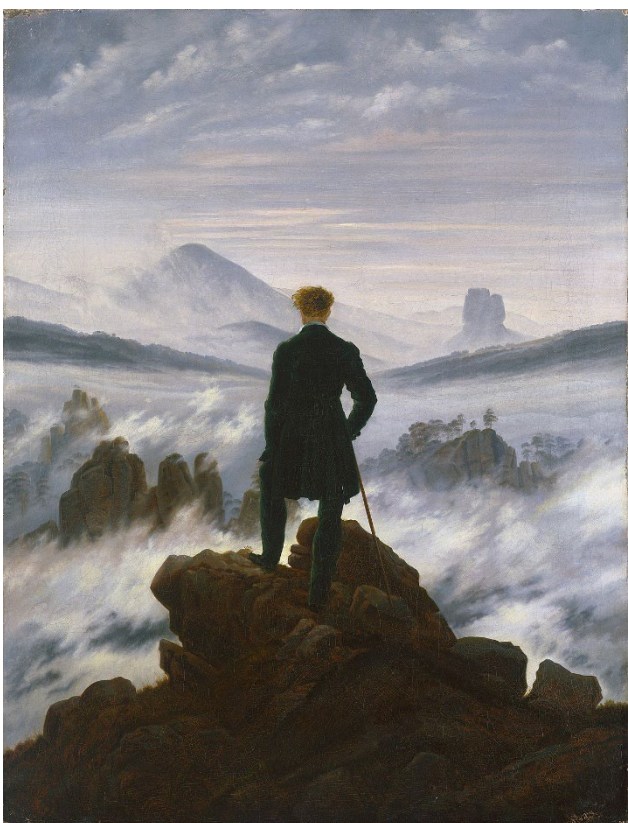


Abstract

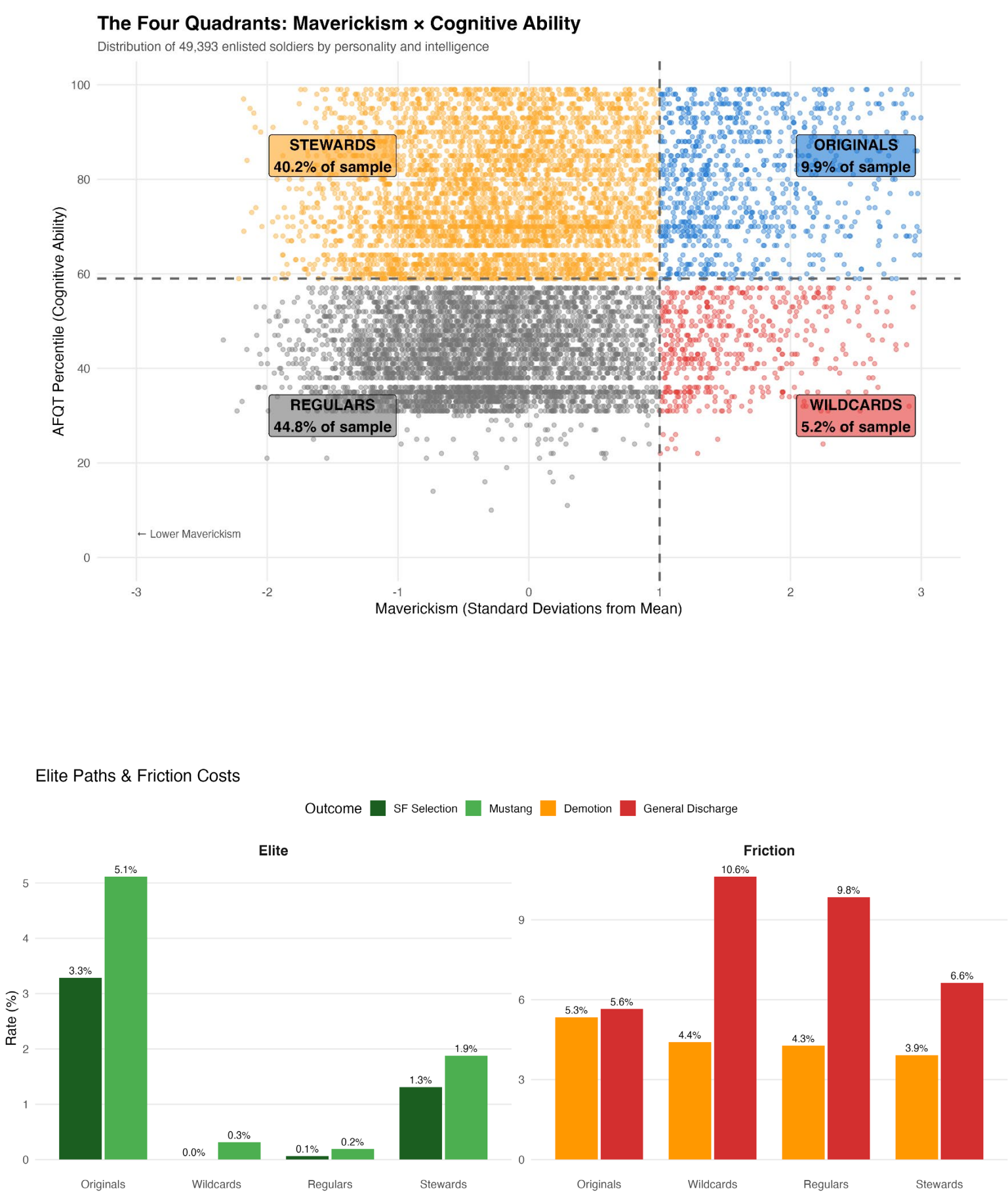
- Modern militaries require discipline, yet adaptation often begins with individuals who challenge prevailing assumptions. “Maverick” is a common label but rarely measured. This study develops and tests a quantitative measure of military maverickism with accession personality data linked to career outcomes.
- Using a cohort of nearly 50,000 enlisted Soldiers, I construct a composite index capturing assertiveness, openness to new ideas, drive, and lower conformity. I examine its relationship with selection into Special Forces, commissioning, demotion, and discharge, controlling for cognitive ability and demographics.
- Maverickism predicts both higher exceptional performance and higher disciplinary risk. Cognitive ability conditions these effects: higher ability amplifies positive outcomes and reduces adverse ones.
- Unconventional personalities are high-variance assets. Managed well, they produce disproportionate returns; unmanaged, they generate friction.



Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (1818)

Methods

- Data: TAPAS personality scores linked to Army personnel records
- Sample: ~49,000 enlisted accessions (FY2009–FY2013), followed through FY2018
- Construct: DOX-A maverickism score combining Dominance × Openness × Exertion – Agreeableness
- Mavericks defined as ≥ 1 standard deviation above mean (~top 15%)
- Outcomes examined
 - Special Forces selection
 - Enlisted-to-officer commissioning
 - Demotion
 - Administrative separation (General discharge)
- Statistical approach
 - Logistic regression models estimating probability of each outcome
 - Controls for AFQT cognitive ability
 - Interaction tests for cognitive moderation
 - Robustness checks across model specifications



$$\begin{aligned} \text{Dominance } (D)_i &= Z_{\text{Dominance},i} + 3 \\ \text{Openness } (O)_i &= \left(\frac{Z_{\text{Intellect},i} + Z_{\text{Tolerance},i}}{2} \right) + 3 \\ \text{Exertion } (X)_i &= Z_{\text{Achievement},i} + 3 \\ \text{Agreeableness } (A)_i &= \text{Clamp}_{[-2,2]} \left(\frac{2 \cdot Z_{\text{Non-Delinquency},i} + Z_{\text{Cooperation},i}}{3} \right) \\ \text{Maverickism } (M_{\text{raw},i}) &= (D_i \times O_i \times X_i) - (10 \times A_i) \end{aligned}$$

Results & Impact

- Mavericks exist within the force**
 - Distribution shows substantial variation in maverick traits
 - Upper tail indicates presence of highly independent personalities
- Career pathways diverge**
 - Higher maverickism increases probability of
 - Special Forces selection
 - Enlisted-to-officer commissioning
 - Also increases risk of
 - Demotion
 - Administrative separation with General characterization

- Cognitive ability moderates outcomes**
 - High-AFQT mavericks show strongest positive outcomes
 - Low-AFQT mavericks show elevated disciplinary risk

Implication
Adaptive capacity may originate from identifiable personality traits, but those same traits generate institutional friction unless paired with sufficient cognitive ability and appropriate assignment contexts.

Future Research

- Apply the DOX-A construct to other services’ TAPAS datasets to test cross-service validity
- Extend the longitudinal window to evaluate retention, promotion, and senior leadership outcomes
- Identify **optimal team composition and maverick density** within operational units
- Examine interactions between mavericks and highly conforming personnel using surveys and qualitative methods
- Replicate analysis in civilian sectors (technology firms, startups) to test whether maverickism predicts innovation outcomes such as patents, promotions, or turnover
- Compare results across allied militaries to determine whether findings reflect universal human capital dynamics or U.S.-specific institutional patterns



Francisco Goya, *The Third of May 1808* (1814)