



# A Stated Preference Analysis of the Determinants of Unit and Soldier Operational Effectiveness

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After more than ten years of war, there have been no studies that assess the relative capabilities of Regular Army and reserve component units of the same type. The authors assess the importance of component status relative to a number of potential determinants of operational effectiveness, including but not limited to unit type, training level, experience in country, and associated costs and risk using stated preference choice experiments.



## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is the perceived operational effectiveness of Army units and individuals after over a decade of war?
- How does the perceived effectiveness of Army units and individuals vary across operational environments?
- What factors are most important in determining the perceived effectiveness of Army units and individuals?



## KEY FINDINGS

For unit capabilities, on average, Regular Army officers preferred to employ Regular Army units, all else equal

- Regular Army and reserve component officers differed starkly in their perceptions of the relative effectiveness of Regular Army and Army National Guard maneuver units.
- Operational risk was the most important factor in selecting brigade combat teams.
- Continuity was generally the most important factor in selecting maneuver battalions.
- Other factors, when combined, could outweigh preferences for Regular Army maneuver units.
- Respondents considered key leaders' experience and skills critical to units' operational effectiveness.

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For individual officers, component mattered most for positions concerned with day-to-day monitoring and management of military operations

- Regular Army respondents preferred to employ Regular Army officers in operational positions.
- All respondents preferred candidates with relevant civilian-acquired skills.
- Continuity in positions was considered important, but not dispositive.

Key takeaway for future use of this method in a military context is the importance of inducing trade-offs for respondents through the experimental design

- This study demonstrated that it is possible to employ stated preference methods to quantify respondents in a consistent way.
- The salience of the findings depends on the confidence decisionmakers repose in respondents' professional judgment, recognizing the hypothetical nature of the exercise.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

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- Differentiate operational requirements by level of risk.
- Further assess the relative cost-effectiveness of Regular Army and Army National Guard maneuver forces in high-risk missions.
- Consider increased pre-employment training for reserve component forces conducting counterinsurgency operations.
- Assess the utility of increasing key reserve component leaders' opportunities to accrue operational experience.
- Explore options for increasing access to reserve component soldiers with relevant civilian-acquired skills.