

Introducing the Special Political Mission Finance and Personnel Dataset*

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Abstract

As peacekeeping has declined, Special Political Missions (SPMs)–UN peace operations without military personnel–increasingly operate in active conflict zones. A growing literature examines SPM mandates, but there is less available data on SPMs than on PKOs. This data feature introduces the Special Political Mission Finance and Personnel Data (SPMFP), a new dataset presenting information on the proposed budget, approved budget, expenditures, proposed personnel, and approved personnel for all SPMs operating from 2005 to 2024. We describe the coding process, and present descriptive analyses showing that SPM budgets and personnel levels differ dramatically across missions. We conduct analyses showing that SPMs with more substantial mandates and that operate in more violent contexts are on average larger and have more substantial budgets, but that there is important variation in size and funding in missions with similar mandates and that operate in countries with similar levels of violence. The SPMFP data enable analyses both of what affects the size and resources of these missions as well as how mission personnel and finances influence conflict management success. These questions are increasingly important as funding cuts and geopolitical competition mean that SPMs are becoming a primary leader of UN conflict management efforts.

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1 Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, the United Nations has engaged in conflict management and peacebuilding efforts in dozens of countries, working to prevent and resolve violent conflicts and facilitate lasting periods of post-conflict peace. UN efforts to manage and prevent conflict have generally been led by UN peace operations (UNPOs), which fall into two broad types—Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) and Special Political Missions (SPMs).

Traditionally, conflict management efforts were led by PKOs, but the last several years have seen a significant shift. UN Peacekeeping is in decline. There has not been a new UN PKO authorized since 2014. Additionally, several missions have, or are in the process of, withdrawing, including the PKOs in Darfur (which withdrew in 2020) and Mali (which withdrew in 2023). The UN PKO in the DRC, which has been the largest mission in the world for much of the post-Cold War period, began withdrawing in 2024, although that withdrawal is currently paused.

At the same time, the number of SPMs has increased. Figure 1 shows the number of UN PKOs and SPMs deployed, by year, since 1991.¹ It shows that there were many more PKOs than SPMs in the 1990s, but that the number of SPMs increased into the early 2000s while the number of PKOs largely flatlined, meaning that there were roughly equal numbers from about 2004 to 2016. Since 2016, as the number of PKOs has declined, there are now more SPMs deployed around the world than PKOs.

These SPMs are increasingly operating in very violent places, in large part because while SPMs used to be replaced by PKOs when armed conflicts escalated, this transition no longer occurs (Hellmüller, Tan and Bara, 2024). In Sudan, for example, the United Nations Integrated Transition Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) was an SPM deployed to help assist the country in transitioning to democracy after the coup in 2020. However, when Sudan erupted into civil war in April 2023, UNITAMS was not replaced by a mission with a more robust

¹ This figure was generated using Version 2.2 of the UNPMM data (Hellmüller, Tan and Bara, 2024).

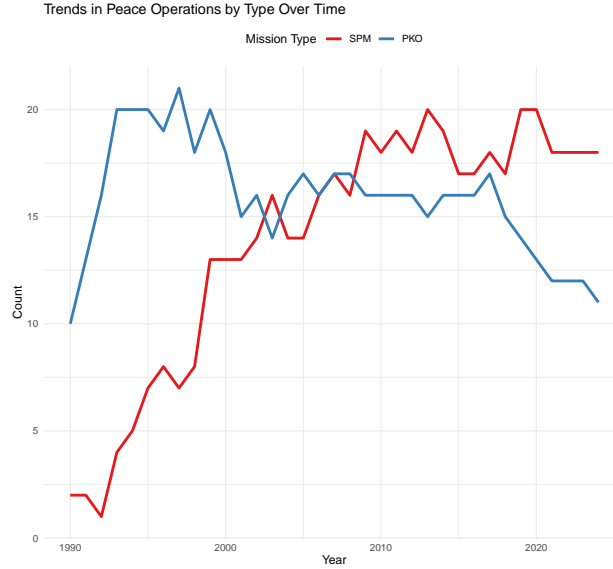


Figure 1: UN PKOs and SPMs deployed, by year

security mandate or capacity, rather, it remained in the country until it was withdrawn in late 2024. Since its departure, there is no UN peace operation operating in relation to the governmental conflict in Sudan.² There are, however, SPMs currently operating in very violent contexts in Libya, Haiti, and Yemen.

These trends are likely to continue. SPMs are easier to authorize than PKOs (they do not require UNSC approval) and much less expensive. In an era of geopolitical competition and shrinking UN budgets, SPMs could increasingly be in the position of leading UN conflict management efforts.

Yet despite SPMs’ growing operational importance, scholarly research and data collection efforts focus nearly entirely on PKOs. There is an enormous literature on UN peacekeeping, and, in general, this literature has shown that more robust PKOs are associated with conflict management success using a variety of measures. The literature on peacekeeping has benefited from the collection of an incredible amount of data on UN PKOs. These data include the number and type of personnel deployed on a monthly basis (Kathman, 2013),

² There are UN PKOs operating in South Sudan, and in Abyei, a disputed region claimed by both Sudan and South Sudan.

the geographical location of deployments within conflict-affected countries (Cil et al., 2020), the countries which provide peacekeepers to specific missions (Bove and Elia, 2011), the mandates of these missions (Di Salvatore et al., 2022; Hellmüller, Tan and Bara, 2024), and many other characteristics.

Data on SPMs, however, is far more limited. There are three recently released datasets which provide information about the mandates of various UN efforts, including political missions. The UN Special Political Mission Mandated Tasks (UNSPMMT) dataset (Maekawa, 2025) contains information on mandated tasks, including those related to capacity building, human rights, elections, etc. for SPMs from 1993 to 2021. The UN Peace Mission Mandate (UNPMM) data codes 41 mandated tasks for PKOs, SPMs, and Group of Experts (GOE) missions from 1991 to 2024. The United Nations Peace Initiative (UNPI) data (Dorussen, Böhmelt and Clayton, 2022) contains information on the mandates of over 400 UN peace initiatives, which include both political missions and peacekeeping operations, from 1946 to 2015. In addition, the UNPI data contains information about the process through which these peace initiatives were mandated (such as whether they were mandated by the Security Council or the General Assembly). These data represent a clear contribution. However, while information on mandates are important, there is no existing data on the resources provided to SPMs, so we cannot measure whether missions have the finances and personnel required to fulfill these mandates.

In this data feature, we present a new dataset—the Special Political Mission Finance and Personnel Dataset (SPMFP). The SPMFP dataset contains information on the approved budget, expenditures, proposed budget, approved personnel, and proposed personnel³ for Special Political Missions on an annual basis from 2005-2024. This information is pulled directly from UN Secretary General reports, as well as from datasets on the UN Peace and Security Data Hub.

³ These variables are listed in order of appearance in the dataset; see the Codebook for more details.

The data in SPMFP facilitate analyses both of what affects the size and resources of these missions as well as how mission personnel and finances influence conflict management success. Early studies in the literature on peacekeeping generally examined how the presence of a peacekeeping mission affected some conflict-level outcome, such as ceasefire duration (Fortna, 2008) or post-conflict democratization (Doyle and Sambanis, 2000). More recently, however, a variety of studies have shown that more robust peacekeeping missions, as measured by the number of peacekeeping troops deployed, lead to reductions in violence and better conflict management outcomes (Hultman, Kathman and Shannon, 2013, 2014; Schumann and Bara, 2023), as well as to other positive outcomes such as environmental protection (Böhmelt, 2024). These data allow for examining whether more robust SPMs produce similar effects — an important question as political missions become the leading tool of UN conflict management.

The remainder of the data feature proceeds as follows. We describe the construction of the SPMFP, present descriptive statistics documenting the substantial variation in SPM resources across missions and over time, and conduct exploratory analyses examining what predicts that variation. We show that missions with more robust mandates and those operating in more violent contexts receive greater funding and personnel. We conclude by discussing how these data can be used to examine whether more robust SPMs produce better conflict management outcomes — a question that has become increasingly urgent as political missions take on a larger share of the UN’s conflict management burden.

2 Data Collection on SPM Budget, Expenditures, and Personnel

In this section, we briefly describe what SPMs are, how we identify them for this project, and the data collection process that we went through to code budgets and personnel. A codebook, provided in the Online Appendix, provides more information about data collection.

2.1 What are Special Political Missions?

As Figure 1 shows, while PKOs have been key parts of the UN's conflict management and peacebuilding efforts for decades, the number of SPMs has increased over time. SPMs are UN peace operations that do not have the security component that PKO missions do, but often have many of the same civilian capacity of PKOs. SPMs vary substantially in their size and mandate, some missions have essentially only one person—a special envoy of the Secretary General—while others, such as the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) are very large, with thousands of personnel and annual budgets in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

SPMs can be mandated by the UN Security Council, but they can also be established by the UN Secretary-General or mandated by the UN General Assembly. SPMs and PKOs are mutually exclusive and do not tend to co-occur in a single host country, although they are often deployed sequentially. Historically, when an SPM was in a country that saw escalations of violence, the SPM would be replaced by a PKO (Dorussen, Böhmelt and Clayton, 2022). This happened in the Central African Republic (CAR) in 2015, when the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA)—an SPM—was subsumed into the new UN PKO, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), which replaced a smaller AU-led peacekeeping operation. SPMs also frequently follow PKOs when violence has abated (Maekawa, 2023), as happened in Burundi when the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi (BINUB)—an SPM—succeeded the United Nations Operation in Burundi (ONUB)—a PKO, which completed its mission in 2007.

2.2 Identifying SPMs

The UN generally divides SPMs into three clusters. Cluster 1 missions primarily include special and personal envoys, advisers and representatives of the Secretary-General. Cluster

2 missions involve sanctions monitoring teams, groups and panels. Cluster 3 comprises regional offices and offices in support of political processes.⁴ Existing datasets on SPMs vary substantially in the set of political missions they include. The UNSPMMT (Maekawa, 2025) is the most restrictive, only including “field missions”, which broadly correspond to Cluster 3 missions in the UN framework. The UNPMM data (Hellmüller, Tan and Bara, 2024) includes SPMs missions—which primarily line up with Cluster 3 as well, but also Group of Experts (GOE) missions, which include some Cluster 1 missions. The UNPI (Clayton, Dorussen and Böhmelt, 2023) has the broadest coverage, including missions across all three clusters.

The SPMFP contains information on SPMS across all three clusters. The data are coded from two sources. The first are datasets released by the United Nations Peace and Security Data Hub.⁵ The Peace and Security Data Hub contains a variety of datasets on peace and security that are published by the United Nations and are freely available. There are five datasets related to budgets, expenditures, and personnel of SPMS, and these datasets broadly cover the time period 2018-2025. The second is a set of annual UN Secretary General reports for the 2005-2018 period. These reports were provided to the authors by researchers at the Peace and Security Data Hub, and are the same type of reports that were used to create the datasets there.⁶ These reports list approved budget, estimated expenditures, proposed budget, approved personnel, and proposed personnel for each year for missions across all three clusters (as well as UNAMA and UNAMI), and all missions included in the reports are in the SPMFP data.

When we coded the SPMFP data, we assigned each mission a unique three-digit ID. In

⁴ UNAMA and UNAMI are very large missions that have a separate budget outside of the cluster system. They are initially classified as Cluster 3 missions in earlier UNSG reports but are later reclassified as UNAMA and UNAMI starting from UNSG report A/63/346 and beyond. We thus follow this classification in the dataset.

⁵ <https://psdata.un.org>. Accessed August 1, 2025.

⁶ For 2018, some variables were coded from the Peace and Security Data Hub and some from Secretary General reports.

most cases, these IDs end in zero, meaning the first two digits identify distinct missions. However, when a mission appeared to transition into a closely related successor mission, we incremented the ones digit accordingly. Researchers may treat these cases either as continuing missions or as distinct entities.⁷ In addition to the SPMFP mission ID, the dataset includes the mission ID from the UNPI (Clayton, Dorussen and Böhmelt, 2023) and the UNPMM data (Hellmüller, Tan and Bara, 2024) so that researchers can merge information from each of those data projects with the budget, expenditures, and personnel data here.⁸ Since the UNPI data covers a wider range of UN political missions than the UNPMM data does, we end up with more matched mission IDs from the former. Details regarding the mission ID matching process across datasets are explained in the Codebook.

2.3 Budget, Expenditures, and Personnel Data

This section describes how the SPMFP dataset is structured and the information included with respect to budget, expenditures, and personnel. A complete list of variables including mission IDs can be found in the Codebook. For budget and expenditures of an SPM, the UNSG reports document these variables as appropriations (approved budget), expenditures (estimated expenditures), and requirements (proposed budget), and the datasets from the Peace and Security Data Hub use similar labels. We retain those labels in our data. For personnel of an SPM, the UNSG reports present approved personnel and proposed personnel at

⁷ For example, Mission 100, “Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team established pursuant to Security Council resolution 1526 (2004) concerning Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities”, Mission 101, “Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pursuant to (Security Council) resolutions 1526 (2004) and 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities”, and Mission 102, “Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pursuant to resolutions 1526 (2004) and 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities; and the Office of the Ombudsperson established pursuant to resolution 1904 (2009)” are plausibly missions that have evolved over time on an expanded scope. We thus consider that they are related and add the value by one instead of treating them as wholly distinct missions.

⁸ The UNSPMMT data does not provide mission ids for the mission, so merging with that dataset would require matching on the name or abbreviation for the mission, and would likely need to in some cases be done manually.

various levels, from UN leadership officials including the Under/Assistant Secretary-General (USG/ASG) to field personnel like UN volunteers (UNVs).

As mentioned in Section 2.2, the SPMFP dataset is built on two primary sources. We manually code all relevant variables using UNSG reports for the period 2005-2018, and merge the remaining data pulled from the UN Peace and Security Data Hub for period 2019-2025.⁹ The unit of observation is mission-year. Manually coding all personnel data in 2005-2018 is rather straightforward as UNSG reports document their values clearly. We simply input the value for each personnel type into each column for each mission year.

Manually coding the finance data was less straight-forward because of the way the data are presented in some UNSG reports. The major issue is that all even-numbered reports¹⁰ record a two-year value of expenditures of an SPM, while the odd-numbered reports record one year values. To get the one-year value for the year of observation that corresponds to each individual even-numbered report, we take the two-year value and subtract the one-year value from the immediate preceding odd-numbered report. To illustrate, report A/63/346 records the 2008 expenditures for “Special Envoy of the Secretary General for Myanmar” as \$614,800, while report A/64/349 records the 2008-2009 expenditures as \$1,346,800. So, the 2009 expenditures value is thus calculated as \$1,346,800 minus \$614,800, which is \$750,000. The same process applies to calculating appropriations (the approved budget) with two exceptions: reports A/64/349 and A/66/354 *do present* one-year appropriations in a separate column, and we extract this information directly from the reports for year 2009 and 2011. For requirements (proposed budget) data, all UNSG reports document it as a one-year value, and we thus manually code this information directly from each individual report. The codebook provides more detail about this specific process, as well as discussion of a few cases that did not exactly match this process (such as missions that only lasted one year).

⁹ For requirements and proposed personnel data in 2019, they come from manual coding with reference to UNSG report A/73/352.

¹⁰ This includes reports A/60/585, A/62/512, A/64/349, A/66/354, A/68/327, A/70/348, and A/72/371.

Because of the way the data is recorded in the reports, the exact years available for each variable vary somewhat. Both the requirements and proposed personnel data from the 2005 report refer to 2006 values, so those variables have a range from 2006 to 2025. The approved personnel and appropriations data are not available for 2025, so those data have a range from 2005 to 2024. The expenditure data, meanwhile, range from 2005 to 2023 (the last year available in the Peace and Security Data Hub). We anticipate the datasets from the data hub being updated annually, which will make updating the SPMFP data quite straight-forward when they become available.

3 Patterns in SPM Finance and Personnel

The SPMFP data reveal substantial heterogeneity in SPM resources across missions and over time. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the finance and personnel variables; though the overall number of observations is 796, this differs across variables due to missingness.¹¹ Finance variables are measured in thousands of US dollars; all personnel variables are measured in persons.

Table 1 reveals substantial variation across SPM characteristics. Mission budgets range from minimal to over US\$265,000,000, with an average of US\$17,000,000. Personnel numbers also vary considerably, both in total and across categories. For instance, local-level offices range from zero to 1,804 staff members, averaging approximately 57.

By comparison, UN PKOs are dramatically more expensive. The approved PKO budget for 2024-2025 totals approximately US\$5.6 billion across nine missions — an average of roughly US\$620 million per mission (United Nations Department of Peace Operations, 2024) — with the most expensive current mission, UNMISS, appropriated US\$1.36 billion for that

¹¹ UN reports only break UN Volunteers into International and National categories from 2019 onward, which is why the approved and proposed personnel variables for those subcategories have fewer observations than the other personnel variables.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Finance and Personnel Variables

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
<i>Budget Variables (thousands of USD)</i>					
Approved Budget	17331.41	37433.48	0.00	265839.10	668
Estimated Expenditure	16931.40	37540.32	0.00	271393.80	640
Proposed Budget	17919.62	38470.91	0.00	270010.40	669
<i>Personnel Variables (persons)</i>					
USG Approved	0.44	0.51	0.00	2.00	695
ASG Approved	0.46	0.65	0.00	2.00	695
D2-Level Approved	0.35	0.67	0.00	5.00	695
D1-Level Approved	1.30	2.19	0.00	9.00	695
P5-Level Approved	4.28	7.06	0.00	32.00	695
P4-Level Approved	9.80	17.66	0.00	127.00	695
P3-Level Approved	9.18	18.59	0.00	124.00	695
P2-Level Approved	1.46	5.89	0.00	66.00	695
Field/Security Service Personnel Approved	18.93	45.70	0.00	290.00	695
Principal-Level General Service Personnel Approved	0.05	0.38	0.00	5.00	695
Other-Level General Service Personnel Approved	1.55	2.76	0.00	20.00	695
National Officers Approved	12.88	37.23	0.00	307.00	695
Local-Level Officers Approved	56.56	190.10	0.00	1804.00	695
UN Volunteers Approved	4.51	20.30	0.00	258.00	695
International UNVs Approved	2.16	14.54	0.00	153.00	230
National UNVs Approved	0.47	3.11	0.00	30.00	230
Total Approved Personnel	122.28	321.01	0.00	2755.00	697
USG Proposed	0.44	0.51	0.00	2.00	695
ASG Proposed	0.45	0.66	0.00	3.00	695
D2-Level Proposed	0.32	0.63	0.00	4.00	695
D1-Level Proposed	1.26	2.21	0.00	16.00	695
P5-Level Proposed	4.22	7.12	0.00	32.00	695
P4-Level Proposed	9.68	17.77	0.00	129.00	695
P3-Level Proposed	8.92	18.25	0.00	126.00	695
P2-Level Proposed	1.37	5.84	0.00	68.00	695
Field/Security Service Personnel Proposed	18.56	45.93	0.00	290.00	695
Principal-Level General Service Personnel Proposed	0.03	0.22	0.00	4.00	695
Other-Level General Service Personnel Proposed	1.54	4.53	0.00	100.00	695
National Officers Proposed	13.01	37.77	0.00	315.00	695
Local-Level Officers Proposed	55.65	190.34	0.00	1874.00	695
UN Volunteers Proposed	4.16	16.97	0.00	141.00	695
International UNVs Proposed	1.87	13.63	0.00	153.00	266
National UNVs Proposed	0.49	3.46	0.00	36.00	266
Total Proposed Personnel	119.99	321.71	0.00	2841.00	698

period (United Nations General Assembly, 2024). The average SPM budget in the SPMFP data is less than three percent of the average PKO budget, underscoring why SPMs are increasingly attractive in an era of fiscal constraint.

The skew in the budget and personnel data are driven primarily by UNAMA and UNAMI. UNAMA had the largest total approved personnel of 2,755 in 2010, and UNAMI recorded the greatest appropriations of US\$265,839,000 in 2009. In comparison, the only other SPM with appropriations greater than US\$100,000,000 was the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia in 2020. Several Cluster III missions have budgets of greater than US\$50,000,000, including, among others, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya, the United Nations Mission in Nepal, and UNITAMS.

The distributions of two key variables—appropriations and total approved personnel—illustrate this heterogeneity further. Figure 2 shows the distribution of appropriations in raw values, revealing a substantial skew to the right due to large missions like UNAMA and UNAMI. Total approved personnel is also heavily skewed, so Figure 3 shows its distribution after log transformation, which produces a more symmetric distribution suitable for statistical modeling. However, note the cluster near zero, indicating that many SPMs operate with very small numbers of personnel. For example, the Group of Experts on Côte d’Ivoire had long operated with only one P3-level official before its discontinuation in 2017. Similarly, the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara consists of one USG with an additional P3-level official as of 2024.

A natural question is whether missions with more personnel also receive more financial resources. Figures 4 and 5 visualize the bivariate relationship between appropriations and total approved personnel. Figure 4 shows a strong positive correlation in raw values, though the cluster near zero raises concerns about outlier influence. Figure 5 presents the log-log transformation, which reveals that the tight linear pattern persists, demonstrating that mission size and funding genuinely scale together rather than being driven solely by a few large missions. This pattern reflects the cluster structure of SPMs: Cluster I and II missions such

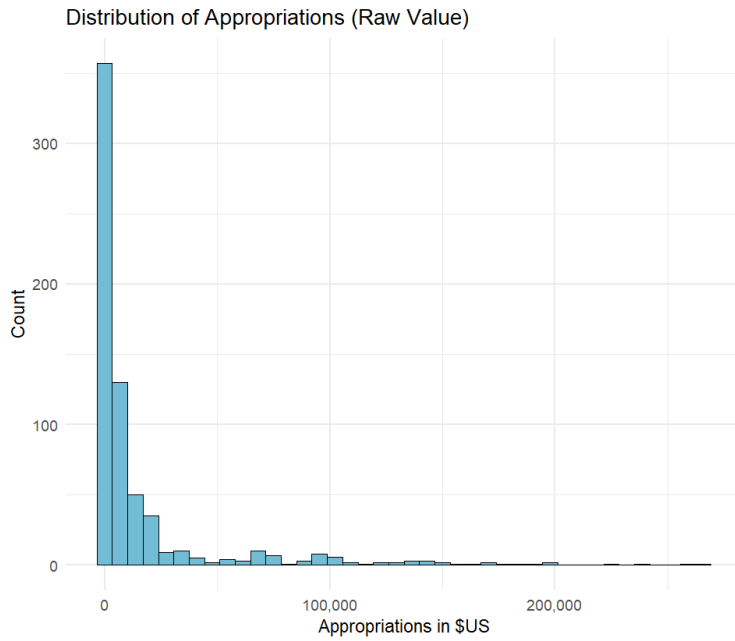


Figure 2: Distribution of SPMs Appropriations (Raw Value)

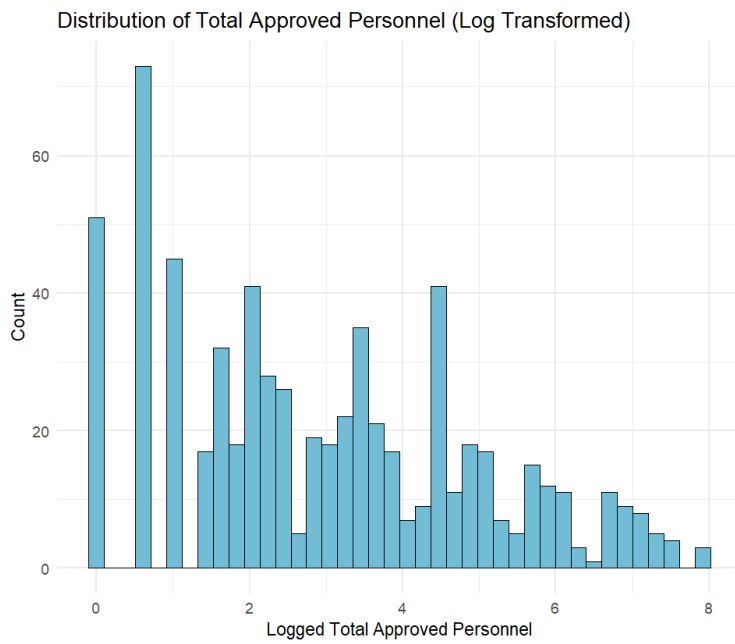


Figure 3: Distribution of SPMs Approved Personnel (Log Transformed)

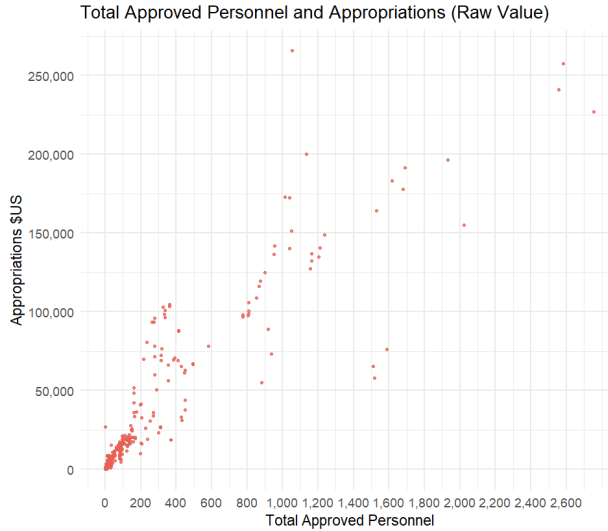


Figure 4: Total Approved Personnel and Appropriations (Raw Value)

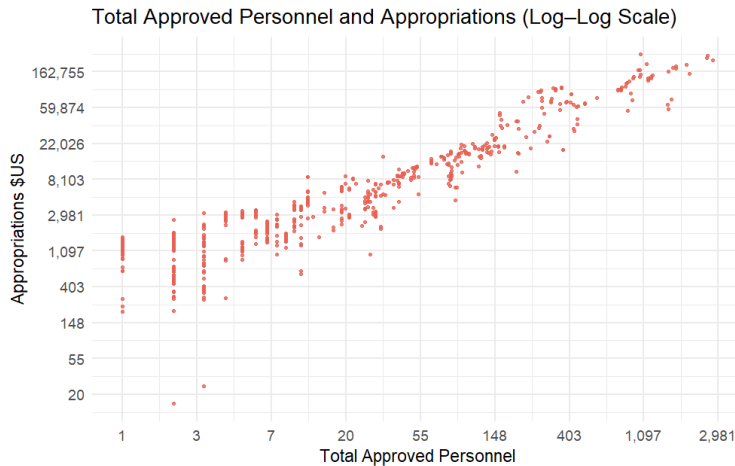


Figure 5: Total Approved Personnel and Appropriations (Log-Log Scale)

as special envoys and sanctions monitoring teams require minimal staffing, while larger Cluster III field missions are deployed to countries actively experiencing conflict and accordingly require significantly greater financial and human resources.

4 What Predicts the Size and Funding of SPMs?

In this section, we conduct exploratory analyses examining what predicts the size and funding of SPMs. We investigate two questions. First, do missions with more robust mandates have

more personnel and larger budgets? Second, are missions deployed in more violent contexts larger and better funded?

4.1 Mandates, Personnel, and Funding

We focus on mission mandates for two reasons. First, mandates typically precede resource allocation decisions. SPMs with more mandates should receive more personnel and funding to effectively fulfill their stated objectives. Second, unlike PKOs with standard force benchmarks, SPM resource allocation reflects mandate scope and ambition (Maekawa, 2025), making mandates central to understanding variation in SPM structures and resources.

To measure mandates, we draw on the UNPMM data (Hellmüller, Tan and Bara, 2024), which identifies 40 mission mandates classified as Minimalist (11 items), Moderate (11 items), or Maximalist (18 items). We create three measures. First, we use the UNPMM’s Mission overall score (ranging 1-3), which weights Minimalist mandates by 1, Moderate by 2, and Maximalist by 3, sums them, and divides by the total number of mandates. Second, we calculate Mission total mandates, a simple count ranging from 0-40. Third, we create Mission weighted score, which applies the same weighting scheme but without dividing by the number of mandates, yielding values from 0-87.

We regress each mandate measure on logged total approved personnel (Models 1-3) and logged appropriations (Models 4-6) using OLS to examine whether mission mandates predict SPM size and funding. Table 2 shows the results from OLS regressions.

The mission overall score is a strong positive predictor of both logged total approved personnel and logged appropriations ($p < 0.001$). Substantively, it suggests that a one-point increase in mission overall score is correlated with a 128.8% increase in total approved personnel and a 117.9% increase in appropriations, respectively.

Figure 6 and Figure 7 visualize the bivariate relationship from Model 1 and Model 4. The scatterplots generally show a positive correlation with missions with more maximalist mandates receiving substantially greater resources. However, there is significant variation in

Table 2: OLS Regressions of Effects of Mandates

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Mission overall score	1.288*** (0.147)			1.179*** (0.137)		
Mission total mandates		0.164** (0.056)			0.142** (0.052)	
Mission weighted score			0.068** (0.023)			0.058** (0.022)
Intercept	1.752*** (0.275)	3.960*** (0.102)	3.965*** (0.102)	7.019*** (0.258)	9.044*** (0.095)	9.048*** (0.095)
Num.Obs.	346	346	346	346	346	346
R2	0.183	0.025	0.024	0.177	0.021	0.020

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

resources within missions with similar levels of mandates, suggesting that the data here are not just picking up the mandate. We see this exploratory analysis as suggesting that the UN does provide greater resources to missions with more robust mandates, but that the data on budget and personnel contained in the SPMFP contain additional information about the capacity of missions to fulfill these mandates.

4.2 Violence, Personnel, and Funding

Next, we examine whether SPMs deployed in more violent contexts receive greater funding and personnel. Unlike the previous analysis, which matched missions on the ID included in the UNPMM data, this next analysis requires matching country codes to SPM missions. For missions included in the UNPI or UNPMM data, we use the country codes from one of those datasets. For remaining missions, we manually coded locations where possible; the process is described in the codebook.

To measure violence, we use the UCDP Country-Year Dataset on Organized Violence within Country Borders (version 25.1) (Sundberg and Melander, 2013; Davies et al., 2025). We examine three measures of intrastate violence. Intrastate conflict incidence is a di-

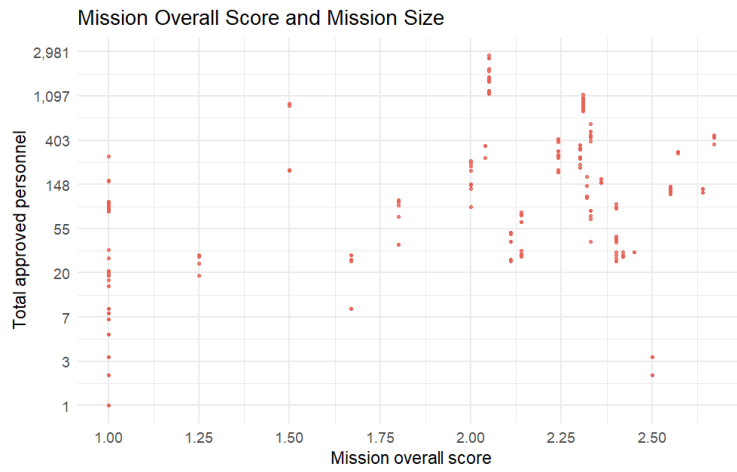


Figure 6: Mission Overall Score and Mission Size

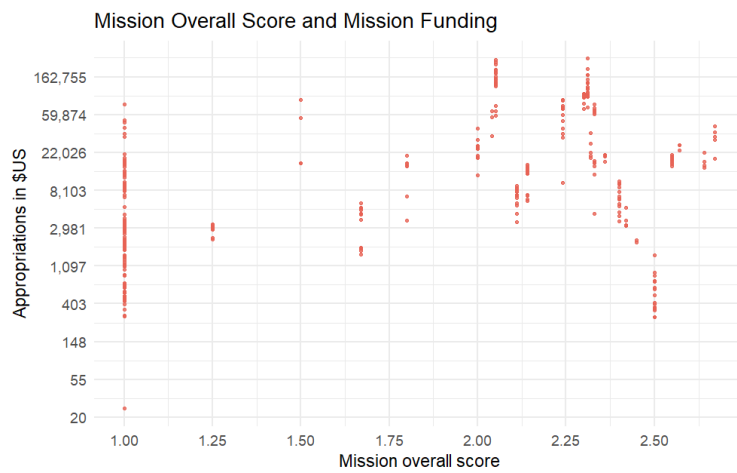


Figure 7: Mission Overall Score and Appropriations

chotomous indicator of whether any state-based intrastate armed conflict occurred in the country-year. Intrastate conflict dyads counts the number of conflict dyads in state-based intrastate armed conflicts. Intrastate conflict deaths provides the best country-level estimate of fatalities from intrastate conflicts (we log-transform the variable for analysis). We regress each violence measure on logged appropriations (Models 7-9) and logged total approved personnel (Models 10-12). We lag all three violence indicators by one year to deal with reverse causality concerns.

Table 3 presents the results. Both conflict incidence and deaths are positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.001$ in Models 7, 9, 10, and 12). SPMs deployed in countries experiencing civil conflict receive 77.6% more in appropriations and 73.7% more personnel. Each unit increase in logged conflict deaths is associated with 18.4% higher appropriations and 20.8% more personnel.

The conflict dyads variable is statistically insignificant with very small coefficients in Models 8 and 11, though the signs turn out to be as expected. This may reflect that the presence and intensity of violence matter more for resource allocation than the complexity of the conflict environment. Overall, the evidence suggests that the UN considers the presence of conflict and levels of violence when making budgeting and personnel decisions for SPMs.

Table 3: OLS Regressions of Effects of Violence

	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
Intrastate conflict incidence	0.776*** (0.138)			0.737*** (0.171)		
Intrastate conflict dyads		0.038 (0.026)			0.042 (0.032)	
Intrastate conflict deaths			0.184*** (0.037)			0.208*** (0.046)
Intercept	8.039*** (0.107)	8.435*** (0.087)	7.711*** (0.242)	2.632*** (0.133)	2.997*** (0.106)	2.125*** (0.300)
Num.Obs.	564	564	341	564	564	341
R2	0.054	0.004	0.068	0.032	0.003	0.057

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

We also estimated models with mission fixed effects to examine whether violence predicts within-mission variation in resources over time. These models yield largely insignificant results, which is unsurprising given the relatively stable resource profiles of individual missions documented in Section 3. The patterns identified here are primarily cross-sectional: missions deployed in more violent contexts are better resourced than those deployed in less violent ones, but a given mission’s resources do not tend to fluctuate substantially in response to changes in violence levels over time. This suggests that initial resource decisions at the time of mandate authorization matter considerably, and that subsequent reallocation in response to changing conflict conditions is limited.

Having established that both mandate scope and conflict severity independently predict SPM resources in bivariate analyses, we now examine whether these patterns persist together. We regress logged appropriations (Model M1) and logged total approved personnel (Model M2) on both intrastate conflict incidence and mission overall score, while controlling for conventional country-level covariates including logged GDP per capita, logged population,¹² and the V-Dem egalitarian democracy index (Coppedge et al., 2024; Pemstein et al., 2025). As before, we lag all these variables by one year to address reverse causality concerns.

Table 4 presents the results. Both mandate scope and conflict incidence remain strong, independent predictors of SPM resources. The coefficients for intrastate conflict incidence and overall mission score are positive and highly statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) in both models, suggesting that the UN considers both the demands of the conflict environment and the ambition of mission mandates when allocating resources to SPMs.

¹² GDP and population data are from the World Development Indicators, we accessed them using the WDI R-package (Arel-Bundock, 2025).

Table 4: OLS Regressions of Effects of Mandates and Conflicts

	Model M1	Model M2
Intrastate conflict incidence	0.967*** (0.211)	1.158*** (0.229)
Mission overall score	1.100*** (0.152)	1.106*** (0.165)
Logged GDP per capita (2015 \$US)	-0.090 (0.078)	-0.128 (0.085)
Logged population	0.148 (0.088)	0.023 (0.095)
Egalitarian democracy index	0.267 (0.534)	0.180 (0.581)
Intercept	4.778** (1.702)	1.947 (1.850)
Num.Obs.	324	324
R2	0.345	0.333

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

5 Conclusion

As UN peacekeeping has declined, Special Political Missions are increasingly operating in violent conflict settings and post-conflict environments with the potential for renewed violence. These trends are likely to continue, as geopolitical competition and preference divergence among the P5 prevent the deployment of peacekeeping missions, and funding cuts lead the UN to search for less expensive means of conflict management. A small but growing literature examines SPM effects on conflicts, yet the relative lack of data on SPMs has limited this research.

The Special Political Mission Finance and Personnel Dataset (SPMFP) helps fill this gap. The SPMFP contains information on approved and proposed personnel, proposed and approved budgets, and expenditures for SPMs operating from 2005 to 2024. Our descriptive analyses show that missions vary dramatically in their funding and personnel, and that missions with more robust mandates and those operating in more violent contexts generally have greater funding and personnel.

Future research using these data could shed further light on two important sets of questions. First, why are some missions better resourced than others? If PKOs continue to decline, are they replaced by better-resourced SPMs? Does the UN respond to financial cuts by shifting resources to SPMs, either by increasing the resources of existing missions or mandating new, more robust missions in response to civil conflicts? These questions have become increasingly urgent as the UN faces a deepening financial crisis, with funding cuts threatening the viability of existing operations and forcing reductions in mission capacity. The SPMFP data provide a baseline against which researchers and policymakers can assess the consequences of such downscaling — and potentially inform decisions about which cuts carry the greatest risk for conflict outcomes.

Second, and more importantly, how do SPM resources and personnel affect conflict outcomes? The peacekeeping literature has demonstrated that it is not simply whether a PKO is deployed that matters, but the mission's characteristics — its size, equipment, deployment locations, and mandate, among others. As SPMs become increasingly important actors in conflict management, understanding whether their characteristics similarly shape effectiveness is crucial. The SPMFP data provide the foundation for such analyses, allowing researchers to move beyond examining SPM presence to understanding how variation in mission resources affects when, where, and how UN conflict management efforts succeed. Given that SPMs are now operating in some of the world's most violent conflicts, answering these questions has direct implications for whether the UN's primary remaining tool of conflict management is being deployed in ways that can actually work.

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