

# BREAKING BARRIERS IN DEFENSE ACQUISITION

Survey Conducted by Atomik Research for MITRE  
May 2025



MITRE

# Barriers Remain for Nontraditional Contractors

**57% of all defense acquisition professionals surveyed** identified inflexibility and complexity of acquisition processes as the most significant challenge for [nontraditional contractors](#).

Small- and medium-sized business executives consistently and substantially viewed the acquisition process differently than other stakeholders, citing lower resource efficiency, slower delivery speeds, and less confidence in the system's operational effectiveness.

Since 2020 when the Adaptive Acquisition Framework (AAF) launched, some extreme negative perceptions of defense acquisition have tempered. But the AAF hasn't fundamentally transformed perceptions of the acquisition landscape. Negative perceptions persist.

## **What could most enhance the speed, responsiveness, or efficiency of defense acquisition?**

Respondents' answers coalesced around reducing bureaucracy and adopting modern digital technologies.

# Reduce Bureaucracy & Adopt Modern Tech



The survey data reveals a strong consensus from both government and industry that we must reduce bureaucracy and adopt modern digital technologies to significantly enhance defense acquisition.



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# Research Methodology

**Commissioned by MITRE and conducted by Atomik Research,** the survey on barriers in defense acquisition explored the perspectives of defense acquisition professionals regarding challenges, efficiency, adaptability, and effectiveness of the defense acquisition process.

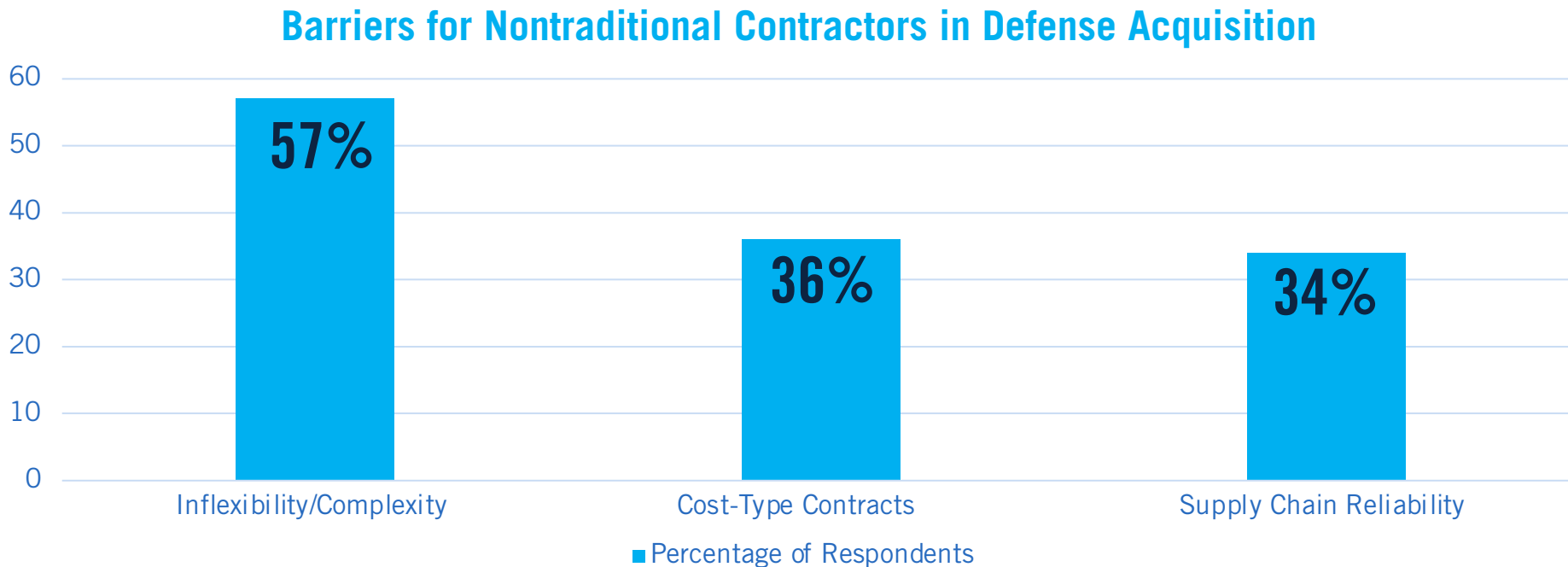
The survey comprised **1,004 respondents** from various sectors, including private aerospace and defense organizations, government, military, academia, and NGOs. All were rigorously screened to ensure familiarity with defense acquisition and relevant professional roles. Respondents were partitioned into four groups: military/government, small- and medium-sized business executives, large enterprise business executives, and the larger defense ecosystem (nonprofits, academia, think tanks, and research facilities).

Data collection occurred between April 7 and April 21, 2025, with a margin of error of +/- 3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.



# Barriers for Nontraditional Contractors

57% of all defense acquisition professionals identify **inflexibility and complexity of acquisition processes** as the most significant challenge for nontraditional contractors. This finding cuts across all survey groups.



Source: MITRE/Atomik Research Defense Acquisition Survey

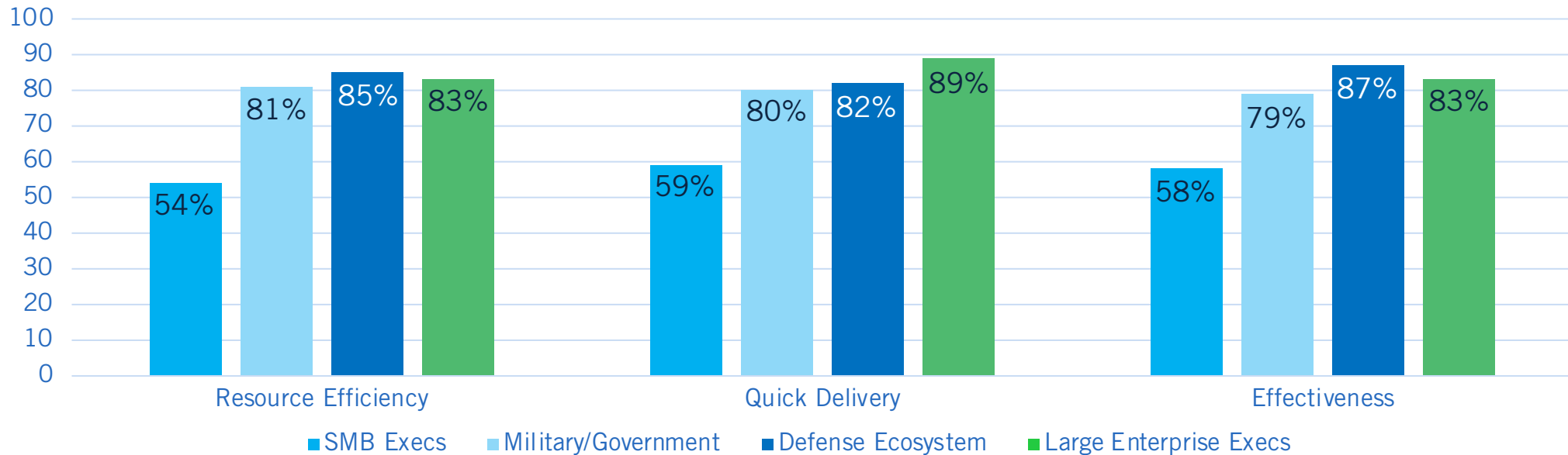
Base: All Respondents (n=1004); data collected April 7-21, 2025

Q1: Which of the following factors contribute most to the challenges faced by non-traditional contractors seeking to do business within the defense acquisition ecosystem?

# Perception Gap

**Small- and medium-sized business (SMB) executives** consistently and substantially view the acquisition process differently than other stakeholders. They see the process as less favorable regarding resource efficiency, speed, and operational effectiveness.

## Positive Perceptions on Defense Acquisition Process



Source: MITRE/Atomik Research Defense Acquisition Survey

Base: All Respondents (n=1004); data collected April 7-21, 2025

Q3: How efficiently or inefficiently are resources for defense acquisition projects or programs (money, manpower, etc.) currently being used to deliver capabilities to warfighters?

Q4: How quickly or slowly is the defense acquisition process able to currently deliver capabilities to warfighters?

Q5: How would you describe the current effectiveness of the defense acquisition process to currently deliver capabilities at a pace that keeps pace with ever-changing operational threats?

# Negative Perceptions Must Be Overcome



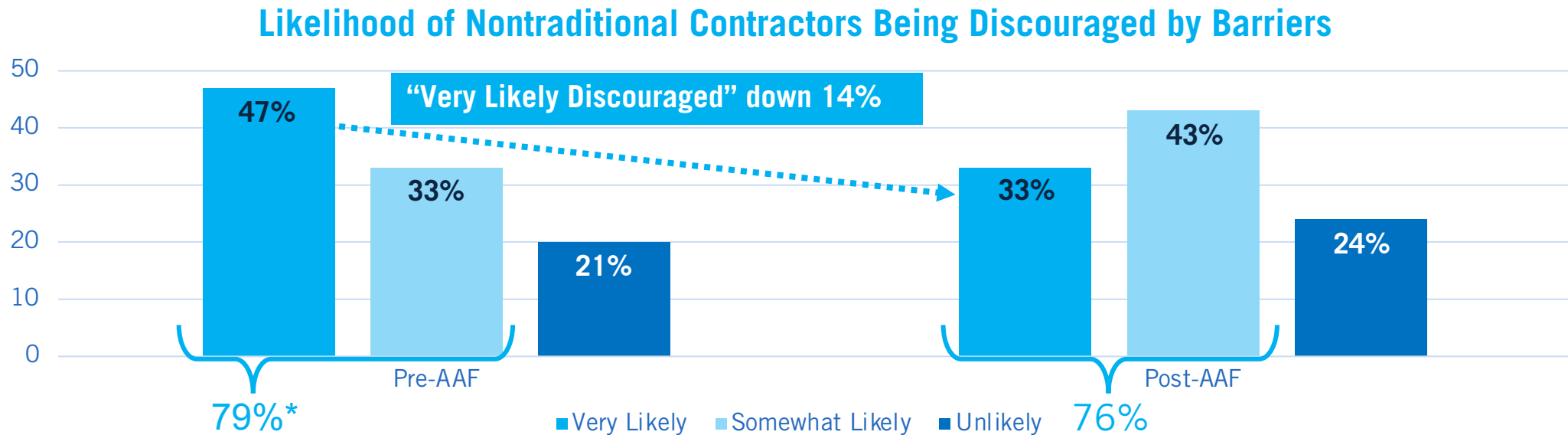
Even with the ongoing push to involve small- and medium-sized businesses in developing new innovations and tools for the military, those businesses' negative perception of the acquisition process will likely be a barrier to their participation. Our [Breaking Barriers Summit](#) aims to help establish actionable strategies for building a more agile, effective, and innovative acquisition ecosystem.



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# Are We Better off Now than 5 Years Ago?

While the AAF has moderated some extreme negative perceptions, especially regarding barriers to nontraditional contractors, it hasn't fundamentally transformed perceptions of the acquisition landscape. The data supports more **subtle shifts in intensity rather than wholesale changes** to overall assessments.



Source: MITRE/Atomik Research Defense Acquisition Survey

Base: All Respondents (n=1004); data collected April 7-21, 2025

Q2a: Reflecting on the acquisition process prior to the establishment of the Adaptive Acquisition Framework in January 2020,

how likely or unlikely were qualified, non-traditional contractors to be discouraged from participating in or dropping out of the defense acquisition ecosystem due to excessive barriers?

Q2b: Currently, how likely or unlikely are qualified, non-traditional contractors to be discouraged from participating in or dropping out of the defense acquisition ecosystem due to excessive barriers?

(\*The percentage shown for net likely in Q2a comprises of the unrounded combined totals for “somewhat likely” (32.57%) and “very likely” (46.71%) resulting in a combined net total of 79.28%.



# How to Enhance the Speed, Responsiveness, or Efficiency of Defense Acquisition

Theme	%	Key Components	Sample Respondent Quote
Process Streamlining & Bureaucracy Reduction	21.4%	Reducing approval layers, simplifying procedures, cutting red tape	“Reduce redundant oversight by aligning reporting to mission outcomes.”
Digital Transformation & Technology Adoption	19.7%	AI implementation, automation, digital platforms, data analytics	“Implement an integrated digital platform that streamlines acquisition processes end to end.”
Agile Methodology Implementation	16.3%	Flexible frameworks, iterative development, rapid prototyping	“Adopting agile acquisition practices and flexible pathways would significantly improve the speed.”
Contracting Flexibility	11.2%	More-adaptable contracts, simpler terms, faster amendments	“Shifting to modular, open-architecture contracts lets forces rapidly integrate new tech.”
Communication & Collaboration Improvement	9.8%	Better cross-departmental coordination, information sharing	“A shared communication platform would help everyone stay on the same page.”
Workforce Development	8.5%	Training, empowerment, better staffing, expertise building	“Prioritizing a highly skilled and adaptable workforce would be the most impactful improvement.”
Supply Chain Enhancement	7.3%	Vendor management, diversification, logistics optimization	“Enhance the transparency and flexibility of the supply chain; adopt real-time monitoring system.”

Source: MITRE/Atomik Research Defense Acquisition Survey

Base: All Respondents (n=1004); data collected April 7-21, 2025

Q11: What one improvement could most enhance the speed, responsiveness, or efficiency of defense acquisition?

# Prioritize Speed, Flexibility, and Innovation



By prioritizing speed, flexibility, and innovation, we can transform the acquisition processes to meet the urgency of today's global threat environment. MITRE helped the U.S. Department of Defense develop and implement the Adaptive Acquisition Framework, and we continue to collaborate with industry innovators to ensure rapid delivery of leading capabilities to warfighters at the edge.



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# THANK YOU

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