70.5%). While the over-representation of married NCOs was notable, it did not reach the threshold for statistical significance (standardised residual = 1.86).

3.6 Voting

With regard to voting in the last National Assembly elections, we asked the respondents if they had taken part in the April 2022 elections for members of the Slovenian National Assembly (see Table 6). The majority of the respondents, both in the general population and in the SAF, reported having voted in the April 2022 parliamentary elections. Among the general population, 73.2% indicated they had voted, while the SAF total (69.3%) was only slightly lower. However, important differences emerge within the SAF ranks. Soldiers reported a lower voting rate (66.8%) than NCOs and officers, both of whom stood out with a notably higher participation rate (85.4%). The proportion of non-voters was higher among soldiers (32.6%) than in the general population (16.4%) and the SAF as a whole (22.9%), indicating that soldiers are more likely to have abstained from voting. In contrast,

NCOs and officers closely matched each other, with only 14.6% reporting that they did not vote – less than the general population and well below the SAF average.

Table 6: Voting

Some people do not vote for various reasons. Did you take part in last year's elections (April 2022) for members of the Slovenian National Assembly?[2]					
	Percentage checking each option				
	SJM 2024	SAF – total	Soldiers	NCOs	Officers
Yes	73.2	69.3	66.8	85.4	85.4
No	16.4	22.9	32.6	14.6	14.6
Did not have the right to vote	3.8	1.3	0.5	0	0
N.A.	6.6	6.5	/	/	/
	N=1089	N=459	N=190	N=103	N=82
			Valid N=375		

The chi-square test indicates a statistically significant difference in voting behaviour between the general population and the SAF ($X^2 = 15.243$, df = 2, p = 0.0004898). Examination of the standardised residuals revealed that the main sources of this difference lie in the 'Did not vote' and 'No right to vote' categories. The SAF sample showed a notable over-representation of individuals who did not vote (residual = 2.15) and a marked under-representation of individuals without the right to vote (residual = -2.40) compared to what would be expected if the two groups were similar. Although the general population also showed a slight tendency towards having more individuals without voting rights (residual = 1.56), the strongest deviations come from the military sample. In other words, while the two groups share some similarities, the higher proportion of non-voters and the lower proportion of 'no-right' individuals within the military primarily drive the significant association found in this analysis.

Furthermore, for comparing between ranks, the chi-square test result ($X^2 = 18.073$, df = 4, p = 0.001194) indicates a statistically significant association between rank and voting behaviour in the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF). This suggests that voting patterns differ between soldiers, NCOs, and officers. To identify the specific sources of these differences, the standardised residuals were examined. For the 'No' category, soldiers showed a notable over-representation (residual = 2.52), indicating that significantly more soldiers reported not voting than would be expected under the assumption of no association. In contrast, both NCOs (residual = -1.91) and officers (residual = -1.69) were under-represented in this category, suggesting that fewer than expected of them reported not voting. For the 'Yes' category, NCOs (residual = 1.10) and officers (residual = 0.97) had slightly higher-than-expected counts, although these residuals fell below the threshold of ±2, making them less significant.

[2] *The elections to the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia were held on Sunday, 24 April 2022. According to the data of the District Electoral Commissions, 1,203,522 voters, or 70.97% of all eligible voters, cast their ballots at polling stations in Slovenia.*

Conversely, soldiers were slightly under-represented (residual = -1.45), indicating fewer soldiers reported voting 'Yes' than expected.

4 DISCUSSION

The findings presented here illuminate the demographic dimension of the SAF against the backdrop of broader society. Although the scope of this study is limited to demographic indicators, the results nevertheless provide an initial empirical basis for understanding how the SAF may resemble or diverge from its parent society.

Notably, based on the samples, the SAF exhibits a distinct age structure, with its service members – predominantly male – being significantly younger than the general population, which aligns with usual armed forces demographics. However, official SAF data indicate that the average age of its service members is 43, whereas the average age of infantry soldiers stands at 37, figures the SAF deems excessively high (STA, 2023; Letno poročilo ministrstva za obrambo, 2023). In response, the organisation is actively seeking to recalibrate its age composition by redesigning officer education programmes so that new officers would be employed by age 24 (as opposed to the current, considerably higher age); revising recruitment requirements to allow those who have yet to finish secondary education to enlist on the condition that they subsequently complete their studies; increasing scholarship opportunities; and expanding access to internships for secondary and tertiary level students. With regard to gender composition, the SAF comprises approximately 17% women, compared to around 14% across NATO. Notably, Slovenia was the first, and thus far remains the only, NATO member state to have appointed a woman as Chief of the General Staff.

One of the differences which emerged is in geographical representation. Compared to the general population sample, service members in the SAF sample are disproportionately drawn from specific regions. The uneven distribution likely reflects a combination of historical, institutional, and socio-economic factors. The legacy of General Maister, who played a key role in securing Slovenian territory after World War I, may contribute to a stronger military tradition in the eastern parts of the country. Furthermore, the presence of large barracks (e.g. in Slovenska Bistrica and Vojašnica Generala Maistra in Maribor) and the military educational hub in Maribor – home to the Doctrine, Development, Education and Training Command – could help to maintain a heightened awareness of the SAF in the local communities. Additionally, in regions with fewer industrial or private-sector employment opportunities, the SAF's stable employment and competitive salaries relative to local standards may make a military career an attractive option. Furthermore, officer over-representation in the Osrednjeslovenska region may be influenced by the concentration of key military and defence institutions such as the Ministry of Defence, the General Staff, and the University of Ljubljana in the capital, as well as the SAF's Force Command in Vrhnika.

The SAF also differs ideologically from the general population. Historically, armed forces tend to attract individuals who are predisposed towards more conservative or right-leaning viewpoints. In many countries, patterns in political affiliation often converge around values such as national pride, security, and tradition. What is noteworthy in the SAF's case, however, is the divergence between the officers and the enlisted ranks. Officers, by virtue of their extended education and more frequent exposure to civilian policymakers, tend to be more centrist than soldiers and NCOs. In Slovenia, this effect is reinforced by the fact that officers only pursue their higher education through civilian institutions, rather than military academies.

Such ideological alignment within the military does not necessarily compromise anything. In fact, cohesive value systems foster unity. However, it may influence how the SAF is viewed in civilian spheres, particularly in sensitive times. If the civilian populace perceives the armed forces as skewing too far right, it could generate tension, impacting public support. Therefore, officers remaining in the civilian education system can be deemed as a protective factor against potential ruptures.

Religious identification reveals negligible differences. The majority of both the general population and the SAF consider themselves religious, although the SAF includes a somewhat higher proportion of convinced atheists, especially among the officers. This could again be tied to officers' educational backgrounds and professional ethos.

Rank-based differences in perceived social standing were also evident. While soldiers and NCOs place themselves near the societal midpoint, officers rate themselves notably higher. This self-perception may reflect officers' career stability, higher education levels, and greater access to social capital. Differences in family structure, with NCOs more likely to be married and soldiers more frequently single, could correlate with socio-economic stability and career progression. Patterns in voting behaviour similarly vary; although the SAF as a whole is only slightly less likely to vote than the general population, soldiers vote at notably lower rates, whereas NCOs and officers show higher electoral participation. One plausible explanation is that, given the limitations on their passive voting rights and broader political engagement, since service members in the SAF are prohibited from joining political parties and restricted in expressing their political views, NCOs and officers may be more inclined to exercise the active right to vote as one of their few remaining means of democratic participation.

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate whether, and to what extent, socio-structural differences exist between the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) and the wider Slovenian population, and to examine how such differences vary by rank. As Slovenia reassesses its defence posture within a rapidly shifting security landscape, we need to strive towards the SAF remaining both operationally effective and socio-politically integrated. Our findings signal that the SAF largely reflects international trends in demographic composition, while also revealing distinctive national dimensions

which merit continued research. First, the SAF sample is overall younger and more male-dominated than the general population, reflecting typical armed forces demographics. Second, regional imbalances emerge, with certain areas contributing disproportionately to recruitment. Third, while the SAF leans more towards the right ideologically than the populace at large, officers appear relatively centrist compared to soldiers and Non-Commissioned Officers. Fourth, variations in social status perceptions and voting participation also surface, with soldiers reporting lower electoral engagement than the other ranks and the general population.

Several constraints qualify these insights. First, the cross-sectional and partly non-probability nature of our sampling design may limit generalisability beyond the study period and population frames. Second, important cultural and organisational dynamics remain unexplored, which leaves space for further research. Finally, the study does not address the full impact of these demographic (mis)alignments.

Future inquiries can build on this work by measuring the impact of how demographic factors influence civil-military relations. Furthermore, comparative research with other NATO countries or post-socialist states could further contextualise Slovenia's experience, shedding light on historically rooted traditions and contemporary defence imperatives.

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