

Ethnic and regional inequalities in the Russian military fatalities in the war in Ukraine

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Mediazona / BBC data

- ▶ Neither Russia nor Ukraine publish data on military casualties
- ▶ For Russia, crowdsourced data have been collected and published by the BBC News Russia and Mediazona
- ▶ The data (obituaries) are collected by the team of volunteers from the social media, local and regional government websites, etc.
- ▶ https://en.zona.media/article/2022/05/20/casualties_eng

Mediazona website

Mediazona

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Russian casualties in Ukraine. Mediazona count, updated

vk f g t a

31,665

Russian casualties corroborated by publicly available data as of 8 September

+ 967 3,534

last two weeks total casualties among new recruits

Mediazona, in collaboration with BBC News Russian service and a team of volunteers, continues gathering information on the Russian military casualties in Ukraine. The figures we provide are derived from publicly accessible sources.

Example from the data

archive.today Saved from https://vk.com/wall-93188324_122192 search 8 Jun 2022 10:30:04 UTC

webpage capture All snapshots from host vk.com no other snapshots from this url

Webpage Screenshot

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0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60%

VK ВКонтакте

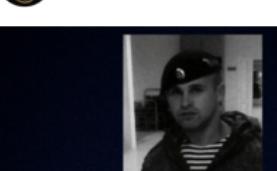
Поиск 3

Моя страница Новости Мессенджер Звонки Друзья Сообщества Фотографии Музыка Видео Клипы Игры Стикеры Объявления Сервисы VK Pro

Морская Пехота сегодня в 5:49

Морская Пехота вернуться к странице

Записи сообщества Поиск записей Запись на стене

Димков Александр Александрович
Гвардии Сержант.

При исполнении воинского долга во время проведения ВС РФ специальной военной операции на Украине геройски погиб в бою.

810-я отдельная гвардейская бригада морской пехоты. Черноморский флот.

Бои морской пехоты всегда находятся на передовой, им поручают сложнейшие задачи.

Ethnic names project

- ▶ A.Bessudnov et al. (2023) “Predicting perceived ethnicity with data on personal names in Russia”. Journal of Computational Social Science.
- ▶ This paper was written before the war started, with the idea to create an ML tool to predict ethnicity from non-anonymised data (for example, from the social media)
- ▶ We collected names and ethnicity for 24 ethnic groups populating Russia from VK and developed an ML classifier

Were ethnic minorities over-represented among the Russian casualties?

- ▶ This was actively discussed in the international media in summer and autumn 2023
- ▶ Only anecdotal evidence was available; no one had any data

Were ethnic minorities over-represented among the Russian casualties?

≡ 🔎

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Russian politics ✓ Added

'We're minor losses': Russia's mobilisation targets ethnic minorities

Indigenous men from Dagestan to Yakutia disproportionately conscripted as activists accuse Kremlin of 'genocide'



© AP | Women in Buryatia with a portrait of Russian serviceman Alexander Koltsov who was killed in Ukraine.

Feedback

Were ethnic minorities over-represented among the Russian casualties?

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REPORT

Russia Is Sending Its Ethnic Minorities to the Meat Grinder

Chaotic mobilization sparks renewed fears that the pain will not be shared evenly across Russia.

By [Amy Mackinnon](#)

Were ethnic minorities over-represented among the Russian casualties?



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'Putin is using ethnic minorities to fight in Ukraine': Activist

Russian minorities are much more likely to die in Ukraine, the Free Buryatia Foundation tells Al Jazeera.



Question

- ▶ The idea was to use the BBC/Medazona data and the ML names classifier to provide support or reject these claims
- ▶ The piece was first published on the BBC News Russian website; then developed into an academic paper

How complete is the data set?

- ▶ As of 12 April 2023, the data set contained 20,253 unique records of deceased Russian military personnel
- ▶ The data are of course incomplete
- ▶ For the purposes of this paper it does not matter much as long as there is no regional / ethnic bias
- ▶ The consensus is that the data represent between 50% and 60% of all Russian fatalities
- ▶ How do we know? a) data from cemeteries, b) estimates of excess mortality with the official mortality statistics for 2022, c) hacked probate records (Medusa).

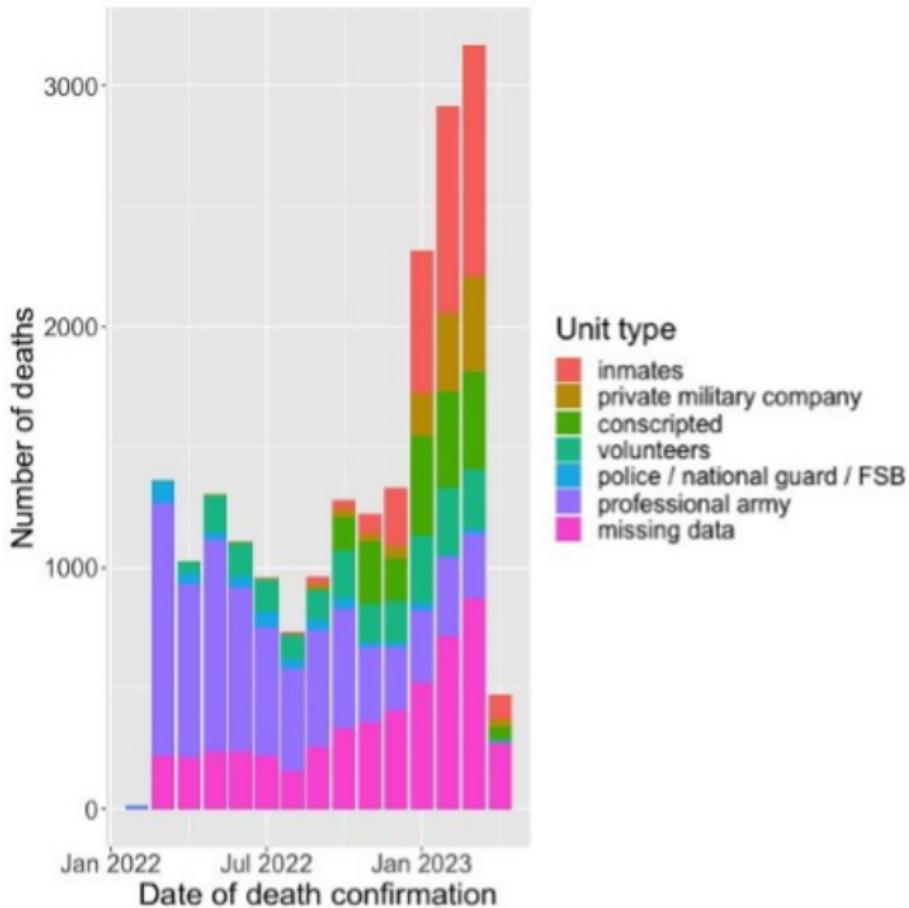
Regional fatality rates per 100,000 working age men



Regional fatality rates

- ▶ The highest fatality rates: Tuva (249), Buryatia (231), Nenets region (212), Zabaykalsky region (160)
- ▶ The lowest fatality rates: Moscow (3), St Petersburg (10), Moscow region (13)

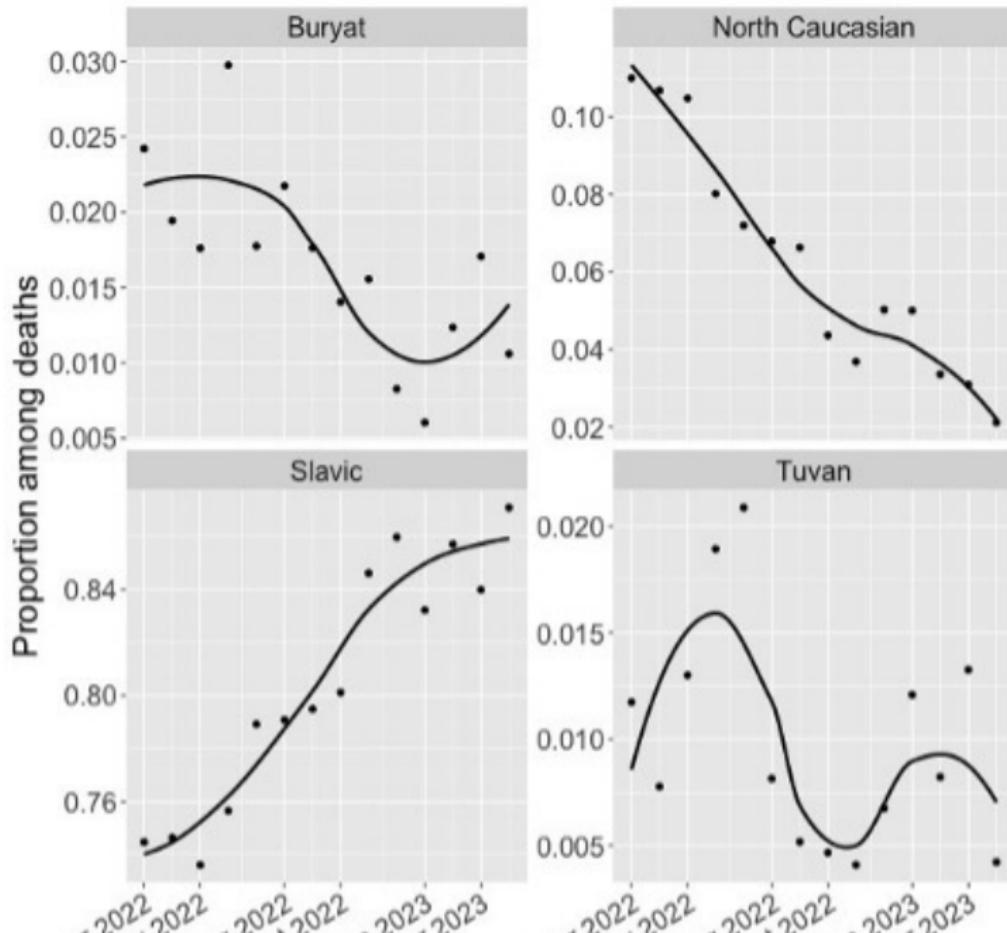
Changes in fatalities over time



Fatality rates by ethnic category (derived from the names)

Ethnic category	% killed	% population	RR
Slavic	81.2	80.5	1.01
North Caucasus	5.8	6.5	0.89
Bashkir / Tatar	5.2	4.8	1.08
Buryat	1.6	0.4	3.83
Tuvan	1.0	0.2	4.68

Changes over time by ethnicity



Fatality rates by ethnic category within regions

Region	% non-Slavic killed	% non-Slavic population	RR
Astrakhan	48.9	35.8	1.37
Buryatia	37.9	36.1	1.05
Tuva	90.0	86.2	1.04
Dagestan	97.0	97.4	1.00
Bashkortostan	63.6	64.1	0.99
Kalmykia	68.8	74.4	0.92
North Ossetia	59.0	82.1	0.84
Tatarstan	44.9	61.1	0.73

Summary of results

- ▶ Large regional inequalities in fatalities; with higher fatality rates in poorer regions, especially in Eastern Siberia and Far East (and those regions where military bases were located)
- ▶ Much higher fatality rates for Buryats and Tuvans
- ▶ Ethnic inequalities seem to be largely driven by regional inequalities

How reliable is ethnicity coding?

- ▶ Ethnic names can only be a proxy for ethnicity even if perfectly coded
- ▶ For some groups the classifier works better than for others
- ▶ For some groups it doesn't work at all (Chuvashes, Komi, Mari and other groups with russified names)
- ▶ Some Buryats have Russian names so there may be some under counting
- ▶ At the level of Slavic / non-Slavic names it should be reliable

Data validation

- ▶ Correlation with Yandex searches ("payments for the killed") at the regional level: 0.61
- ▶ Ministry of Defense pension data (increase in 2022 compared to 2021): $r = 0.53$
- ▶ Official mortality data: excess mortality (?)

Reference

- ▶ A.Bessudnov. (2023). “Ethnic and regional inequalities in the Russian military fatalities in Ukraine: Preliminary findings from crowdsourced data.” Demographic Research 48 (31): 883-898.
- ▶ Replication package on Github:
<https://github.com/abessudnov/ruCasualtiesPublic/>