



## Introduction

### Research Question and Expectations

- Does Russia's Wagner Group contractors commit more severe political violence than state forces?

While incumbent actors have some incentives to commit violence against civilians (VAC), Wagner Group contractors have larger positive incentives (net benefits) and smaller negative incentives (net negatives).

*H<sub>1</sub>: Wagner contractors are more likely to commit more severe violence against civilians than Central African Republic forces.*

### Research Design

#### Leveraging the Russian Invasion of Ukraine as an Instrument

"It's either [private mercenaries] and prisoners, or it's your children: decide for yourselves." In response to critics on a recent video of Russian recruiting efforts within prisons, Yevgeny Prigozhin defended his actions to increase the manpower of Russia's Wagner Group.

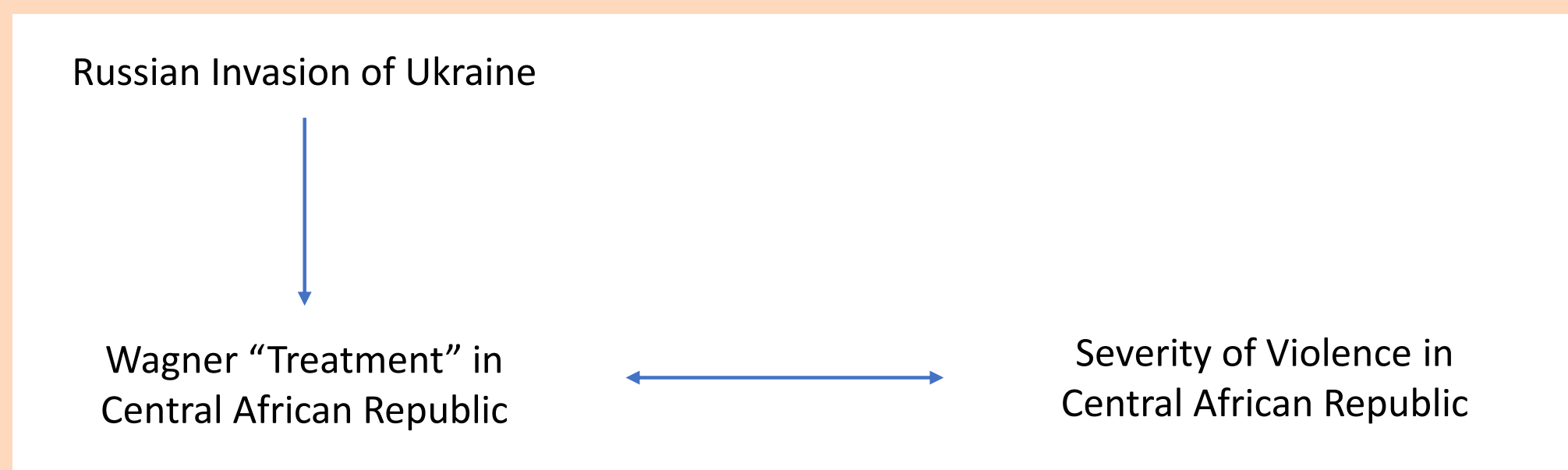


Fig. 1: Directed Acrylic Graph (DAG) of causal logic and instrument.

## The Data

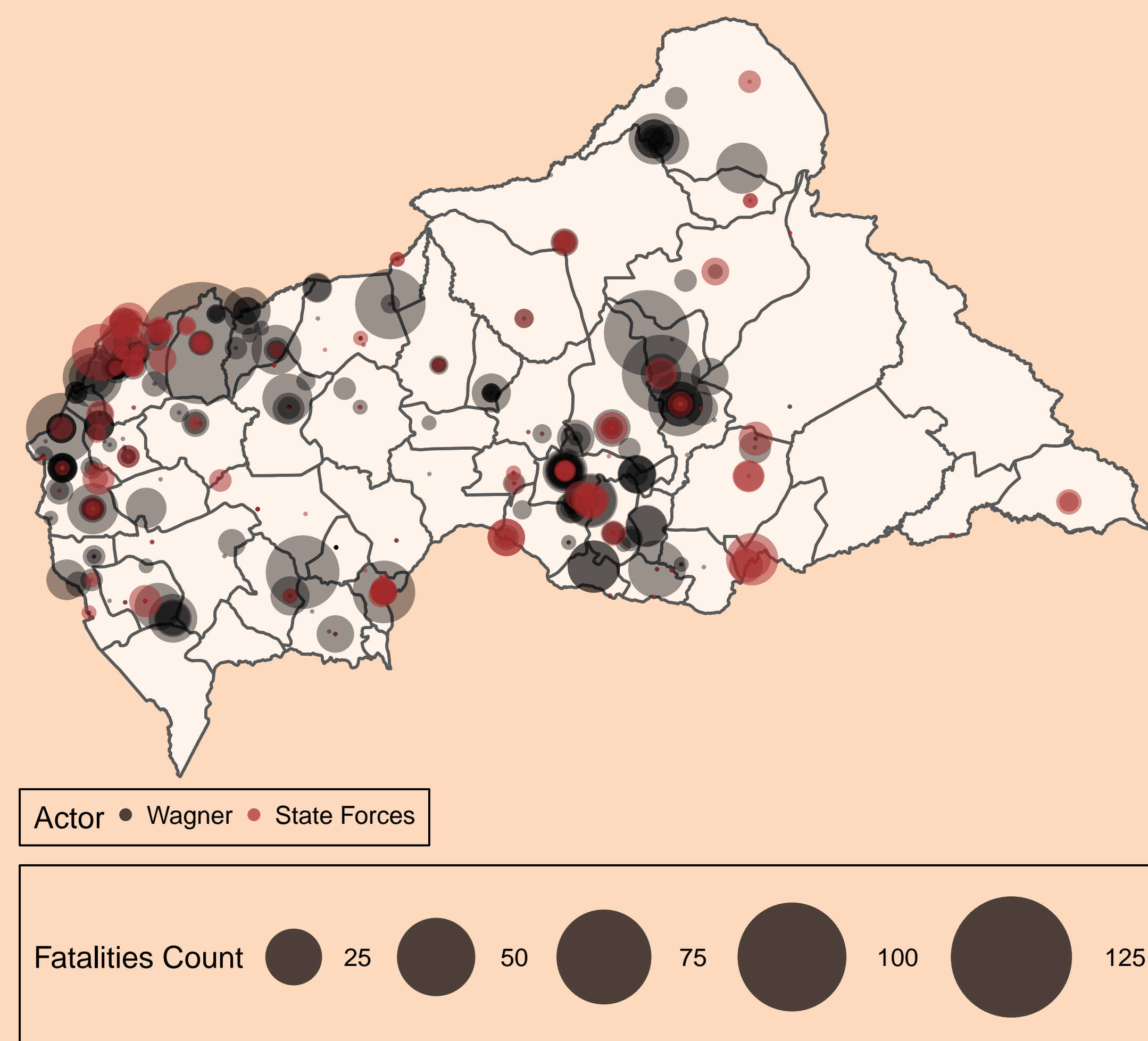


Fig. 2: Russian and State Violence in the Central African Republic since 2021.

## The Evidence of the Wagner Group

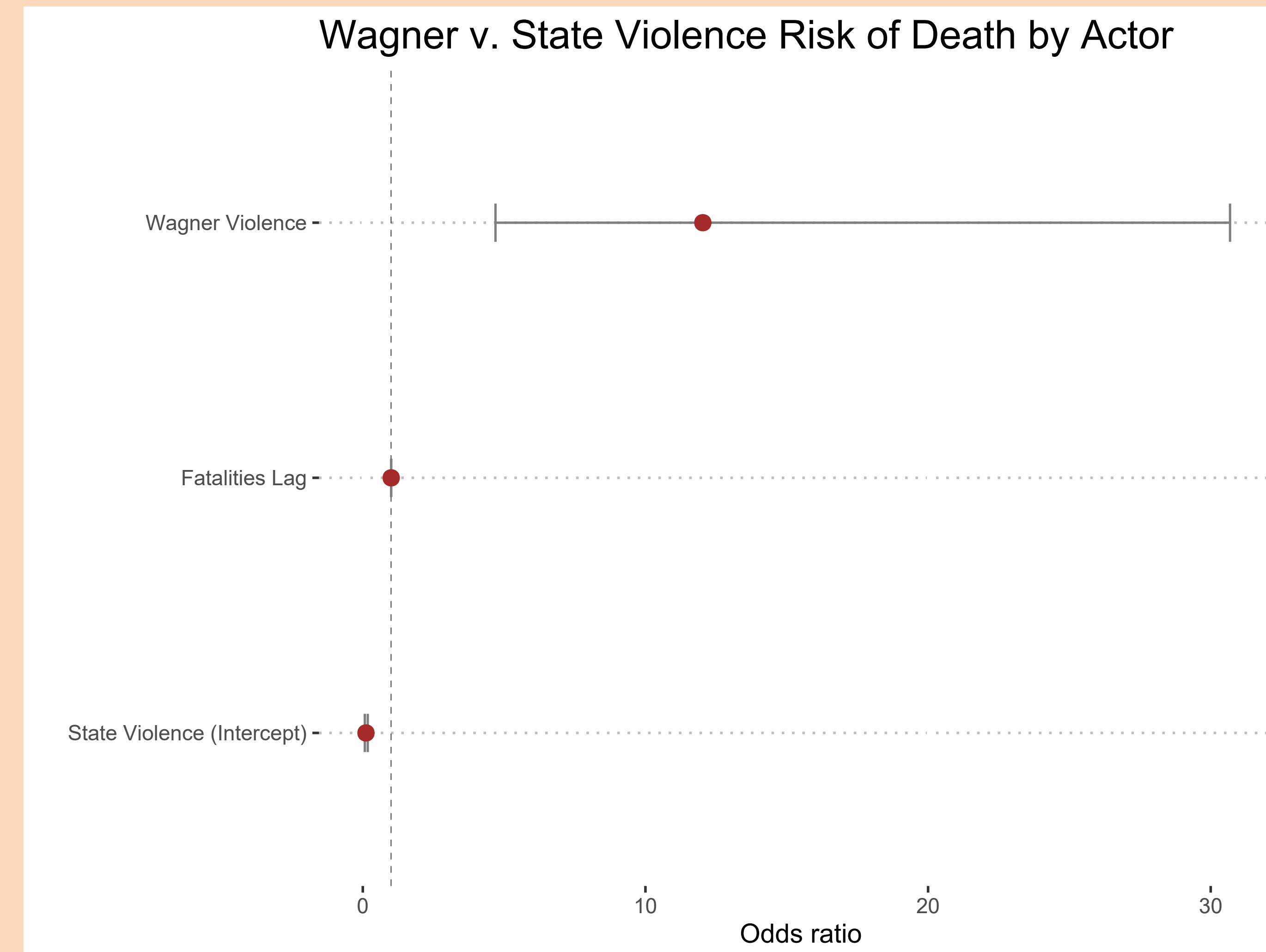


Fig. 3: Violence by State Forces and Wagner Contractors.

**When the Wagner Group contractors commit violence over state forces, the event is over 10 times more likely to end in a civilian death.** These results hold under various model specifications; when including our instrument of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine in the first stage, the results show an even stronger effect.

## Violence Over Time

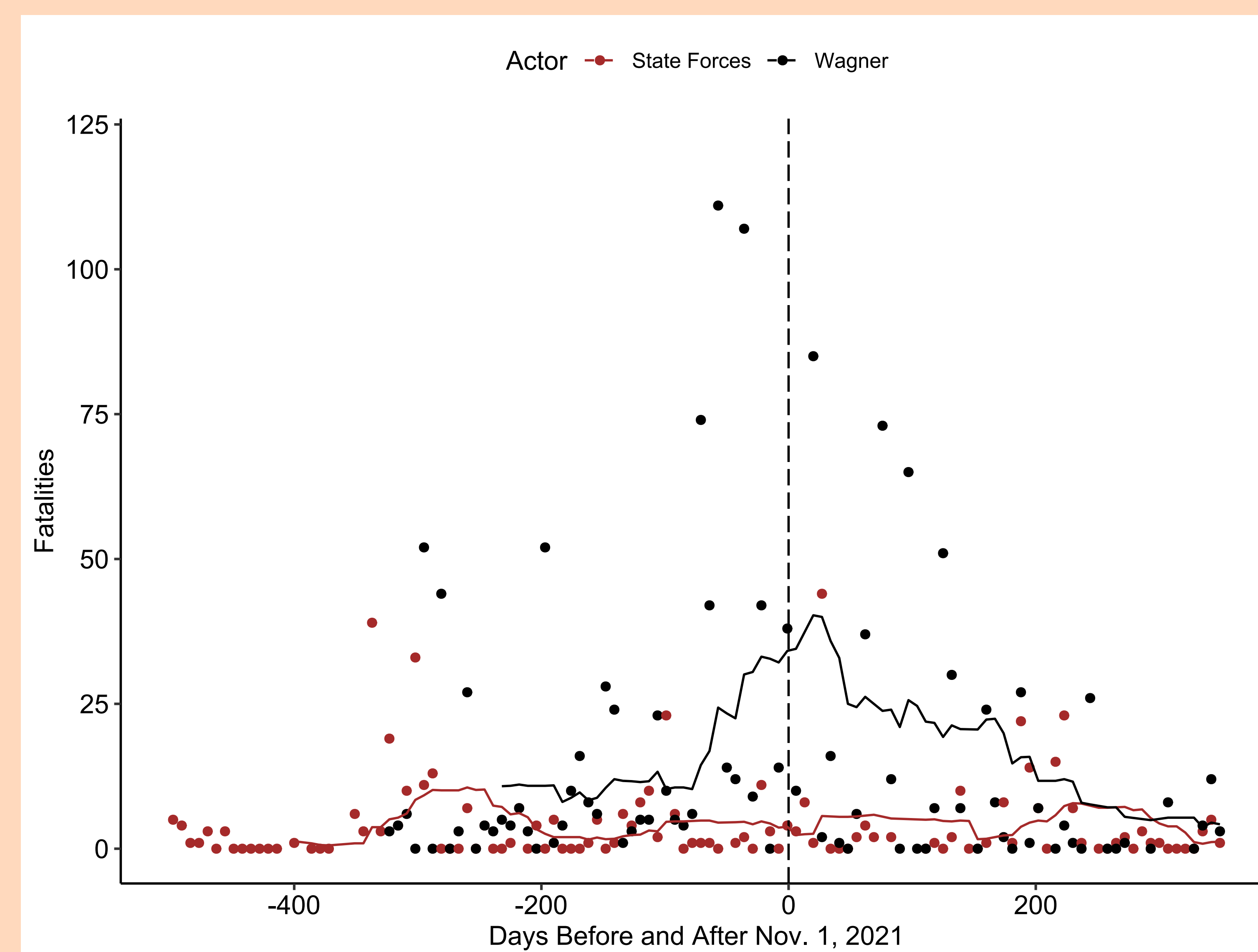


Fig. 4: In early Nov. 2021, Russia began massive mobilization to the Ukrainian border, which marks the start date of our instrument.

## The Instrument

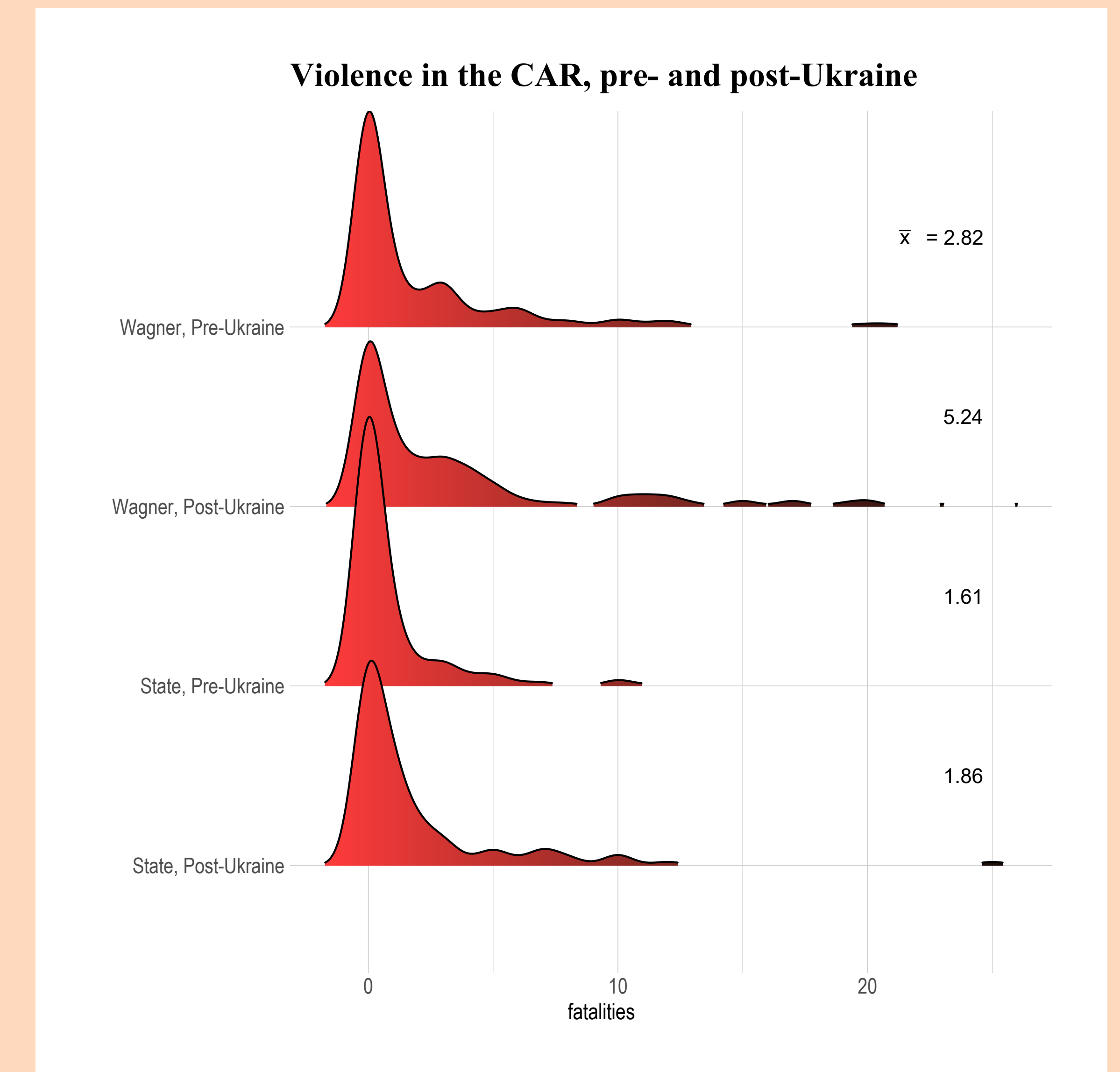


Fig. 5: Violence over time by state forces and the Wagner group.

How valid is Nov. 2021 as the cutoff date for our instrument? In this figure, we show how violence from Wagner group contractors accelerated after Russia began repurposing more skilled and experienced contractors to the border of Ukraine.

## Conclusion

What happens when states use the Russian quasi-state military contractors known as Wagner? Our results indicate that Wagner contractors increase the chances that a violent interaction with state forces escalates to a fatality. More concisely, we conclude that:

### Main Findings

- The use of Wagner Group contractors increases the likelihood that a violent altercation ends in a civilian death.
- These results hold across several model specifications, and the descriptive trends support the validity of the instrument. The mean of state violence before and after the date of interest are nearly indistinguishable, while Wagner violence after Nov. 2021 increases dramatically.

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