

Comparative Analysis of Motivational Factors for Service in the Bulgarian Armed Forces (2017–2025)

Teodora Grozdanova

Defence Advanced Research Institute
Rakovski National Defence College,
Sofia, Bulgaria
t.grozdanova@mdc.bg

Abstract: This study focuses on the dynamics of motivational factors for service in the Bulgarian Armed Forces. It aims to guide management policies toward enhancing motivation and retention of personnel within the context of a constantly changing security environment.

The analysis is based on a cross-sectional study of two independent representative samples of military personnel. Each of them comprises of approximately 1,500 respondents. Primary data were collected through a direct anonymous survey conducted within two representative empirical sociological studies of the Bulgarian Armed Forces. The latter were carried out in 2017 and 2025, respectively. The period between the two surveys provides a relatively broad time horizon for conducting a comparative analysis of mean values and the rank structure of motivational factors.

The results indicate an increased significance of factors related to social security, remuneration, and the balance between professional and personal life. At the same time, there is a gradual decline in the influence of traditionally dominant internal motivators for service. The observed dynamics reflect the impact of the changing institutional and socio-economic environment on the motivational priorities of the military personnel.

The study provides up-to-date empirical data on the transformation of military personnel's motivational attitudes, in which the amount of remuneration, job security and the balance between professional and personal life are of leading importance.

Recommendations from the analysis include the introduction of personalized incentives, improvement of social benefits, and systematic monitoring of motivational trends to update motivation strategies and human resource management policies. Aligning management practices with the factor structure of military personnel's motivational attitudes contributes to personnel retention, enhances

individual and organizational effectiveness, and strengthens operational readiness within the national security and defence system.

Key words: Bulgarian Armed Forces, comparative analysis, motivational factors, sociological studies.

I. INTRODUCTION

Human resource management is a complex process, as all activities within its system are interconnected, while each organization operates both within its internal environment and under external environmental conditions. In the academic literature, human resource management is defined as a specific management activity aimed at attracting, retaining, motivating, developing, and utilizing the people necessary for the organization's operations. It encompasses the following key elements: job analysis and design, human resource planning, personnel selection, training and development of human resources, performance appraisal, compensation and benefits, and ensuring safe and healthy working conditions [1], [2], [3].

Motivation is a continuous process involving the use of various tools and approaches, the purpose of which is to stimulate people's willingness to perform their tasks effectively and with commitment [4]. Motivation occupies a central place in organizational management, and as it enables organizations not only to exist but also to achieve high performance.

The theories of Abraham Maslow, Frederick Herzberg, and Victor Vroom are regarded as socio-psychological approaches to the study of motivation. According to Abraham Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs (the Hierarchy of Needs), human behaviour in organizations is driven by the desire to satisfy needs arranged in a hierarchical structure. The transition to satisfying higher-

Online ISSN 3044-7771

<https://doi.org/10.68302/std2026.vol1.124>

© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Green Future Technologies.

This is an open-access article under the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#).

order needs occurs only after lower-level needs have been fulfilled [5].

According to Frederick Herzberg's two-factor theory, the conditions influencing individual motivation are divided into two main groups – hygiene/external (working conditions, salary, job security, interpersonal relations) and motivators/internal factors (achievement, recognition, responsibility, and opportunities for development). According to Herzberg, only internal factors lead to true motivation, while external can only prevent dissatisfaction [6]. While Maslow's theory emphasizes the hierarchical structure of motivational factors, Herzberg's approach focuses on distinguishing between true motivators and those that merely create basic working conditions.

Victor Vroom's expectancy theory views motivation as a result of conscious choice, explaining how individuals select behaviour that they believe will lead to desired outcomes such as recognition or professional development, higher income, and security [7].

The presented theoretical approaches do not fully cover the topic of motivation, given its specific characteristics in the military context. In the scientific literature, three main approaches stand out, which examine the motivation of military personnel from different perspectives. In his studies, Morris Janowitz Segal views the military institution as a specific social system in which the motivation is formed not so much by individual needs, but is based on values such as mission, duty, morality, and commitment to a collective cause. This orientation builds a strong professional identity and a high degree of commitment to the institution and service in the public interest [8].

For Samuel Huntington, the army is an autonomous professional organization, and the motivational factors are rooted in professional ethics. Officers are motivated by their commitment to the profession and by a sense of duty to society to apply their professional expertise in its service [9].

Originally formulated in the late 1970s Moskos' model of the transformation of the armed forces proposes that contemporary armies are shifting from an "institutional" to an "occupational" (professional-organizational) type, a process that leads to changes in the motivation of military personnel [10]. In the occupational model, the military increasingly resembles the civilian labour market, and motivation is based on a cost–benefit ratio with a clearly career-oriented focus. Moskos argues that the motivation in the armed forces is mixed – partly value-based (duty, mission) and partly pragmatic (pay, security, status). He further emphasizes that military motivation cannot be reduced either to a purely value-based "calling" or to a market-oriented career, but rather represents a dynamic combination of institutional and professional incentives that evolves over time [11].

The synthesis of the theoretical approaches indicates that motivation is a multifaceted process aimed at the selection, direction, and regulation of human behaviour, thereby ensuring both flexibility and persistence in goal

attainment. Within the military context, the motivation can be conceptualized as an outcome of socialization and organizational integration, reflecting professional ethics, domain-specific expertise, and a deeply internalized sense of duty. It further represents a dynamic interplay between institutional values and pragmatic, career-oriented incentives. Accordingly, the motivation of military personnel should be understood as a complex, multifactorial phenomenon with a dynamic nature, shaped by developmental processes both within the military organization and within society as a system.

The reviewed theoretical approaches suggest that the complexity of soldiers' motivation is shaped by the interaction between institutional and career-oriented pragmatic factors. In this context, a comparative analysis of empirical findings was undertaken to evaluate the actual motivational drivers of military personnel and to assess the extent to which these findings support or refine the proposed theoretical models.

On this basis, the study formulates the hypothesis that, as a result of socio-economic and organizational transformations over the past decade, the importance of career-oriented pragmatic motives has increased relative to institutional ones. At the same time, institutional motives have not been entirely reduced; rather, their relative weight within the overall motivational structure has declined.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The analysis is based on a cross-sectional study of two independent representative samples of military personnel, each comprising approximately 1,500 respondents. Both samples were constructed to reflect the structure of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria, thereby ensuring comparability and methodological consistency across the two time points.

Primary data were collected through a direct anonymous survey conducted within two empirical sociological studies in 2017 and 2025. The survey instrument included standardized items measuring the importance of selected motivational factors for military service, assessed using a Likert-type scale.

A structured sampling procedure was applied to ensure adequate representation of different ranks, service branches, and categories of military personnel. This approach enabled balanced coverage of the main subgroups within the military population and contributed to the external validity of the findings.

The time interval between the two surveys provides a robust temporal basis for comparative analysis of both mean values and rank order distributions of motivational factors. This design enables the identification of structural changes in motivational priorities over time.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistical methods, including the calculation of arithmetic means and rank ordering of motivational factors. A comparative approach was applied to examine differences between the two time points (2017 and 2025), enabling the identification of trends in the motivational structure.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of military personnel's assessments of the importance of motivational factors for service in the Bulgarian Armed Forces is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1

	Assessments of motivational factors		
		Mean score 2017	Mean score 2025
1.	Amount of remuneration	4.31	4.43
2.	Secure and guaranteed employment position	4.36	4.42
3.	Desire to serve my country	4.40	4.36
4.	Opportunity to improve professional skills	4.24	4.22
5.	Opportunity for early retirement	4.05	4.21
6.	Interest in the specific field of work	4.11	4.19
7.	Opportunity for more annual vacation time	3.89	4.16
8.	Opportunity for a professional career	4.00	4.07
9.	Interest in military equipment, armament, and technologies	4.03	4.03
10.	Social prestige of the military profession	3.90	3.79
11.	The challenges of the military profession	3.74	3.59
12.	Desire to be a leader, to command and manage others	3.51	3.48
13.	Opportunity to participate in international missions	3.41	3.08
14.	Opportunity to use service accommodation	2.95	2.95

Note: Rating scale: 1 – “not important at all”, 2 – “rather not important”, 3 – “neither yes nor no”, 4 – “rather important”, 5 – “very important”.

A comparative analysis of military personnel's evaluations of career development motives between 2017 and 2025 reveals relatively high mean values (most exceeding 4.00), indicating that these motives remain consistently and strongly important over time. The retrospective examination of the results reveals certain dynamics in the motivational structure, reflecting a hierarchical shift characterized by strengthening of some motives, the weakening of others, and the stability of a third group.

The most strongly motivating factors for career development among the surveyed respondents include the amount of remuneration (4.43), a secure and guaranteed employment position (4.42), the desire to serve one's country (4.36), as well as opportunities for improving professional skills (4.22), early retirement (4.21), and interest in the specific field of work (4.19).

Motives with a moderate level of importance are ranked as follows: the challenges of the military profession (3.59),

and desire to assume leadership roles and command and manage others (3.48).

The least important motives are the opportunity to use service accommodation (2.95) and participation in international missions (3.08).

The analysis of the obtained evaluations regarding potential factors influencing these results does not reveal statistically significant differences in respondents' answers, while the motivation of military personnel to serve in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria is assessed as relatively high (3.97).

The comparative analysis of the results relative to 2017 indicates an increase in the importance of pragmatic factors such as financial-material incentives and the need for a secure and stable employment position. A significant increase is also observed in motivational factors such as the opportunity for longer annual leave and early retirement.

Relatively unchanged, but still high, are the evaluations of motives such as interest in military equipment, opportunities for career advancement, and the desire to serve one's country.

The analysis of the rank distribution of motives within the motivational structure indicates an increase in the importance of factors such as financial-material incentives and job security and stability. An increased relative weight is also observed for motives related to longer annual leave and early retirement, indicating a stronger need for a balance between professional and personal life [12]. The decline in the importance of factors such as social prestige, the challenges of the military profession, and the opportunity to participate in international missions indicates a shift in priorities toward greater stability and predictability of the working environment.

The opportunity to use service accommodation remains the factor with the lowest level of importance, showing no change in its evaluation compared to ten years ago. This result confirms the dominant role of financial and material security as a motivational factor relative to the provision of service accommodation, which is likely perceived as a supplementary or more neutral element, as it is considered rather a component of the institution's social policy than a determining motive for choosing the military profession.

The obtained results confirm the main research hypothesis regarding the increasing importance of career-pragmatic motives within the motivational structure. At the same time, no decline in institutional motives is observed, as their significance remains stable over the examined period. This result is highly consistent with Charles C. Moskos' institutional-occupational model, which allows for a dynamic balance between institutional values and career-pragmatic incentives without implying their mutual exclusion.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of empirical data reveals a strengthening of pragmatically oriented motives among military personnel during the period 2017–2025. Leading factors

for career development remain material and financial incentives and job security, the importance of which has increased and continues to dominate over patriotic and leadership motives.

At the same time, interest in professional development and military technology remains relatively a stable, suggesting that professional identity continues to play an important role within the armed forces. In contrast, a decline in the importance of participation in international missions is observed, which may be interpreted as a reorientation of priorities toward internal stability and predictability of service conditions.

Both empirical studies indicate that existential needs—primarily income and stability—represent a key driver of military personnel motivation. In this context, the results align with the Institutional–Occupational Model proposed by Charles C. Moskos, which emphasizes the dynamic balance between institutional values and career-oriented pragmatic incentives within the armed forces.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

At the end of 2025, as a result of the policy efforts of the leadership of the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces the Strategy for the Motivation of Personnel was completed. The Strategy aims to provide a comprehensive and systematized framework for attracting, developing, and retaining qualified personnel, with expected outcomes including increased attractiveness of military service, improved personnel retention, and enhanced levels of professional development among service members in the Armed Forces.

The recommendations from the study focus on the introduction of personalized incentives, improvement of social benefits, and systematic monitoring of motivational trends in order to update the motivation strategy and human resource management policies [13], [14], [15]. Aligning management practices with the motivational structure will contribute to higher job satisfaction, personnel retention [16], improved efficiency and effectiveness, and strengthened operational readiness within the national security and defence system.

In conclusion, the sustainable development of the motivation system in defence requires a comprehensive and balanced approach that integrates internal and external motivational factors, such as material incentives, professional development, and institutional affiliation, thereby contributing to more effective personnel management within the military organization.

VI. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The report was developed in implementation of the National Scientific Programme “Security and Defence”, adopted by Council of Ministers Decision No. 731 of 21.10.2021, and in accordance with Agreement No. D01-74/19.05.2022, financed by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria.

REFERENCES

- [1] M. Atanasova, *Human Resource Management: Theory and Practice*. Sofia, Bulgaria: Avangard Prima, 2015.
- [2] D. Tashkov, E. Pavlova, V. Gagamova, and V. Vasileva, “Analysis of Cybersecurity Training Platforms and Simulation Environments and Opportunities for Their Integration into Higher Education,” in *Proc. 31st Int. Conf. Knowledge-Based Organization (KBO)*, vol. 3: *Applied Technical Sciences and Advanced Military Technologies*, Sibiu, Romania, 2025, pp. 177–181, <https://doi.org/10.2478/kbo-2025-0094>.
- [3] V. Aleksandrova, A. Guncheva, and V. Vasileva, “Technological Solutions Supporting Modern E-Learning,” in *Proc. 7th Nat. Conf. E-Learning in Higher Education*, Sofia, Bulgaria, 2018, pp. 216–223. Sofia, Bulgaria: University Publishing House “St. Kliment Ohridski,” 2018.
- [4] *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Sociology*. S. Mihaylov, Gen. Sci. Superv. and Ed.; N. Tilkidzhiev, Comp. and Ed. Sofia, Bulgaria: M-8-M, 1997.
- [5] A. H. Maslow, “A Theory of Human Motivation,” *Psychological Review*, vol. 50, no. 4, pp. 370–396, 1943, <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346>.
- [6] F. Herzberg, B. Mausner, and B. Snyderman, *The Motivation to Work*. New York, NY, USA: John Wiley & Sons, 1959.
- [7] V. H. Vroom, *Work and Motivation*. New York, NY, USA: Wiley, 1964.
- [8] M. Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait*. New York, NY, USA: Free Press, 1960.
- [9] S. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*. Sofia, Bulgaria: Ministry of Defense Publishing House “St. George the Victorious,” 1998.
- [10] C. C. Moskos, “Institutional/Occupational Trends in Armed Forces: An Update,” *Armed Forces & Society*, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 377–382, 1986.
- [11] C. C. Moskos, J. A. Williams, and D. R. Segal, Eds., *The Postmodern Military: Armed Forces after the Cold War*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- [12] T. V. Georgieva, *Socio-psychological problems of military families: A monograph*. Sofia, Bulgaria: Vidzhi – Viktor Gutsev, 2022.
- [13] V. Aleksandrova, V. Tagareva, and V. Vasileva, “Regarding the Needs for Knowledge and Artificial Intelligence as a Guarantee for the Change of Modern Bulgaria: Ethical Aspects of the Application of Artificial Intelligence in Autonomous Systems,” in *Proc. XVIII Int. Conf. Open and Underwater Mining of Minerals*, Varna, Bulgaria, 2025, pp. 225–234. Sofia, Bulgaria: Scientific and Technical Union of Mining, Geology and Metallurgy, 2025.
- [14] V. Vasileva and V. Gagamova, “Raising Cyber Awareness for Users from Public Sector Organizations to Improve Ethical Behavior in the Virtual World,” in *Proc. 16th Int. Conf. Educ. New Learn. Technol. (EDULEARN)*, Palma, Spain, Jul. 1–3, 2024. Valencia, Spain: IATED, 2024, pp. 10167–10171, <https://doi.org/10.21125/edulearn.2024.10167>.
- [15] V. Vasileva and V. Gagamova, “Application of the Simulation Modeling in Education and Scientific Research: An Exploration Through Predictive Scenarios of Cybersecurity Threats,” in *Proc. 18th Int. Conf. on Education, Research and Innovation (ICERI)*, Seville, Spain, Nov. 10–12, 2025, pp. 8962–8969. Valencia, Spain: IATED, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.21125/iceri.2025.2527>.
- [16] N. Boteva, “Attitude towards work in organization,” *International Journal of Scientific and Applied Research*, vol. 9, pp. 31–35, 2016.