Introducing the Special Political Mission Finance and Personnel Dataset*

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October 7, 2026

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 2025. 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.

*We thank Susanna Campbell for inspiration, researchers at the UN Peace and Security Data Hub for discussions of their data collection process and for pointing us to the UN Secretary General reports, and Corinne Bara, Tobias Bohmelt, Han Dorussen and Wakako Maekawa for helpful comments on the data and article.

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), Mali (which withdrew in 2023), and the DRC (which began withdrawing in 2024).

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] There were many more PKOs than SPMs in the 1990s, but 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, 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 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

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

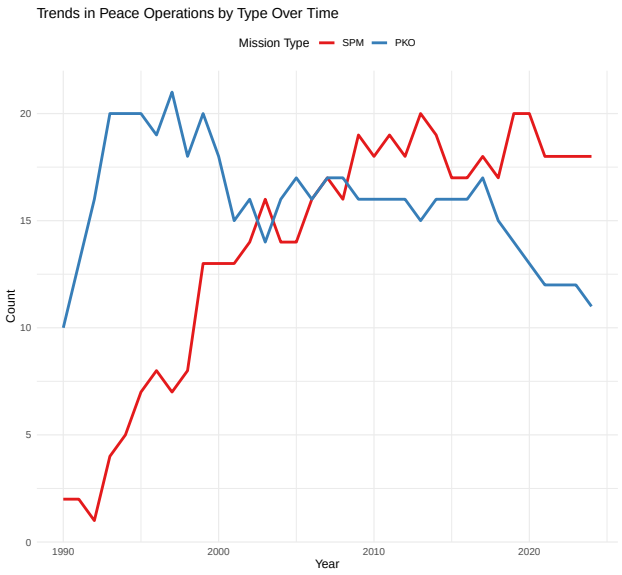

Figure 1: UN PKOs and SPMs deployed, by year

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.[3] 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), the geographical location of deployments within conflict-affected countries (Cil et al., 2020),

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

[3] See, as examples, Hultman, Kathman and Shannon (2013, 2014); Schumann and Bara (2023) and the overview in Walter, Howard and Fortna (2021).

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 is far more limited. Three recently released datasets 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, and elections. The UN Peace Mission Mandate (UNPMM) data codes 41 mandated tasks for PKOs, SPMs, and Group of Experts (GOE) missions. 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. The UNPI also contains information about the process through which these peace initiatives were mandated. These data represent a clear contribution. However, while information on mandates is 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 personnel for Special Political Missions on an annual basis from 2005-2025.

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.

2 Data Collection on SPM Budget, Expenditures, and Personnel

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 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.

2.1 Identifying SPMs

The UN generally divides SPMs into three clusters. Cluster I missions primarily include special and personal envoys, advisers and representatives of the Secretary-General. Cluster II missions involve sanctions monitoring teams, groups and panels. Cluster III 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 III missions in the UN framework. The UNPMM data (Hellmüller, Tan and Bara, 2024) include Cluster III missions, as well as some Cluster I missions. The UNPI (Clayton, Dorussen and Böhmelt, 2023) has the broadest coverage, including missions across all three clusters.

The SPMFP includes every special political mission that receives a distinct, mission-level appropriation in the Secretary-General's budget reports across all three clusters. A few politically comparable missions fall outside this criterion: those financed outside the regular budget, such as the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), funded through voluntary contributions; and good-offices engagements funded from a thematic-cluster provision rather than a distinct appropriation, such as the Personal Envoy on the Guyana–Venezuela controversy.

The SPMFP data are coded from two sources that ultimately draw on the same underlying UN documents. For recent years, we use the United Nations Peace and Security

[4] UNAMA and UNAMI are very large missions that have a separate budget outside of the cluster system. They are presented within the cluster structure in earlier reports but as separate budget lines from A/63/346 onward.

Data Hub,[5] which publishes five freely available datasets on SPM budgets, expenditures, and personnel covering roughly 2018–2025; we merged these into a mission-year panel. For 2005–2017, we extended the coding using the Secretary-General budget reports on which the Hub's datasets are themselves based. We confirmed that the Hub's figures trace to these reports.

Together, this gave us information on the budget, personnel, and expenditures for SPMs. For approved budget and expenditures, 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 various levels, from UN leadership officials including the Under/Assistant Secretary-General (USG/ASG) to field personnel like UN volunteers (UNVs).

Because of the way the data are recorded in the reports, the exact years available for each variable vary somewhat. Approved personnel data begin in 2005 and run through 2024. The requirements and proposed personnel data from the 2005 report refer to 2006 values, so those variables range from 2006 to 2025. Appropriations data have a range from 2006 to 2024, and expenditure data range from 2006 to 2023.

In addition to the budget and financial information, the SPMFP data includes mission identifiers and country codes for every mission, as well as a variable indicating how the mission was mandated. There are three distinct mission IDs–a unique mission ID for the SPMFP data, as well as the mission IDs 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.[6]

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[5] https://psdata.un.org. Accessed August 1, 2025.

[6] The UNSPMMT data do not provide mission ids for the mission, so merging with that dataset would

The SPMFP mission id is three digits. In 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.

The country codes are Gleditsch and Ward codes (Gleditsch and Ward, 1999), pulled from the UNPMM or UNPI dataset or coded by ourselves for missions not in either dataset. We include these to facilitate merging information from country-year datasets.

Finally, the SPMFP data contain a variable that indicates whether the SPM was authorized by the UNGA, UNSC, or the Secretary General. This information was taken from the UNPI datasets for all missions that were included in both SPMFP and UNPI, and we coded it for missions not in UNPI. More information about the coding of this and all other variables is provided in the codebook in the Online Appendix.

2.2 Measuring SPM Finances

The SPMFP finance variables require some explanation, because the way the UN reports mission budgets shapes what each variable measures. First, all even-numbered Secretary General reports[7] record two-year (biennium) totals for both appropriations and expenditures, while the odd-numbered reports record one-year values. To recover the second year of each biennium, we take the two-year total from the even-numbered report and subtract the first-year value, which the immediately preceding odd-numbered report reports on its own.[8] The same process applies to appropriations (the approved budget), with two exceptions: reports A/64/349 and A/66/354 present one-year appropriations in a separate column, and

require matching on the name or abbreviation for the mission.

[7] 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.

[8] To illustrate, report A/63/346 records 2008 expenditures for the 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. The 2009 value is therefore $1,346,800 minus $614,800, or $750,000.

we take the 2009 and 2011 values directly from those reports. For requirements (proposed budget), all UNSG reports document one-year values, which we code directly from each report. The dataset includes a "coding basis" variable for each expenditure and appropriation value, indicating whether it was a direct one-year value or derived by subtraction, and a corresponding coding note recording what guided that decision.

A second feature of the expenditure variable reflects a change in UN reporting practice. Prior to 2018, the Secretary-General reports present only estimated expenditure for each mission — a mid-year projection made before the budget year closes. Beginning with the 2020 budget report, the reports introduced a completed-year actual expenditure figure, making 2018 the first year for which mission-level actual expenditure is available. Mission-level actual expenditure does not exist for earlier years: political missions are excluded from the UN's programme budget performance reports, where final expenditure is otherwise recorded. Our expenditure variable is therefore estimated through 2017 and actual from 2018 onward.

The third point relates to the approved budget variable, where figures are the initial appropriation enacted by the General Assembly at the start of the budget cycle. Appropriations are occasionally revised during the year, most often for large missions in volatile environments (such as UNAMI and UNAMA), and these revisions can be substantial. We record initial appropriations throughout, for reasons of comparability: revised estimates are issued sporadically and mission-specifically, so incorporating them where they exist would measure different mission-years on different bases. Because the dataset also reports expenditures, researchers can identify likely revised mission-years by comparing expenditure against the initial appropriation; UNAMA in 2022 is a clear example, where a $44,900 initial appropriation stands against $134.1 million in expenditure following the change of government in Afghanistan.

2.3 Validation

The initial coding of the data was done by a human coder. We conducted a systematic validation of the data, described in full in the Online Appendix. The validation had three main steps. First, to confirm the two sources are consistent, we independently reconstructed a merged panel from the five Peace and Security Data Hub datasets and compared it against the SPMFP values; the two matched across the overlapping years. Second, to assess transcription accuracy, we drew a stratified random sample of 55 mission-year values spanning all five variables, both reporting eras, and a range of mission types, and had a human coder and a large language model independently re-code each value from the source reports without access to the dataset or to one another; agreement was high, and the exercise identified two single-digit errors in the sampled data, which we corrected. Third, to validate the derived biennial figures, we checked whether the two annual values in the data sum to the two-year total reported in the source; 363 of 422 reconciled exactly, with the remainder resolving into a small number of corrections, reclassifications, and cases requiring individual adjudication.[9] Finally, we verified every appropriation, expenditure, and personnel figure in the dataset against its source report — roughly 2,700 values — confirming both transcription and, for derived figures, computation under each value's recorded coding basis. The data proved over 99% accurate, and we corrected the remaining discrepancies.

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.[10] Mission

[9] We further confirmed a sample of approved budgets against the corresponding Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) reports, which record enacted appropriations.

[10] 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.

budgets range from minimal to over US$265 million, averaging roughly US$17 million, and personnel vary just as widely—local-level staff, for instance, range from zero to 1,804 across missions, averaging about 57. Finance variables are in thousands of US dollars and personnel in persons.

This variation is driven by a small number of very large missions at one extreme and many minimal ones at the other. UNAMA and UNAMI dominate the upper tail: UNAMA reached 2,755 approved personnel in 2010, and UNAMI recorded the largest single appropriation at US$265.8 million in 2009. Only one other mission—the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia in 2020—was ever appropriated more than US$100 million, though several Cluster III missions, including UNSMIL, the UN Mission in Nepal, and UNITAMS, exceeded US$50 million. At the other extreme, many SPMs operate with a handful of staff: the Group of Experts on Côte d'Ivoire ran for years with a single P-3 official, and the Personal Envoy for Western Sahara consists of one USG and one P-3 as of 2024. Because UNAMA and UNAMI are such pronounced outliers, researchers should run analyses both with and without them to confirm that patterns are not driven by these two missions.

Figures 2 and 3 show the distributions of two key variables. Appropriations are strongly right-skewed (Figure 2); total approved personnel is similarly skewed, so Figure 3 plots it on a log scale, which is more symmetric and better suited to statistical modeling. The cluster of small values remains visible even after transformation, a reminder that most SPMs are small.

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

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Finance and Personnel Variables

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Approved Budget	17035.42	36533.84	0.00	257388.60	668
Estimated Expenditure	16527.48	36503.33	0.00	271393.80	641
Proposed Budget	17919.62	38470.91	0.00	270010.40	669
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	1.29	2.18	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 Gerenal Service Personnel Approved	0.06	0.39	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	56.85	190.51	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	122.75	321.56	0.00	2755.00	696
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 Gerenal Service Personnel Proposed	0.04	0.24	0.00	4.00	695
Other-Level General Service Personnel Proposed	1.41	2.58	0.00	22.00	695
National Officers Proposed	13.02	37.77	0.00	315.00	695
Local-Level Officers Proposed	55.63	190.32	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	119.86	321.56	0.00	2841.00	698

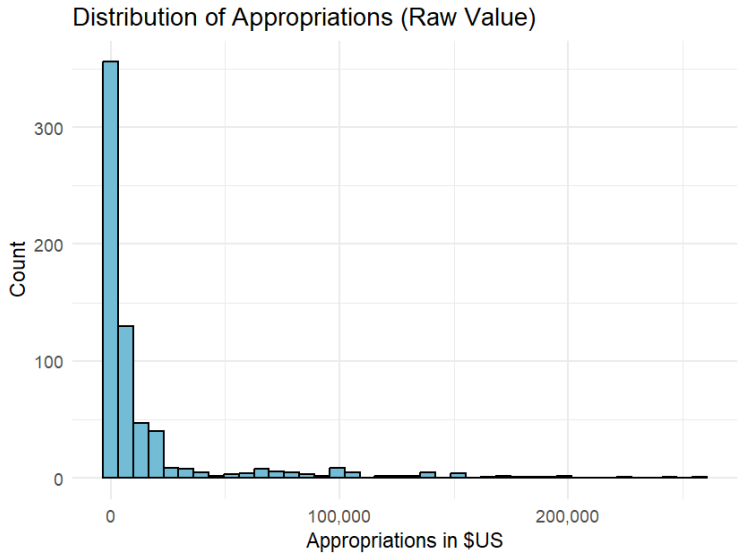

Figure 2: Distribution of SPMs Appropriations (Raw Value)

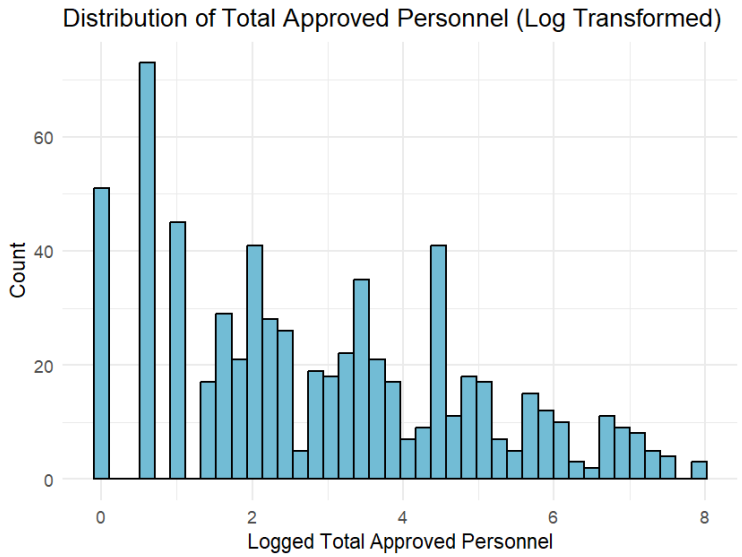

Figure 3: Distribution of SPMs Approved Personnel (Log Transformed)

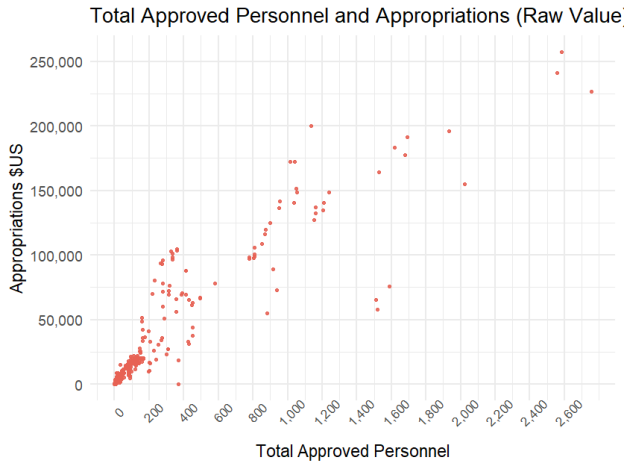

Figure 4: Total Approved Personnel and Appropriations (Raw Value)

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 first examine whether missions with more robust mandates have more personnel and larger budgets.

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),

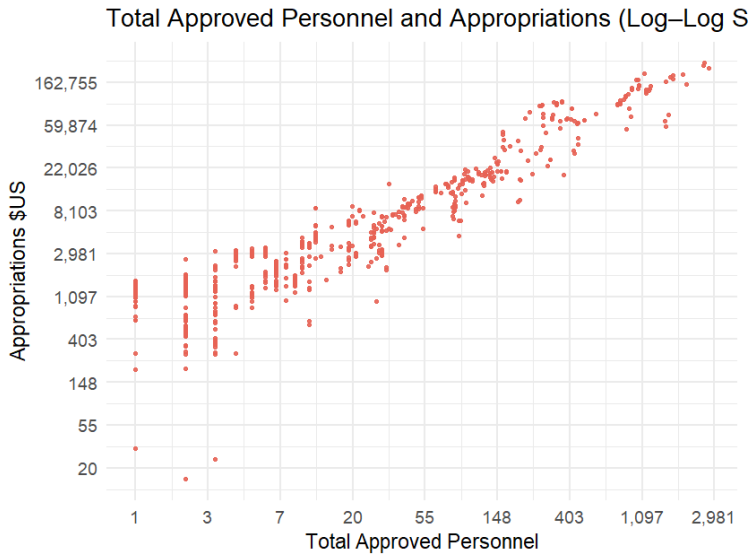

Figure 5: Total Approved Personnel and Appropriations (Log-Log Scale)

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 129.1% increase in total approved personnel and a 117.6% increase in appropriations, respectively.

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

Table 2: OLS Regressions of Effects of Mandates

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Mission overall score	1.291***			1.176***		
	(0.147)			(0.138)		
Mission total mandates		0.164**			0.142**	
		(0.056)			(0.052)	
Mission weighted score			0.068**			0.058**
			(0.024)			(0.022)
Intercept	1.746***	3.962***	3.966***	7.019***	9.040***	9.044***
	(0.276)	(0.102)	(0.102)	(0.258)	(0.095)	(0.095)
Num.Obs.	345	345	345	345	345	345
R2	0.183	0.025	0.024	0.176	0.021	0.020

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

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. The unit of analysis is the country-year, and we use the country-codes in the SPMFP data to identify where SPMS are deployed. We use three measures of violence from the UCDP Country-Year Dataset on Organized Violence within Country Borders (version 25.1) (Sundberg and Melander, 2013; Davies et al., 2025). Intrastate conflict incidence is a dichotomous 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).

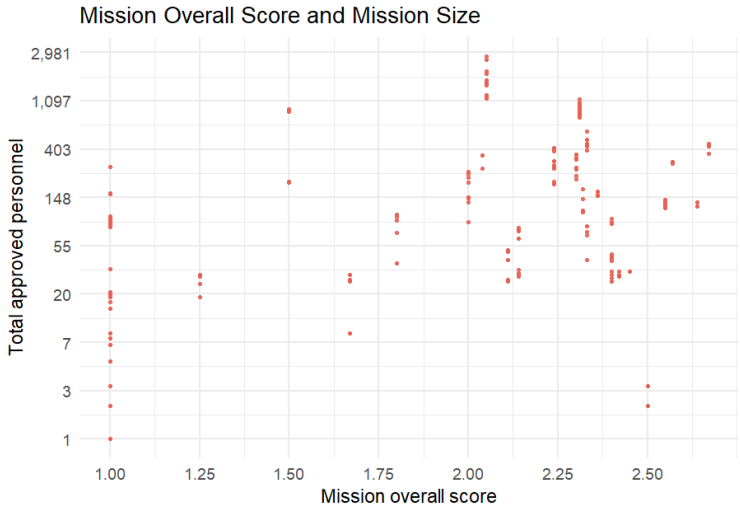

Figure 6: Mission Overall Score and Mission Size

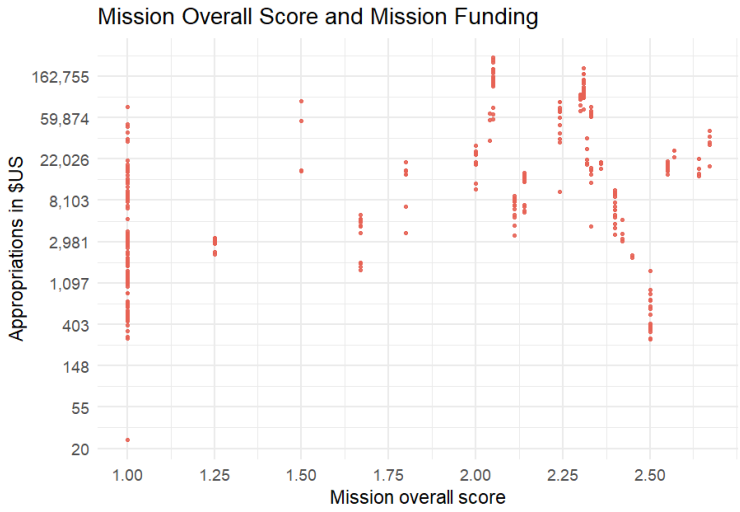

Figure 7: Mission Overall Score and Appropriations

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 80.2% more in appropriations and 73.8% more personnel. Each unit increase in logged conflict deaths is associated with 19.1% higher appropriations and 21.7% more personnel.

The conflict dyads variable is statistically insignificant with very small coefficients in Models 8 and 11, though the signs are 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	0.802***			0.738***		
	(0.138)			(0.170)		
Intrastate conflict dyads		0.042			0.044	
		(0.026)			(0.032)	
Intrastate conflict deaths			0.191***			0.217***
			(0.037)			(0.046)
Intercept	8.018***	8.421***	7.678***	2.632***	2.992***	2.071***
	(0.107)	(0.087)	(0.241)	(0.133)	(0.106)	(0.300)
Num.Obs.	562	562	339	562	562	339
R2	0.057	0.005	0.073	0.032	0.003	0.062

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

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,[11] 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.

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 litera-

[11] 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	0.980***	1.162***
	(0.210)	(0.229)
Mission overall score	1.095***	1.112***
	(0.152)	(0.166)
Logged GDP per capita (2015 $US)	-0.096	-0.129
	(0.077)	(0.085)
Logged population	0.147+	0.025
	(0.087)	(0.095)
Egalitarian democracy index	0.302	0.195
	(0.533)	(0.582)
Intercept	4.822**	1.909
	(1.696)	(1.851)
Num.Obs.	323	323
R2	0.348	0.333

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

ture examines SPM effects on conflicts (such as Campbell and Di Salvatore, 2024), 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. 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? Because the data distinguish proposed from approved budgets, researchers can measure the gap between what missions request and what member states grant as an indicator of political support; and because

personnel are disaggregated by category, they can separate substantively staffed missions from those that exist largely on paper. 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. By showing how resource levels have historically tracked with mission context and outcomes, the data can help the UN and member states identify where reductions carry the greatest risk for conflict management and where funding is best protected.

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. Because the dataset includes identifiers linking each mission to existing mandate datasets, researchers can go further still, joining the finance and personnel data here to information on mission mandates to ask not only whether resources shape effectiveness, but whether resources and mandates interact — whether, for instance, a human-rights or electoral mandate translates into better outcomes only when the mission is adequately funded and staffed to pursue it. 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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