Mandate Design Under Strain

Evolution of Security Council Practice on Special Political Missions

2010–2026



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CAPSTONE REPORT

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Mandate Design Under Strain: Evolution of Security Council Practice on Special Political Missions (2010-2026)

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Executive Summary

Special Political Missions (SPMs) have become one of the United Nations' primary instruments for managing conflict, facilitating political transitions, and sustaining diplomatic engagement in an era of intensifying geopolitical fragmentation. Unlike peacekeeping operations, they operate through civilian personnel, political facilitation, and consent-based engagement, making their effectiveness acutely sensitive to Security Council dynamics, host-state cooperation, and the broader international environment in which they are deployed.

This report examines how shifting geopolitical conditions, reflected in Security Council dynamics and institutional constraints, have shaped the evolution of SPM mandates and the space within which these missions operate. Drawing on a multi-layered dataset spanning 1948 to 2026, combined with comparative analysis of five cases—Afghanistan, Colombia, Haiti, Libya, and Yemen—the report analyzes how political missions adapt under conditions of structural constraint.

The historical analysis identifies three broad phases of SPM development. During the Cold War, missions were limited in scope and largely confined to mediation roles. The post-Cold War period saw rapid expansion in both number and complexity, enabled by an unusual degree of Council convergence. Since around 2010, the system has entered a phase of consolidation and adaptation, marked by fewer new missions, more targeted mandates, and greater reliance on lighter, politically focused configurations.

Cross-mission analysis of mandate cycles from 2010 to 2026 reveals several system-wide patterns. Renewal timelines remain highly standardized, with most mandates following a twelve-month cycle. While aggregate adoption patterns continue to reflect procedural consensus—approximately 87 percent of mandates are adopted unanimously or without a vote—disaggregated trends show a sustained rise in contestation, particularly after 2017. Penholdership remains concentrated among the P3, and variation in drafting arrangements is associated with differences in both mandate change and levels of contestation. Mandate evolution is predominantly incremental, occurring through the layering and recombination of standardized functional components rather than through structural redesign.

The case studies illustrate how these system-level patterns play out in practice. The United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia (UNVMC) demonstrates how a narrowly defined, consent-based mandate can sustain strong Council support, while also revealing the risks of politicization following scope expansion. The United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) shows how the Council can adapt and significantly shift mandate priorities in response to deteriorating conditions, even amid reported divergence among Council members. The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) highlights the limits of mandate effectiveness under persistent geopolitical fragmentation and weak domestic cohesion. In Yemen, the combination of the United Nations Mission to support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA) and the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (OSESGY) reflects an adaptive institutional pathway, in which a narrowly focused monitoring mandate operates within a broader political

framework. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) represents the most extreme case of mandate adaptation. Following the Taliban's return to power in 2021, the Security Council significantly adjusted UNAMA's mandate to reflect the transformed political environment. At the same time, the mission has also had to adapt its operations within the parameters of the revised mandate in response to rapidly evolving conditions on the ground.

Synthesizing these findings, the report advances three central arguments. First, SPM mandates are best understood as politically negotiated institutional outcomes rather than purely technocratic designs. Second, the system exhibits adaptive stability: institutional forms and renewal procedures remain durable even as political dynamics become more contested. Third, the effectiveness of SPMs depends not only on mandate design but on the political and operational conditions under which mandates are implemented.

The report concludes with policy considerations for DPPA and the Security Council, focusing on mandate design, renewal practices, leadership selection, resource alignment, and interinstitutional coordination, with the aim of strengthening the relevance and effectiveness of SPMs under current and emerging conditions.

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I. Introduction

A. Special Political Missions: Research Context

Special Political Missions (SPMs) are civilian United Nations missions that work with governments, conflict parties, regional organizations, and civil society to prevent conflict, support peace processes, and assist in building sustainable peace. Their mandates, structures, and operational footprints vary widely. They may take the form of country-based political missions, regional offices, Secretary-General's envoys and good offices engagements, or specialized mechanisms focused on tasks such as ceasefire verification, sanctions monitoring, investigations, or disarmament. Despite this diversity, the vast majority of SPMs serve to operationalize the political role of the United Nations and the good offices of the Secretary-General, often at the direction of the Security Council or, to a lesser extent, the General Assembly. [1]

SPMs have become a central instrument through which the United Nations sustains political engagement and supports conflict management across a wide range of settings.. Amid increasing geopolitical fragmentation within the Security Council and growing constraints on consensus-based multilateral action, the institutional flexibility of Special Political Missions has proven particularly significant. SPMs have assumed expanding roles in mediation, political facilitation, preventive diplomacy, sanctions monitoring, electoral assistance, and mission transition support, while continuing to operate alongside peacekeeping operations as complementary instruments within the broader UN peace and security architecture, even as the bifurcation between peacekeeping operations and special political missions remains largely intact.[2] This shift reflects not only institutional adaptation within the UN system, but also broader transformations in the nature of conflict, the distribution of power, and the limits of collective security in the contemporary international order.

Against this backdrop, this report asks how changing geopolitical conditions—especially shifts in Security Council dynamics and broader institutional pressures—have shaped the evolution of SPM mandates and altered the political and operational space within which these missions function.

Unlike peacekeeping operations, SPMs operate primarily through political engagement rather than coercive force. They rely on consent, legitimacy, access, and sustained engagement, making their effectiveness highly sensitive to international political alignment, host-state consent, regional dynamics, Security Council politics, and resource availability. Rather than evaluating SPM effectiveness as a binary outcome, this report adopts a grounded institutional perspective focused on how changing Security Council dynamics and broader institutional pressures shape the evolution of mission mandates over time. Mandates are treated as negotiated institutional outputs that reflect political bargaining, operational limitations, and evolving conflict environments. The analysis therefore focuses on how political constraints shape the design and revision of SPM mandates in practice, rather than on idealized models of mission performance.

B. Contemporary Security Council Dynamics

The evolution of Special Political Missions must be understood within the broader dynamics of the contemporary Security Council. The current international environment is marked by intensifying geopolitical fragmentation, renewed great power competition, and declining consensus among major powers, all of which directly shape the design, scope and implementation of SPM mandates. The scale of this challenge is substantial: the world is experiencing roughly sixty active conflicts, the highest number since the Second World War, in a context where many states are increasingly preoccupied with domestic disruption rather than sustained investment in collective security. [3]

At the core of these dynamics lies the re-emergence of great power rivalry. Political divisions among the permanent members of the Security Council have constrained the Council's ability to generate unified political direction and have reduced the availability of consistent political backing for UN missions. [4] Yet this should not be understood as institutional failure. The Security Council was not designed to eliminate great power disagreement, but to contain it within an institutional framework. [5,6] In practice, this means that mandates often reflect negotiated compromise rather than coherent strategic design. As great power rivalry has intensified in recent years, cooperation among permanent members has diminished from its more immediate post-Cold war levels, thereby constraining the Security Council's ability to respond effectively to threats to peace and security. In conflicts where consensus on more robust collective measures — such as enforcement action, peacekeeping deployments, or stronger coercive mandates — is absent, the Security Council often relies on Special Political Missions as politically feasible instruments for managing escalation risks, preserving channels of communication, and sustaining minimal political engagement, and not necessarily as mechanisms capable of delivering decisive conflict resolution.

C. Structural Conditions: Inequality, Colonial Legacies, and the Limits of Political Solutions

Geopolitical fragmentation at the Security Council level is compounded by broader structural shifts in the international system, which shape not only how SPM mandates are negotiated, but also the environments in which they must be implemented. The diffusion of power beyond traditional Western actors has produced a more fragmented diplomatic environment in which emerging and middle powers, regional organizations, and informal groupings increasingly shape conflict dynamics and mediation processes, sometimes complementing UN efforts and sometimes operating in parallel. [7,8] As a result, while formal SPM mandates continue to be negotiated within the Security Council, the political environment shaping those mandates have become increasingly decentralized and contested. For SPMs, this often means operating alongside alternative mediation tracks, navigating overlapping diplomatic initiatives, and responding to divergent external pressures that may not be coordinated through UN channels.

This fragmentation also reflects and reinforces deeper questions of legitimacy in the international system. Contemporary global fissures run along North–South as well as East–West lines. The reluctance of many developing countries to align with Western positions — however frustrating to Northern policymakers — reflects not confusion or opportunism on their part, but a calculated mistrust shaped by historical experience. For many states in the Global South, this skepticism is grounded in lived experience of colonialism, structural adjustment, and the perceived selective application of international law. [9] In this context, appeals to a "rule-based international order" may be viewed as lacking consistency when rules appear unevenly applied or politically instrumentalized. These perceptions matter directly for Special Political Missions: they affect host-state willingness to accept UN engagement, shape the credibility of UN mediators, and narrow the political space within which missions operate.

One of the clearest manifestations of this legitimacy debate can be seen in the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Although UN Member States unanimously endorsed its core principles in 2005, its implementation has been uneven and, in the view of many governments, open to contestation. The NATO-led intervention in Libya in 2011, for example, has been widely perceived by some states as extending beyond civilian protection and contributing to regime change. The aftermath of the intervention further reinforced concerns about the risks associated with open-ended or ambiguously defined mandates, shaping subsequent Council dynamics, including reluctance to authorize similar measures in Syria and elsewhere. [10]

Calls to "reform" the multilateral order must be understood in this context. For many states in the Global South, the issue is not simply representation within existing institutions, but the perceived legitimacy of the rules themselves. This has direct implications for UN engagement: the credibility of UN mediation, the willingness of host states to accept SPM deployments, and the sustainability of political settlements are all conditioned by how these actors perceive the impartiality and consistency of the system.

Beyond questions of international norms and interventions, these dynamics are further shaped by underlying persistent inequality, institutional weakness, and the legacies of external intervention in conflict-affected states. The material foundations of peace are often deeply contested, and political missions are frequently tasked with advancing stabilization in contexts where underlying social and economic conditions continue to deteriorate. The persistence of global inequality reinforces this problem. Nearing 2030, only a small share of the Sustainable Development Goals are on track, while many are progressing too slowly or regressing altogether. [11] In such settings, SPMs confront not only immediate political crises but also deeper structural conditions that constrain the viability of political settlements.

These structural inequalities are inseparable from broader historical patterns of power and external intervention. Many states in which SPMs operate did not become "fragile" in isolation, but through long histories of colonial extraction, Cold War proxy competition, and externally imposed political-economic restructuring. Contemporary contestation over multilateral legitimacy therefore reflects more than immediate geopolitical rivalry; it also reflects dissatisfaction with an international order widely seen as uneven in both representation and enforcement. For SPMs, this means that mandate implementation

unfolds in environments where legitimacy is contested not only among conflict parties, but also between the UN and the states and societies in which it operates.

Taken together, these dynamics point to a central structural constraint: the Security Council functions as a consensus-based mechanism among major powers rather than as a supranational authority. [12] Its effectiveness is therefore shaped not only by broader structural fragmentation and legitimacy concerns, but also by the specific interests of its permanent members. In high-stakes geopolitical conflicts, these factors often converge, further constraining the Council's ability to act. In such environments, SPM mandates should be understood not as optimal policy designs but as politically negotiated instruments shaped by competing interests, institutional limitations, and structural inequalities. This reinforces the need to analyze mandate evolution as a reflection of political constraint rather than purely strategic intent.

D. Research Design and Analytical Approach

This report approaches the study of Special Political Missions (SPMs) through a multi-layered analytical framework designed to capture both broad institutional trends and case-specific variation. Rather than treating mission effectiveness as a single measurable outcome, which was beyond the scope of this report, the analysis focuses on how mandate design, mandate renewal practices, and mission configuration evolve over time in response to shifting political conditions, particularly UN Security Council dynamics.

This question is addressed through three related analytical lenses.

First, the report analyzes historical and cross-mission patterns in the development of SPMs. Using the mission-level dataset, which covers the full historical evolution of UN political missions from 1948 to 2026 and includes all recorded Special Political Missions in the dataset universe, it identifies long-term trends in the creation, transformation, and institutional positioning of political missions across the UN system.

Second, it examines mandate evolution at the cycle level. Using the mandate-cycle dataset, which covers mandate renewals from 2010 to 2026 across all cycle-based SPM mandates included in the study, the report tracks changes in mandate scope, voting patterns, penholder dynamics, mandate components, and selected institutional features across mandate renewals. The focus here is not only on whether mandates are renewed, but on how they are revised, expanded, narrowed, or reprioritized over time.

Third, the report uses comparative case analysis to examine how these broader patterns operate in practice. The case-level dataset covers five selected mission settings, tracing each from mission establishment through February 2026, and allows for closer analysis of host-state dynamics, operational constraints, leadership changes, resource conditions,

and implementation environments in selected missions. This layer helps explain why similar mandate structures may function differently across contexts.

In a nutshell, these three levels of analysis allow the report to move from broad institutional trends to mandate-level adaptation and, finally, to context-specific mechanisms. The analytical focus is therefore on institutional adaptation rather than on producing a definitive measure of mission success. In this framework, mandate evolution is treated as an indicator of how the Security Council and the wider UN system adjust political missions under conditions of contestation, fiscal pressure, and operational uncertainty.

E. Scope and Temporal Boundaries

The analysis focuses primarily on the period from 2010 to 2026, which reflects the contemporary phase of Special Political Missions marked by increasing geopolitical fragmentation, fiscal constraints, and the growing operational significance of political missions in contexts where Security Council consensus on larger multidimensional operations has become more difficult to sustain.

Within this temporal scope, the report adopts a multi-layered dataset structure. The mandate-cycle dataset—central to the analysis—covers mandate renewals and revisions during this period, enabling systematic comparison of mandate evolution across missions. However, to ensure consistency in mandate identification and sequencing, a broader historical dataset is constructed to establish complete mandate lineages. This historical layer allows each mandate cycle to be situated within the longer institutional trajectory of the mission, even when earlier cycles fall outside the primary analytical window.

The report includes a diverse range of Special Political Missions across functional types and geographic regions. While the dataset is designed to support cross-mission comparison, particular attention is given to a selected set of case studies that reflect different mandate structures, political environments, and operational constraints. These cases are not intended to be representative of all SPMs, but to illustrate variation in how mandates are negotiated, adapted, and implemented in practice.

At the same time, the scope of the analysis reflects several deliberate limitations. The report focuses on mandate design, institutional dynamics, and political context, rather than on comprehensive evaluation of mission outcomes. While selected indicators related to resources and implementation are included, the analysis does not aim to provide a definitive assessment of mission effectiveness. Instead, it prioritizes understanding how mandates evolve as institutional responses to changing political and operational conditions.

F. Structure of the Report

The report proceeds in six parts.

The first section situates Special Political Missions within the broader evolution of the United Nations peace and security architecture and outlines the contemporary geopolitical context in which they operate.

The second section develops the conceptual and analytical framework, defining how mandate evolution is understood and identifying the key dimensions through which changes in mandate design and institutional practice are analyzed.

The third section examines historical patterns in the development of SPMs, drawing on the DPPA Compendium and the mission-level dataset. It traces the evolution of political missions across three periods: Cold War practices (1948-1991), post-Cold War expansion, and the contemporary period (2010-2026). This section provides the historical baseline necessary to interpret more recent trends in mandate design and institutional adaptation.

The fourth section presents cross-mission findings based on the mandate-cycle dataset. It identifies major trends in mandate structure, renewal practices, voting dynamics, and institutional positioning over time.

The fifth section provides comparative case studies, examining how mandate design interacts with political context, host-state relations, and operational constraints in selected missions. This section highlights variation across cases and illustrates how broader institutional patterns manifest in practice.

The final section synthesizes the findings and offers policy-relevant recommendations for the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and the Security Council. These recommendations focus on how mandate practices can be adapted to sustain the effectiveness and relevance of Special Political Missions in an increasingly fragmented international environment.

II. Conceptual and Analytical Framework

A. Defining Special Political Missions

Special Political Missions (SPMs) are among the most institutionally versatile instruments in the United Nations (UN) peace and security architecture, yet they remain among the least systematically studied. The term itself did not enter formal UN usage until the 1990s — notwithstanding that the underlying practice dates to 1948 — and this conceptual lateness has produced considerable ambiguity in both policy and scholarly treatment. [13] Any rigorous analytical framework for studying SPMs must therefore begin with the question of definition: what distinguishes an SPM from other forms of UN engagement, and what internal diversity must a working definition accommodate?

At the most authoritative institutional level, the most current and comprehensive definition of SPM is provided in the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) *Compendium of Special Political Missions* (2025), the first full systematic overview of missions deployed since 1945. The *Compendium* defines SPMs as "civilian missions that work with governments, conflict parties, regional organizations, and civil society to prevent conflict, support peace processes and assist in building a sustainable peace." [14] It further specifies that their mandates may cover "preventive diplomacy, good offices, peacemaking, the implementation of peace agreements, peacebuilding, and different thematic issues," while their focus "can be country-specific, regional or global." [15] This formulation reflects a significant broadening and clarification of earlier UN definitions, capturing more explicitly the functional diversity and institutional reach of contemporary SPM practice.

Earlier institutional and scholarly formulations were narrower in scope. For example, the 2013 Secretary-General report to the General Assembly defined SPMs as "civilian missions that are deployed for a limited duration to support Member States in good offices, conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding", and grouped them into three main clusters: special envoys, sanction panels and monitoring groups. [16] While operationally useful, this formulation primarily emphasized deployment and administrative classification rather than the more expansive substantive functions of SPMs.

Similarly, earlier scholarship often framed SPMs primarily as mediation-oriented instruments. Richard Gowan, for example, characterized them as largely or solely civilian missions whose primary purpose is to foster sustainable political settlements within or between states. [17] While this remains an important insight into the political character of many SPMs, it did not fully capture the broader mandate spectrum now reflected in contemporary practice, including fact-finding, verification, sanctions monitoring, and thematic advisory mandates, all of which are more explicitly articulated in the 2025 *Compendium*.

The shift from these earlier formulations to the 2025 definition is analytically important for this study. It reflects the broader range of mandate functions evident in contemporary practice.. The 2025 *Compendium* definition is therefore adopted as the working definition for this report, since it most accurately reflects the broader mandate diversity examined in the dataset and case studies.

At the same time, functional diversity should not obscure the fact that SPMs share a common political raison d'être. As the Secretary-General's earlier thematic report noted, special political missions are unified by their role in preventing and resolving conflict and in helping Member States and conflict parties build a sustainable peace. This common political function is what distinguishes SPMs as a category, even as their concrete forms range from envoys and sanctions panels to regional offices and country-based field missions. [18]

This substantive commonality, however, coexists with considerable organizational diversity. While the *Compendium* clarifies what SPMs are in substantive terms, the UN system also clarifies them operationally through an administrative cluster structure that governs budgeting and reporting practice. This operational typology is especially important because it shapes how missions are grouped, financed, and managed across the Secretariat.

Operationally, SPMs are grouped by the Secretariat into three institutional clusters. As set out in the Secretary-General's proposed programme budget for 2026, thematic cluster I comprises special and personal envoys, advisers, and representatives of the Secretary-General; thematic cluster II includes sanctions monitoring teams, groups, panels, and related mechanisms; and thematic cluster III covers regional offices, offices supporting political processes, and other field-based missions. [19] This three-part structure is not merely a recent budgetary device: the Secretary-General's 2013 thematic report likewise grouped SPMs into three broad clusters—special envoys, sanction panels and monitoring groups, and field-based missions—suggesting a degree of institutional continuity in how the UN has organized the portfolio. [20] Yet although widely used in UN budgetary and reporting practice, this typology is primarily administrative rather than analytical: it does not map cleanly onto distinctions between field-based and headquarters-based missions, nor between Security Council- and General Assembly-mandated operations.

The administrative typology, while useful for administrative purposes, is therefore analytically insufficient on its own. A more meaningful distinction lies in the legal and institutional diversity of SPM mandates.

Dirk Druet observes that Special Political Missions are generally associated with Chapter VI of the UN Charter, particularly because many are designed around mediation, preventive diplomacy, and other forms of pacific dispute settlement. [21] However, the

legal foundations of SPMs are in practice more heterogeneous than this general pattern suggests. While many country-based and regional political missions derive their logic from the pacific settlement principles of Chapter VI, other categories—especially sanctions monitoring groups and expert panels—are often explicitly linked to Chapter VII enforcement measures authorized by the Security Council.

What therefore distinguishes SPMs from peacekeeping operations is not a uniform Charter basis, but their shared civilian character, political mandate structure, and non-peacekeeping institutional design. Unlike peacekeeping operations, which increasingly involve military deployment under Chapter VII authority, SPMs operate through civilian personnel and flexible legal modalities that span multiple Charter authorities and institutional arrangements.

From the perspective of quantitative peace science, Han Dorussen, Tobias Böhmelt, and Govinda Clayton conceptualize one major subset of SPMs as what they term "political-development missions," defined as in-country operations that support, strengthen, and develop the political and governance capacities of states. In their framework, these missions constitute one category within a broader typology of UN peacemaking tools, distinct from diplomatic missions, technocratic missions, and peacekeeping operations. [22] This classification is analytically useful because it captures the governance- and institution-building dimension of many field-based SPMs, particularly larger country missions such as United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), and other multidimensional political presences.

At the same time, the political-development mission category does not encompass the full universe of SPMs as defined by DPPA. Unlike the DPPA definition, which includes special envoys, sanctions monitoring mechanisms, regional political offices, and thematic advisory mandates, Dorussen et al. focus specifically on one functional subset of field-based missions. Their framework therefore complements rather than replaces the broader UN institutional definition. For this report, both perspectives are necessary: the DPPA definition establishes the full institutional scope of SPMs, while the political-development mission concept helps illuminate the governance and state-support functions that characterize many of the field missions examined in this study.

Several conceptual distinctions further sharpen the definition. First, SPMs are distinguished from peacekeeping operations (PKOs) by the absence of uniformed military contingents in operational roles. Unlike PKOs, SPMs exclusively comprise civilian staff, a structural feature that affects host-state consent dynamics, deployment requirements, and operational scope. [23] Some SPMs do include small military or police guard units for security purposes, but these contingents serve only protective functions and do not alter the civilian character of the mission. The case of UNAMI illustrates this distinction: although the mission maintained a Fijian Guard Unit for perimeter security during much of its operation, this unit remained separate from mandate implementation, which continued to rest entirely with civilian personnel. [24]

Second, SPMs differ from PKOs in their financing arrangements. SPMs are funded through the special political missions subsection of Section 3 (Political Affairs) of the UN regular programme budget, whereas PKOs are financed through separate peacekeeping appropriations under distinct assessment mechanisms. This structural asymmetry has long contributed to resource constraints for SPMs and has generated repeated calls for reform of their funding and backstopping arrangements. [25]

Third, while PKOs are typically authorized by the Security Council, SPMs may be established through a wider range of legal instruments, including Security Council resolutions, exchanges of letters between the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council, or General Assembly resolutions. This gives SPMs greater institutional flexibility in both the speed and modality of deployment.

Finally, a definitional note on scope is warranted. The term “Special Political Mission” as used by DPPA encompasses a broad and heterogeneous range of entities, including some not directly managed by that department, such as panels of experts supporting Security Council sanctions regimes, the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED), and specialized investigative mechanisms. [26] Accordingly, this report adopts the broader DPPA institutional definition when analyzing system-wide historical and mandate-level trends, ensuring that the full universe of SPM forms is captured in the mission-level and mandate-cycle datasets.

At the case-study level, however, the report focuses on five selected mission contexts for in-depth comparative analysis. These cases serve as focused empirical settings through which broader patterns of mandate evolution are examined in operational context. Together, this dual approach allows the report to combine system-wide institutional coverage with closer analysis of how mandate design and political constraints operate in specific mission environments.

B. Special Political Missions in Existing Scholarship

Despite the central role that SPMs now play in the UN peace and security architecture, the scholarly literature on these missions remains comparatively underdeveloped relative to the extensive research on UN peacekeeping operations. The imbalance reflects both the structural marginalization of SPMs in intergovernmental processes and a broader tendency in international relations scholarship to privilege military deployments as the primary form of international conflict management. As a result, the literature provides important insights into SPM functions, but leaves significant gaps in understanding how mandates are designed, revised, and politically negotiated over time.

The earliest systematic treatments of SPMs emerged from policy communities and practitioner networks rather than academic scholarship. Richard Gowan’s *United States*

Institute of Peace Special Report (2011) was among the first to conceptualize political missions as a distinct category of international instrument, emphasizing their political agility in contexts where military deployment is politically unviable. [27] The *Review of Political Missions 2010*, edited by Gowan and produced by New York University's Center on International Cooperation, provided the first sustained empirical mapping of the SPM landscape, covering over fifty active missions across the UN, OSCE, EU, and other organizations, and remains a foundational reference point. [28] That volume also included Ian Johnstone's chapter on emerging doctrine for political missions, which offered an early attempt to theorize the normative and operational framework governing SPMs, arguing that a nascent doctrine centered on "political process management" could be discerned. [29] The *Special Political Missions Start-Up Guide (2012)* produced by the UN Department of Political Affairs further documents the institutionalization of SPM practice within the Secretariat. [30] This period also saw the first Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly on SPMs (2013), which provided an early system-wide articulation of their functions, evolution, and policy role within the UN peace and security architecture. [31]

A major strand of literature approaches SPMs through the lens of preventive diplomacy. Drawing on Boutros-Ghali's *Agenda for Peace* and later Secretary-General reports, this scholarship emphasizes SPMs as instruments for preventing escalation and sustaining political dialogue. [32,33] Małgorzata Myl's analysis is representative: she identifies SPMs as adaptable tools for mediation, reconciliation, and peacebuilding, while also noting that their effectiveness depends heavily on Member State political will and mission adaptability. [34] This literature is valuable in clarifying the preventive function of SPMs, but it often underspecifies the institutional mechanisms through which mandates are adjusted in response to changing political conditions.

A second strand of literature approaches SPMs in relation to peacekeeping operations, especially as successor mechanisms after PKO drawdown. Druet's work highlights SPMs as institutionally distinct political instruments grounded in Chapter VI logic rather than residual substitutes for peacekeeping. [35] Maekawa's research on transition logic demonstrates that SPMs increasingly function as successor operations in the framework proposed by Richard Caplain, consolidating gains after PKO withdrawal while operating with lighter footprints and lower costs. [36] Dorussen, Böhmelt, and Clayton further show that political missions are more likely to be deployed in lower-intensity conflict environments, reinforcing the argument that mandate design is shaped by the conflict conditions under which SPMs are selected. [37]

The most important recent development in the field is the emergence of quantitative mandate datasets. The United Nations Peace Initiatives (UNPI), UN Peace Mission Mandates (UNPMM), and UN Special Political Mission Mandated Tasks (UNSPMMT) datasets have significantly advanced empirical research by enabling systematic analysis of mission mandates over time. [38, 39, 40] These datasets establish several important baselines: SPM mandates are dynamic rather than static, task portfolios expand over time, and missions increasingly absorb functions previously associated with PKOs. Yet

even these advances leave unresolved a central analytical question: why mandates evolve in particular directions under specific political conditions.

Despite this progress, three major gaps remain. First, the conditions that drive mandate design, specifically the political and institutional factors that shape which tasks are assigned to an SPM at the point of establishment and how mandates evolve over the mission's lifespan, remain understudied. Most existing work focuses on the deployment decision, that is, when and why the UN chooses an SPM over a PKO, rather than on the design decision: what mandated tasks are given to an SPM once deployed, and why.

Second, the role of Security Council political dynamics, including the effects of great-power competition and the use or threat of veto, in shaping SPM mandates has not been systematically examined, even though practitioner accounts suggest that it is a decisive variable. The 2026 Security Council Report on the veto documents ongoing gridlock in the Council that has constrained collective action across multiple peace and security files, with clear implications for the authorization and revision of SPM mandates in contested political environments. [41]

Third, the distinction between Secretariat-driven mandate evolution, through reporting, mission reviews, and administrative practice, and Council-driven evolution, through formal resolutions, remains insufficiently theorized. Addressing these gaps requires precisely the conceptual architecture developed in the remaining sections of this framework.

C. Mandate Design and Evolution as Institutional Practice

Mandate design in Special Political Missions is best understood not as a static legal act, but as an evolving institutional practice shaped by repeated political negotiation, organizational adaptation, and changing conflict conditions. Unlike one-time authorization instruments, SPM mandates are continuously reinterpreted and recalibrated over the life of a mission. At the moment of establishment, a mandate reflects a negotiated compromise among Security Council members, informed by input from and consultation with the Secretariat, host-state actors, and, in some cases, regional organizations. Once adopted, however, that mandate enters an iterative process in which its scope may be expanded, narrowed, reprioritized, or informally adapted in response to developments on the ground. This process unfolds across both formal and operational levels: through Security Council resolutions that renew or adjust mandates, and through Secretariat and field-level decisions that interpret and implement them in light of evolving conditions. Mandate evolution is therefore not exceptional but constitutive of how SPMs function as flexible instruments of UN political engagement.

This report conceptualizes mandate evolution along three principal dimensions: expansion, contraction, and reprioritization. Expansion occurs when new substantive

tasks are added to a mission's responsibilities, such as electoral assistance, ceasefire monitoring, sanctions support, or institutional capacity-building functions not previously included. Contraction refers to the removal, transfer, or narrowing of existing tasks, often associated with mission drawdown, political deadlock, or reduced host-state consent. Reprioritization captures shifts in emphasis among existing mandated functions without major additions or deletions, such as when mediation functions are deemphasized in favor of humanitarian coordination, or when governance support becomes secondary to ceasefire verification. These distinctions are central to the analytical design of the dataset, which codes mandate change not merely by textual amendment, but by substantive alteration in operational function.

A key premise of this framework is that mandate evolution occurs through two partially distinct institutional pathways: formal Council-driven evolution and informal Secretariat-driven adaptation. Council-driven evolution takes place through explicit legal instruments, most commonly Security Council resolutions that renew, modify, or redefine mission mandates. These moments are visible, documentable, and often politically contested, making them traceable through mandate-cycle analysis. Secretariat-driven adaptation, by contrast, occurs through Secretary-General reports, internal planning processes, mission reviews, administrative reinterpretation, and operational practice. In these cases, a mission's practical priorities may shift significantly even when formal mandate language remains unchanged.

This distinction also explains why mandate renewal should not be conflated with mandate change. Many Security Council renewals simply extend authorization periods without altering substantive task composition, while some seemingly minor textual revisions may signal major strategic reorientation. For this reason, the report treats the mandate cycle as a key analytical unit for examining formal mandate evolution, since each cycle captures a discrete authorization period linked to a specific Security Council decision. This makes it possible to compare patterns of revision across time while distinguishing routine renewal from substantive redesign.

At the same time, not all SPMs evolve through identical governance structures. Building on the empirical patterns observed in the dataset and case studies, this report proposes three distinct mandate governance models through which SPM authority is maintained over time: cycle-based governance, accumulative governance, and hybrid governance.

Cycle-based governance applies to missions whose authority depends on discrete, periodically renewed Security Council mandates with clearly bounded authorization periods. Missions such as the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA), and the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) operate under this model, making them well suited to mandate-cycle analysis because each renewal constitutes a comparable unit of observation.

Accumulative governance refers to mandate authority that is sustained through continuous political reaffirmation and institutional practice, rather than discrete, time-bound reauthorization cycles. In this model, mandates are sustained through successive Security Council resolutions, General Assembly mandates, Secretary-General appointments, exchanges of letters, and continuing political endorsement, rather than through periodic reauthorization tied to discrete authorization periods. This model is common among special envoys and good offices arrangements, but also includes certain General Assembly-mandated offices, standing coordinators, and global thematic advisory mandates. The Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (OSESGY) exemplifies one prominent case of accumulative governance.

Hybrid governance arises when accumulative and cycle-based forms are jointly present within a single conflict setting and perform differentiated but complementary functions. Rather than merely coexisting, these forms interact within a layered governance structure in which accumulative mandates sustain political authority, while cycle-based mandates provide time-bound operational, monitoring, or enforcement functions. In complex political environments such as Yemen, an accumulative political mandate may operate alongside multiple cycle-based mechanisms, producing a layered governance structure in which different institutional components perform distinct but complementary functions. One layer sustains political legitimacy and mediation authority, while others govern field-level monitoring, implementation, or sanctions oversight. In Yemen, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (OSESGY), the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA), and the Panel of Experts on Yemen together illustrate this hybrid model, combining accumulative political authority with periodically renewed operational and monitoring mandates.

Table 1. Mandate Governance Models in Special Political Missions

	Cycle-Based Governance	Accumulative Governance	Hybrid Governance
Definition	Authority derived from discrete, time-bound Security Council mandates with clearly bounded authorization periods.	Authority sustained through continuous political reaffirmation—successive resolutions, SG appointments, exchanges of letters—rather than periodic reauthorization.	Both forms jointly present within a single conflict setting, performing differentiated but complementary functions.
Authorization Mechanism	Periodic Security Council renewal; each cycle constitutes a discrete, comparable unit of analysis.	Layered reaffirmation through SC resolutions, GA mandates, SG appointments, and continuing political endorsement.	Accumulative layer sustains political authority; cycle-based layer governs operational, monitoring, or enforcement functions.
Typical Mission Types	Country-based political field missions; sanctions monitoring mechanisms; verification missions.	Special envoys; good offices arrangements; GA-mandated offices; global thematic advisory mandates.	Complex multi-mechanism settings where political and operational functions are institutionally separated.
Analytical Treatment	Core unit of mandate-cycle dataset; allows systematic comparison across renewal events.	Included in historical parent dataset; excluded from mandate-cycle analysis to preserve institutional logic.	Treated through parallel coding structures; integrated at case-study level.
Illustrative Examples	UNAMA, BINUH, UNMHA	OSESGY	Yemen (OSESGY + UNMHA + Panel of Experts on Yemen)
Key Feature	Temporal standardization; 12-month renewal norm.	Institutional continuity without fixed renewal intervals.	Layered complementarity: legitimacy and mediation authority alongside time-bound operational mechanisms.

Table 1. Mandate Governance Models in Special Political Missions

D. Political Drivers and Institutional Constraints

The evolution of SPM mandates is shaped not only by changing conflict conditions, but also by the political and institutional environments within which mandates are negotiated, authorized, and implemented. Because SPM mandates are products of intergovernmental bargaining rather than technocratic design alone, their content reflects the distribution of political influence within the Security Council and the wider UN system. Understanding mandate evolution therefore requires attention to the political drivers that shape mandate negotiations, as well as the institutional constraints that limit what missions can realistically be asked to do.

A primary driver of mandate change is Security Council political dynamics, particularly the degree of consensus or contestation among permanent members. In periods of relative alignment among the P5, mandates are more likely to be renewed smoothly and expanded into new functional areas. By contrast, intensified geopolitical rivalry has produced shorter mandate durations, narrower language, delayed renewals, or compromises that preserve mission existence while weakening operational clarity. The influence of political dynamics on mandate content extends beyond formally exercised vetoes. Wouters and Ruys have observed that the threat of the veto is "partly responsible for some of the most tragic failures in the sixty-year history of the United Nations"—a dynamic that operates not only through formal votes but through the anticipatory shaping of draft language before resolutions reach a vote. [42] This phenomenon,

sometimes referred to as the “pocket veto”, describes cases in which draft resolutions are not formally presented, or their content is significantly altered, because of the threat of a veto by one or more permanent members. [43] In this sense, mandate texts often reflect anticipated political constraints as much as explicit negotiated agreement.

Penholder dynamics constitute a second major political driver. Because penholder states exercise disproportionate influence over drafting language, agenda-setting, and textual revision, changes in penholder leadership can affect both the substance and tempo of mandate evolution. In Security Council practice, penholders formally “initiate and chair” the drafting of mandate texts and retain significant discretion in shaping how the Council approaches a mission file. Recent disputes over penholdership on Afghanistan illustrate how politically consequential this role has become: as Gowan notes in his analysis of the 2025 U.S.-China confrontation over the UNAMA file, the central issue in the dispute was not substantive disagreement over the mandate itself, but control over who drafted the text. [44] Stable penholdership may generate continuity in mission framing, while contested or shifting penholder arrangements may produce abrupt textual recalibration. The concentration of drafting authority in a small number of Council members also means that mandate language may reflect drafting asymmetries rooted in geopolitical power distribution rather than broad-based multilateral consensus.

Host-state consent is an equally important constraint, particularly for field-based political missions whose access and effectiveness depend on continued cooperation from national authorities. Even when Security Council support remains strong, governments may resist mandate expansions involving human rights monitoring, electoral oversight, sanctions reporting, or politically sensitive investigative tasks. In such contexts, mandate contraction may reflect negotiated political accommodation rather than declining mission relevance. This dynamic is particularly visible in Chapter VI political missions, where host governments may actively delimit mandate scope by conditioning consent on the exclusion of politically intrusive functions, as seen in Sudan’s insistence that United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) remain a civilian mission without robust protection authorities despite persistent insecurity in Darfur. [45]

Resource constraints further shape mandate evolution by limiting implementation feasibility. Unlike peacekeeping operations, SPMs are financed through the regular UN budget and compete within broader programme budget negotiations, making them especially vulnerable to fiscal austerity pressures. Budget reductions may produce pressure to narrow mandates, defer new tasks, or redistribute responsibilities without formally reducing textual commitments. This creates a recurring gap between mandated ambition and operational capacity, particularly in missions expected to absorb new functions without commensurate increases in staffing or funding.

Finally, conflict environments themselves exert pressure on mandate design. Escalating violence, stalled peace processes, ceasefire collapse, or humanitarian deterioration may trigger mandate expansion into monitoring, coordination, or protection-related

functions. At the same time, deteriorating security conditions can also force mandate simplification when access constraints make implementation impossible. As the Secretary-General has also emphasized, SPMs increasingly operate in volatile security environments in which restrictions on movement, access, and interaction with local counterparts can directly constrain mandate delivery. [46] This means that mandate evolution may reflect not only political bargaining and conflict adaptation, but also the practical limits imposed by security management.

Together, these drivers underscore a central premise of this report: SPM mandates are politically negotiated institutional artifacts shaped by competing interests, constrained resources, and changing operational realities. Their evolution reflects not only what missions are needed to do, but what the international system is politically willing and institutionally able to authorize.

E. Operationalizing Core Concepts and Analytical Variables

To translate this conceptual framework into empirical analysis, the report operationalizes mandate evolution through a structured set of variables that capture both formal mandate change and the political conditions surrounding it. These variables are embedded within a three-layered dataset architecture consisting of mission-level, mandate-level, and case-level analysis, with the mandate layer internally structured through historical parent and mandate-cycle datasets. This design allows the report to move from system-wide institutional patterns to mission-specific mandate evolution while preserving comparability across different governance forms.

The mission-level dataset provides the broad institutional foundation of the analysis, capturing structural characteristics across the full universe of Special Political Missions, including mission type, legal basis, geographic scope, leadership structure, and core mandate attributes. This level establishes the comparative baseline from which broader patterns of institutional variation can be identified across the SPM system as a whole.

Within the mandate-level layer, the analysis begins with a historical parent dataset consisting of all missions active at any point between 2010 and 2026. This parent dataset serves as the bridge between mission-level institutional classification and temporal mandate analysis. Because governance structures vary across missions, the historical parent dataset is divided into two governance categories: cycle-based governance missions, which operate through discrete Security Council renewal cycles, and accumulative governance missions, whose authority develops incrementally through layered reaffirmation rather than standardized renewal intervals. This division allows mandate identifiers (mandate_id) to be constructed consistently while preserving the distinct institutional logic of each governance type.

For cycle-based missions, the core analytical unit is the mandate cycle: a discrete authorization period linked to a specific Security Council decision that renews, extends, or modifies mission authority. Each cycle constitutes one observation in the mandate-cycle dataset, allowing systematic comparison of mandate duration, renewal timing, voting behavior, and substantive task change across time. The mandate-cycle dataset is therefore derived exclusively from cycle-based governance missions and includes only mandate observations falling within the 2010–2026 study period.

Several variables directly measure substantive mandate evolution. Mandate change type records whether a cycle reflects expansion, contraction, reprioritization, or no substantive change. Mandate duration captures the authorized temporal length of each cycle and serves as an indirect indicator of Council confidence, political contestation, or institutional uncertainty. Mandate component variables track the presence or absence of specific task areas, such as ceasefire monitoring, electoral assistance, sanctions support, mediation support, and human rights functions, making it possible to trace shifts in mission portfolios over time.

Political dynamics are captured through variables reflecting Security Council behavior during mandate authorization. These include vote type, abstention presence, and penholder change. Together, they make visible the relationship between political contestation and mandate outcomes, enabling comparison between routine renewals and politically contentious episodes of mandate renegotiation.

The case-level dataset forms the third analytical layer and provides mission-specific contextual detail for the five selected comparative case settings: Afghanistan, Colombia, Libya, Haiti, and Yemen. These datasets incorporate variables that cannot be captured systematically across the full SPM universe, including contentious negotiations, host-state relations, conflict trajectory, leadership turnover, budget implementation patterns, and operational constraints specific to each mission environment. In hybrid governance contexts such as Yemen, case-level analysis is particularly important because it captures the interaction between parallel governance structures that cannot be fully represented through mandate-cycle coding alone.

Because governance structures differ fundamentally across mission types, they cannot be operationalized in a uniform way. Accumulative governance cases do not follow fixed renewal intervals and cannot be reduced to comparable cycles without distorting their institutional logic. For this reason, they remain analytically essential in the historical parent dataset but are excluded from the cycle-based mandate-cycle dataset. Hybrid governance contexts are handled through parallel coding structures that preserve the distinct temporal logics of their component missions while still allowing integrated comparison at the case-study level.

The Secretary-General’s thematic reporting also suggests that mandate evolution should be understood alongside transition logic. United Nations transitions may proceed in

multiple directions — not only from peacekeeping operations to Special Political Missions (e.g. ONUB in Burundi, succeeded by BINUB in 2007; UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone, succeeded by UNIOSIL in January 2006; MINUJUSTH in Haiti, succeeded by BINUH in 2019), but also from SPMs to peacekeeping operations (e.g. BINUCA in the Central African Republic, succeeded by MINUSCA in 2014; UNOM in Mali, succeeded by MINUSMA in 2013), and from SPMs to country teams (e.g. UNIPSIL in Sierra Leone, which transferred its responsibilities to the UN Country Team in 2014; BNUB in Burundi, which transferred its responsibilities to the UN Country Team in 2014; UNTMIS in Somalia, currently carrying out a formal transition of its functions to the UN Country Team through 2026). This matters analytically because mandate evolution is often embedded in broader reconfiguration of the UN field presence rather than in isolated textual revision alone. Tracking predecessor and successor arrangements is therefore important not only descriptively, but conceptually, as part of the institutional life cycle of political missions.[47]

This measurement architecture reflects the report's broader analytical premise: mandate evolution is not reducible to textual amendment alone. It must be observed through the interaction of legal renewal patterns, political authorization behavior, substantive changes in mission task structure, and the contextual pressures visible only at the case level. By combining governance-sensitive coding with layered dataset design, the report creates an empirical framework capable of analyzing how SPM institutional design adapts under conditions of political contestation and operational constraint.

III. Methodology

A. Research Design Overview

This study examines how Special Political Missions (SPMs) evolve as instruments of United Nations conflict management under conditions of geopolitical fragmentation and fiscal constraint. Rather than attempting to directly measure mission effectiveness, the analysis focuses on patterns of institutional adaptation observable in mandate design, renewal practices, and mission structures. Security Council mandates are treated as negotiated institutional outputs reflecting political bargaining, geopolitical interests, ideological differences, and a range of operational constraints, including access limitations, host-state restrictions, security conditions, and logistical challenges, as well as evolving conflict environments.

The research is centered on a structured dataset design, complemented by documentary analysis, comparative case studies, and expert interviews. Quantitative and descriptive analysis of mission and mandate characteristics provides a structural overview of long-term trends in SPM development, while qualitative case studies examine how mandate design and operational practices adapt within specific political contexts. In addition, expert interviews with practitioners familiar with UN political missions are used to contextualize and interpret observed institutional patterns.

This combination of methods allows the study to identify both broad institutional dynamics shaping SPM mandates and the context-specific mechanisms through which these mandates evolve over time.

B. Layered Dataset Architecture

To analyze patterns of institutional adaptation in Special Political Missions, the empirical analysis is based on a layered dataset architecture designed to capture different dimensions of Special Political Mission development. The study constructs three interconnected datasets, each operating at a different level of analysis and temporal scope.

The first component is a **mission-level dataset**, which records core institutional characteristics of Special Political Missions across the full historical period of UN field presences from **1948 to 2026**. The dataset includes variables capturing mission identification and naming conventions, geographic location and operational scope, mandate duration and implementation status, institutional and legal foundations, and selected political process indicators related to the adoption of mission mandates. Additional variables record leadership characteristics of first mission heads and document the primary sources used for coding. By covering the full historical evolution of UN political missions, this dataset enables descriptive analysis of long-term trends in

the creation, transformation, and institutional positioning of SPMs within the broader UN peace and security architecture.

The second component is a **mandate-cycle dataset**, which captures the evolution of mission mandates through successive Security Council resolutions and mandate renewals. Each mandate cycle is treated as a distinct observation, allowing the dataset to track changes in mandate scope, operational priorities, reporting requirements, and institutional design features over time. While the mission-level dataset provides a long-term institutional baseline, the mandate-cycle dataset focuses on the period from **2010 to 2026**, when mandate renewals, through which the Security Council adjusts mission structures and priorities, were increasingly subject to conditions of geopolitical contestation and fiscal constraint. This component allows the analysis to examine how mandate language and institutional design evolve in response to changing political and operational environments.

The third component is a **case-level dataset** constructed for five selected missions chosen for in-depth analysis. This dataset incorporates additional qualitative and contextual variables related to host-state dynamics, conflict environments, and operational constraints. Unlike the mandate-cycle dataset, the case-level dataset does not follow a fixed global timeframe. Instead, it traces each mission from its establishment through the present, allowing for a more context-sensitive analysis of mandate evolution and institutional practice. It supports the comparative case analysis presented later in the report by enabling closer examination of how mandate design and institutional practices operate within specific political contexts.

Taken together, this layered dataset architecture enables analysis across three levels: long-term institutional trends (mission-level), mandate evolution (mandate-cycle), and context-specific dynamics (case-level).

C. Variable Construction

Variables in the datasets are derived primarily from the *United Nations Special Political Missions: A Compendium* and other official United Nations documents, including Security Council resolutions establishing and renewing Special Political Missions, Secretary-General reports, and related institutional documentation. Coding rules and variable definitions are specified in detail in the project codebook.

Variables are designed to capture several dimensions of mandate design and institutional structure. Where interpretation is required, coding decisions are guided by explicit rules to ensure consistency across observations.

Variable construction prioritizes comparability and consistency across cases, even where this requires simplifying complex institutional phenomena.

To maintain dataset reliability, all entries undergo a cross-review process among team members. Coding decisions are verified against primary sources, and ambiguities are resolved through team discussion and, where necessary, clarification of coding rules in the codebook.

D. Hypotheses

The analysis is guided by several exploratory hypotheses:

- Mandate complexity increases over time as missions accumulate functions
- Political contestation within the Security Council is associated with more constrained or fragmented mandate design
- Budget and personnel levels do not always scale proportionally with mandate expansion
- Different governance models produce distinct patterns of mandate evolution

E. Case Selection Strategy

To complement the dataset analysis, the study conducts a comparative case analysis of five Special Political Mission settings representing diverse political and operational environments. The selected cases are: United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia (UNVMC), and Yemen, examined through the combined case of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA) and the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (OSESGY).

These cases provide context-specific insights into how mandate design and mission structures operate in practice and allow the study to examine how institutional patterns identified in the dataset analysis manifest in different conflict settings.

These cases were selected to capture variation across conflict types, level of international involvement, and institutional configurations of SPMs. The rationale for case selection and the analytical dimensions guiding the comparison are discussed in detail in Section VI.

F. Expert Interviews

In addition to documentary and dataset-based analysis, the study draws on semi-structured interviews with practitioners and experts familiar with the design and implementation of Special Political Missions. Interviewees include current or former UN officials, policy analysts, and practitioners with experience in Security Council negotiations, mission management, or UN political affairs.

These interviews provide contextual insight into institutional practices that are not fully observable through formal documentation, including negotiation dynamics surrounding mandate renewals and operational challenges faced by missions in the field. Interview insights are used primarily to contextualize and interpret patterns identified in the dataset analysis and comparative case studies rather than as standalone empirical evidence.

Interviews were conducted on a non-attributable basis unless otherwise indicated.

G. Limitations and Scope Conditions

Like all institutional analyses, this study faces several methodological and empirical limitations. These limitations stem primarily from the nature of available data, the focus on mandate design as an analytical lens, and the scope of the dataset constructed for this research.

First, the study relies heavily on publicly available United Nations documentation, including Security Council resolutions, Secretary-General reports, and other official records. While these documents provide authoritative information on the formal design and evolution of Special Political Missions, they do not fully capture internal negotiation dynamics within the Security Council or operational decision-making within the UN Secretariat. Many aspects of mandate negotiation and implementation occur through informal consultations, closed-door diplomacy, or internal bureaucratic processes that are not fully observable through official documents.

Second, the dataset constructed for this study focus primarily on institutional design and mandate structure rather than direct measures of mission effectiveness. Mandate language, renewal patterns, and institutional arrangements can reveal how the Security Council adapts its policy instruments over time, but they cannot alone determine whether missions successfully achieve their political or operational objectives. For this reason, the analysis treats mandate evolution as an indicator of institutional adaptation, not as a direct measure of policy success.

Third, the construction of descriptive datasets necessarily involves analytical choices regarding classification, variable selection, and temporal scope. Decisions about how to define mission characteristics, categorize mandate provisions, and structure observations reflect interpretive judgements by the research team. Description itself involves selecting particular dimensions through which complex phenomena are represented and analyzed. In this sense, the dataset should be understood as an analytical framework designed to illuminate certain institutional patterns rather than a comprehensive representation of all aspects of UN political missions.

Fourth, the temporal structure of the datasets reflects the study's analytical focus. The mission-level dataset covers the full historical evolution of UN political missions from 1948 to 2026, enabling the identification of long-term institutional trends. However, the mandate-cycle dataset focuses on the period from 2010 to 2026 in order to examine contemporary patterns of mandate adaptation under conditions of heightened geopolitical contestation and fiscal constraint. While this design allows for detailed analysis of recent mandate dynamics, it does not systematically capture mandate-level variation across earlier historical periods.

Finally, the comparative case studies are designed to illustrate variation across different political and operational environments rather than to provide a statistical sample of Special Political Missions. The selected cases highlight key types of institutional challenges faced by SPMs, but they do not encompass the full diversity of mission experience across the UN system.

Overall, these limitations mean that the study should be understood primarily as an analysis of institutional patterns and mandate evolution rather than a comprehensive evaluation of mission performance. By combining descriptive dataset analysis with comparative case studies and expert interviews, however, the research seeks to triangulate evidence from multiple sources in order to generate a more robust understanding of how Special Political Missions evolve as instruments of UN conflict management.

IV. Historical Patterns of Special Political Missions

A. The Cold War Era (1948-1991): Founding Mandates, Decolonization, and Constrained Activism

The history of United Nations Special Political Missions (SPMs) begins on 14 May 1948, when the General Assembly adopted resolution 186 (S-2), establishing the United Nations Mediator in Palestine—the Organization's first formal deployment of a mediator and the institutional prototype of what would later be known as a Special Political Mission. [48] The appointment of Folke Bernadotte within a week of that resolution, his rapid brokering of an initial truce, and his assassination in Jerusalem on 17 September 1948 together established a foundational pattern that remains true today: SPMs can generate swift and consequential diplomatic results, yet they operate in environments marked by acute danger and political fragility. [49]

In the first postwar decades, decolonization provided the principal political logic for SPM expansion. At the founding of the United Nations, roughly one-third of the global population still lived under colonial administrations. [50] As newly independent states entered the Organization, the UN assumed a growing role in facilitating transitions to sovereignty. Under the framework of Chapter XI of the Charter, General Assembly-mandated political missions became instruments for managing self-determination processes. Their responsibilities varied widely: supervising referenda before independence, overseeing elections on constitutional status, conducting on-site consultations, and reporting local political conditions back to UN decision-makers. [51] This early decolonization-driven expansion is reflected in the temporal distribution of mission establishments, which rose steadily through the 1950s and peaked in the 1960s before declining under the constraints of Cold War polarization (Figure 1).

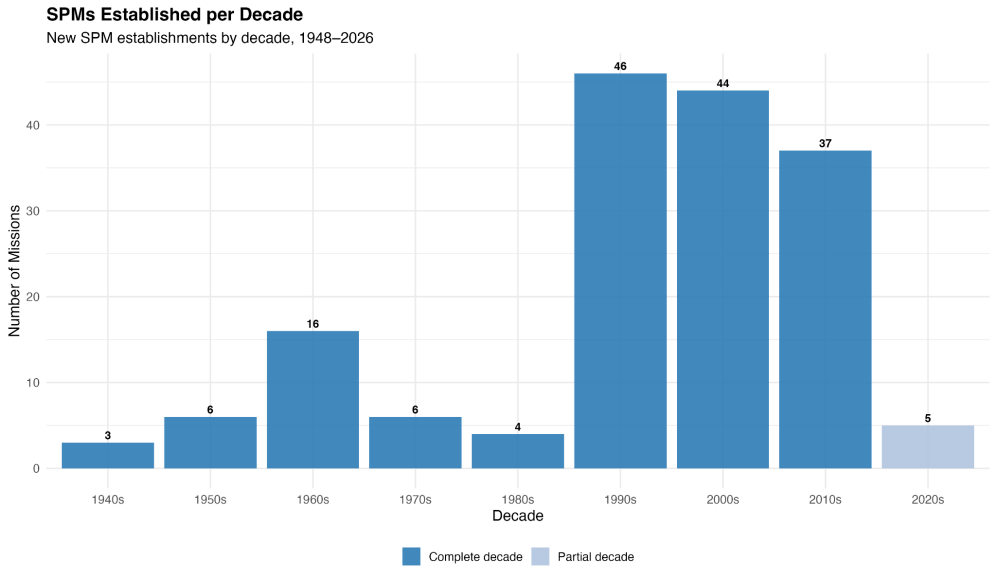


Figure 1. SPM Established per Decade: *SPM establishment during the Cold War remained concentrated in the decolonization era, peaking in the 1960s before declining as geopolitical rivalry constrained new mandates.*

The United Nations Commission for Libya illustrates the breadth of these early mandates. Established in 1949 under General Assembly resolution 289 (IV), the Commission did far more than mediate constitutional questions. Under Adrian Pelt's leadership, it helped reconcile fragmented administrative structures, harmonize rival currency systems, support constitutional drafting, and assist in building the institutional foundations of a new state. Libya's independence in December 1951 marked the first case in which a sovereign state emerged through a transition process directly shepherded by the United Nations. [52] A similar pattern appeared in Eritrea, where the UN Commissioner assisted constitutional design and governmental formation, anticipating later peacebuilding practices long before that vocabulary entered UN doctrine. [53]

This expansive early phase narrowed as Cold War polarization hardened. From the 1960s onward, geopolitical rivalry sharply reduced the willingness of Member States to authorize new large-scale civilian political missions. [54] In place of field presences, the Secretary-General increasingly relied on lighter diplomatic mechanisms: personal envoys, special representatives, and temporary good offices missions. [55] As later Secretary-General reporting (2013) makes clear, this growing reliance on envoys and personal representatives reflected the comparative political flexibility of good office instruments: unlike large field-based missions, they could still be deployed even when Cold War divisions made consensus on more formal mandates difficult to achieve. [56] This constraint is also visible in the overall number of simultaneously active missions, which remained low and relatively stable throughout most of the Cold War before rising sharply after 1991 (Figure 2).

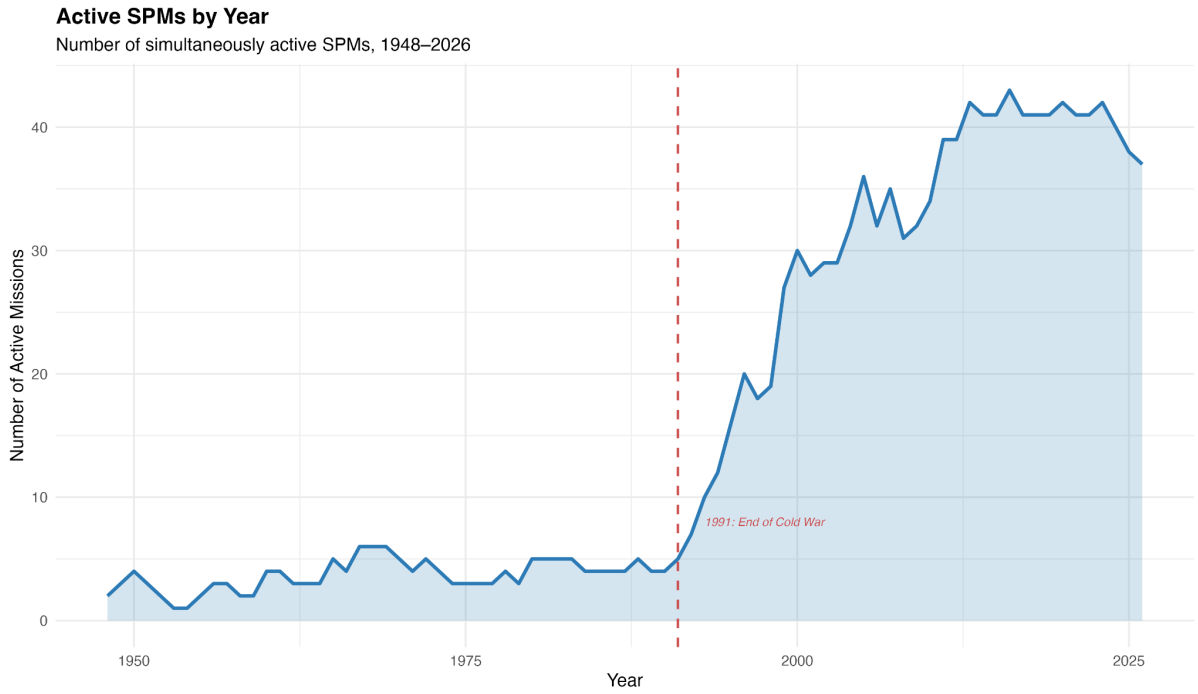


Figure 2. Active SPMs by Year: *The number of simultaneously active SPMs remained low and relatively stable throughout the Cold War, before rising sharply after 1991 as geopolitical constraints eased and multidimensional political missions expanded.*

Even so, some significant mandates persisted. In Cyprus, the Security Council called for mediation in resolution 186 (1964), while in the Middle East, resolution 242 (1967) created a Special Representative role designed to sustain diplomatic contact with the parties and explore peaceful settlement options. [57]

The growing reliance on good office diplomacy is especially visible in late Cold War crisis mediation. In 1980, during the Iran-Iraq conflict, the Secretary-General appointed a special representative to facilitate communication between the belligerents after offering UN good offices. In Afghanistan, a personal representative appointed in 1982 led the indirect negotiations that culminated in the 1988 Geneva Accords, demonstrating that even in periods of institutional constraint, UN political diplomacy remained active through less formalized channels. [58]

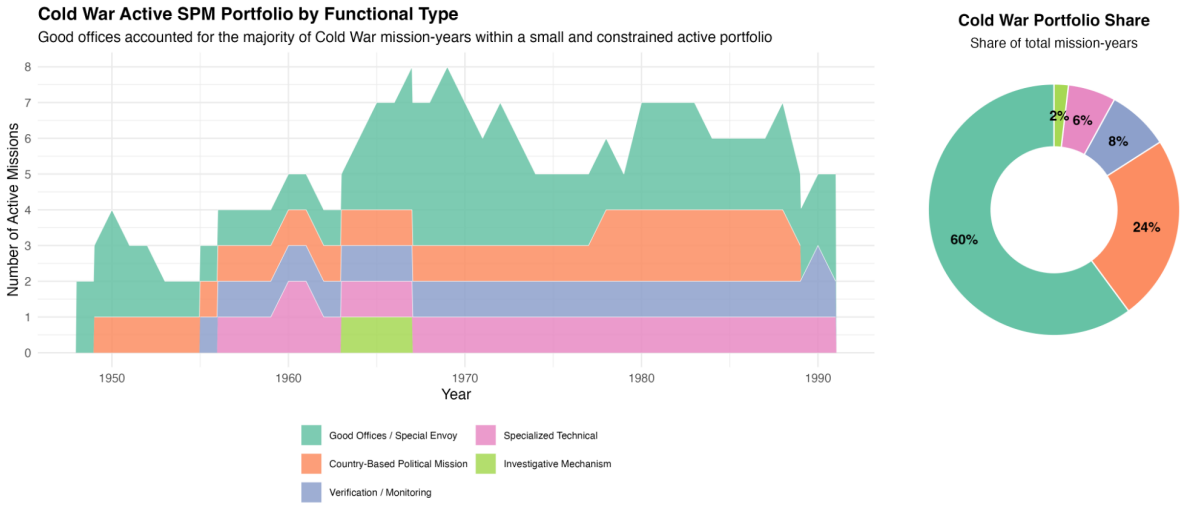


Figure 3. Cold War active Special Political mission portfolio by functional type, 1948-1991: *During the Cold War, the overall number of active SPMs remained limited, reflecting the political constraints imposed by bipolar rivalry. Within this relatively small portfolio, good offices and special envoy missions constituted the dominant and most persistent form of UN political engagement, accounting for 60 percent of total Cold War mission-years. Other mission types—including country-based political missions, verification mechanisms, and specialized technical mandates—remained comparatively narrow in scale and duration. This pattern underscores the centrality of lighter diplomatic instruments in sustaining UN conflict-management activity during a period when broader multidimensional deployments were politically constrained.*

The Cold War era therefore established the institutional DNA of SPMs: adaptability in mandate design, dependence on diplomatic legitimacy rather than coercive authority, and close connection to the Secretary-General's good office role. These features allowed SPMs to survive periods of geopolitical paralysis, even as their scale and visibility fluctuated with shifts in the international system. [59]

B. The Post-Cold War Surge (1991-2009): Expansion, Multidimensionality, and Institutionalization

The end of the Cold War fundamentally altered the conditions under which Special Political Missions were created and deployed. Conflicts that had been contained, frozen,

or politically managed under bipolar rivalry re-emerged across multiple regions, while negotiated settlements in places such as El Salvador and Guatemala opened new opportunities for international mediation. At the same time, crises in Somalia, Rwanda, and the Balkans generated urgent demand for more sustained UN political engagement. [60] As states underwent political transition and fragile peace processes multiplied, governments and conflict parties increasingly turned to the United Nations not only for mediation and good offices, but also for assistance with elections, constitutional reform, reconciliation processes, and rule-of-law institution building. [61]

This new geopolitical environment produced a sharp expansion in both the number and complexity of SPMs. This expansion was driven not only by rising demand for United Nations engagement in post-conflict settings, but also by an unusual degree of Security Council convergence in the immediate post-Cold War period — a moment the 2023 Secretary-General's report characterizes as one of "new opportunities for collective security"—which temporarily lowered political barriers to authorizing broader and more ambitious multidimensional mandates. [62,63] Missions established during this era, including the joint United Nations-Organization of American States International Civilian Mission in Haiti (MICIVIH), the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA), the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), the United Nations Office in Angola (UNOA), and the United Nations Office in Timor-Leste (UNOTIL), reflected this shift toward multidimensionality. [64,65] Unlike earlier missions centered primarily on mediation, these mandates combined political facilitation with human rights monitoring, electoral support, institution-building, and legal reform.

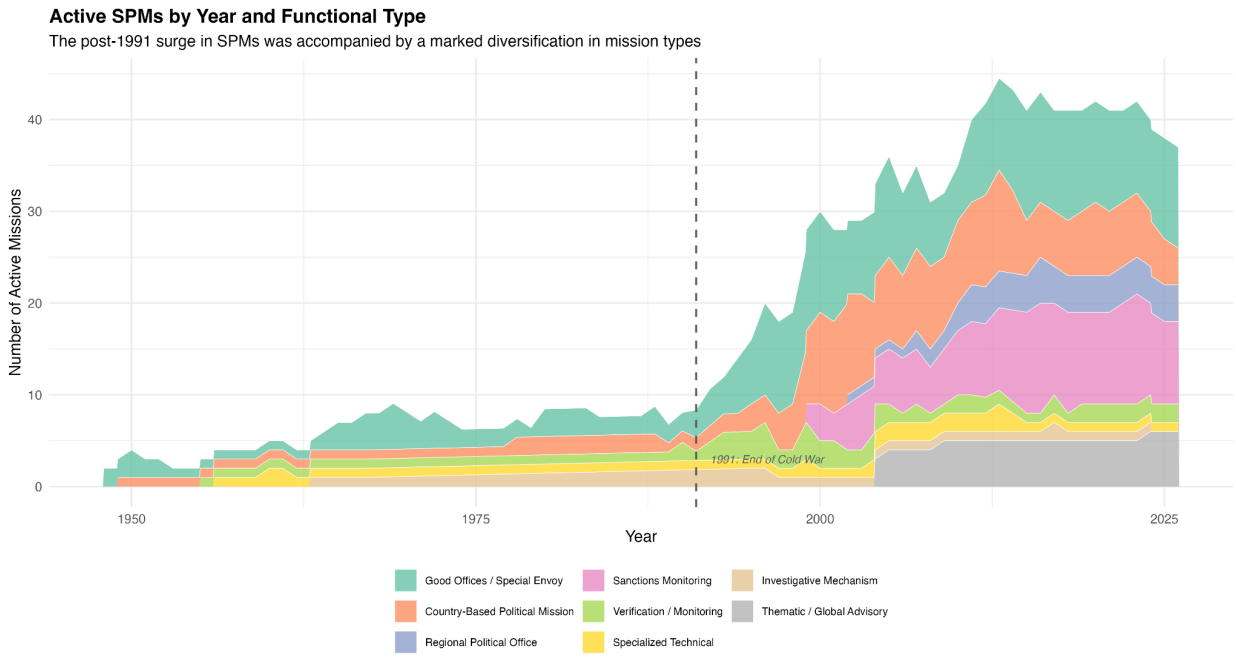


Figure 4. Expansion and diversification of active SPMs after 1991: *The post-Cold War surge increased not only the number of missions, but also the range of functional mission types in operation. In particular, the post-1991 period saw the marked emergence and expansion of regional political offices, sanctions monitoring mechanisms, and thematic/global advisory mandates, reflecting the widening functional scope of the SPM system.*

One especially important area of expansion was electoral assistance. Missions such as the United Nations Observer Mission in Nicaragua and the United Nations Observer Group for the Verification of Elections in Haiti reflected a growing UN role in supporting democratic transitions through election monitoring and political verification. [66, 67] In Afghanistan, the Secretary-General's Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA), established in 1993 at the request of the General Assembly, was tasked with consulting Afghan actors on pathways toward reconciliation and reconstruction—anticipating the broader political role later assumed by UNAMA. [68, 69] That same year, new political offices in Burundi and Somalia signaled the emergence of country-specific peace offices designed to sustain reconciliation processes beyond immediate ceasefire diplomacy. [70]

Institutionally, this period also marked the consolidation of SPMs within the UN system. In 1992, the creation of the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), following a request from the President of the Security Council, centralized support for the Secretary-General's good offices and strengthened the Organization's preventive diplomacy and peacemaking capacities. [71] For the first time, SPMs acquired a dedicated bureaucratic anchor within the Secretariat, supported by standing analytical capacity, specialized staffing, and clearer institutional oversight. It was also during the 1990s that the term "Special Political Mission" entered formal UN usage, signaling the codification of a practice that had existed informally since 1948. [72]

Another notable development was the expansion of regional offices with standing preventive diplomacy mandates. What was then the United Nations Office for West Africa — now the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) — was created in 2002, followed by the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) and the United Nations Office for Central Africa (UNOCA). [73] These offices represented a structural innovation: unlike earlier SPMs deployed in response to specific crises, regional offices were designed to anticipate threats and engage in preventive diplomacy on an ongoing basis, working alongside regional and subregional organizations. This shift from reactive to proactive engagement marked a significant evolution in the conceptual design of SPMs.

The post-Cold War period also saw the growth of sanctions monitoring mechanisms as a major functional component of the SPM portfolio. As Chapter VII sanctions regimes multiplied, the Security Council increasingly mandated expert panels to investigate violations, monitor implementation, and report to sanctions committees. [74] Panels concerning Angola, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo exemplified this growing category, which added a new quasi-investigative dimension to SPM activity and expanded the Council's enforcement toolkit.

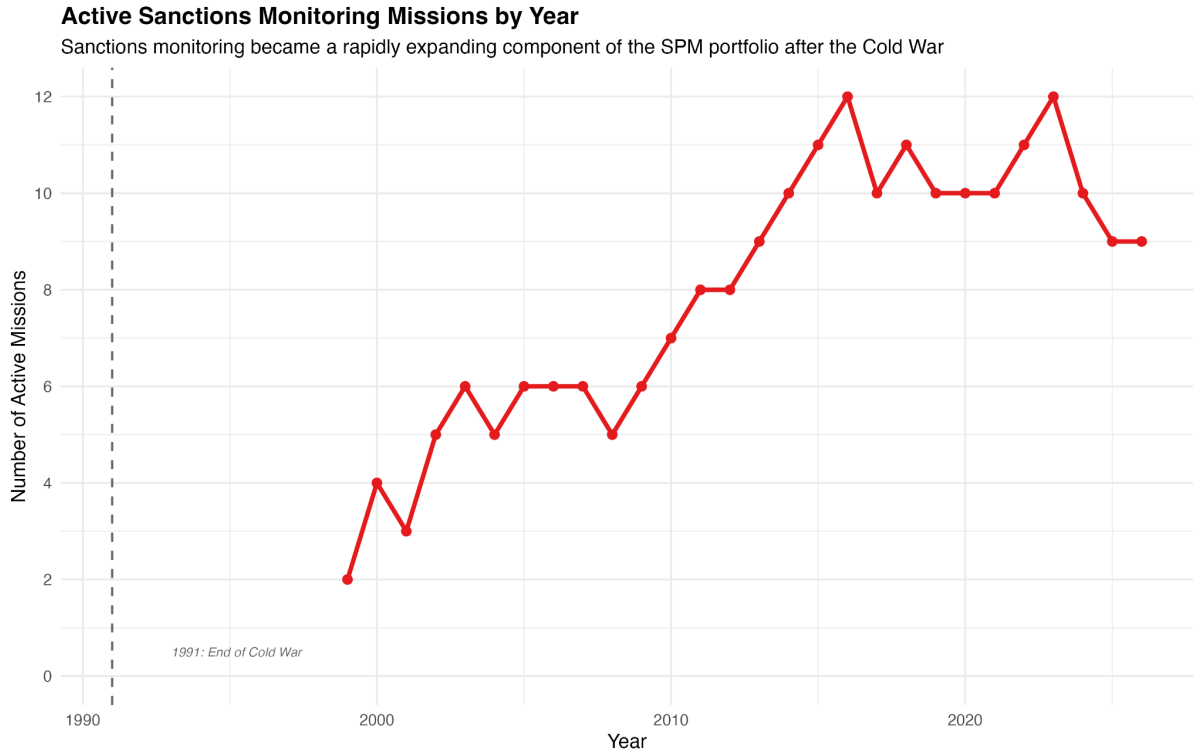


Figure 5. Growth of active sanctions monitoring missions after the Cold War: *Sanctions monitoring mechanisms became an increasingly prominent component of the SPM portfolio from the late 1990s onward, reflecting the Security Council's expanding reliance on Chapter VII monitoring regimes.*

Peacebuilding also became a more explicit organizing principle in mission design. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, integrated peacebuilding offices were established in countries including Burundi, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, and Tajikistan, reflecting a growing recognition that political stabilization required coordination across security, governance, and development sectors. [75] These missions sought to align political mandates with the operational presence of UN agencies, funds, and programs on the ground, helping institutionalize the integrated mission model that later became standard in complex post-conflict settings.

Taken together, these developments marked a decisive transformation in the nature of SPMs. What had once been a relatively small and flexible set of political instruments evolved into a diversified and institutionalized architecture capable of supporting mediation, electoral transitions, sanctions enforcement, preventive diplomacy, and post-conflict peacebuilding.

Box 1 - Security Council Authorization Culture: Critical Inflection Points

A series of major crises since the end of the Cold War have progressively reshaped the norms and practices governing Security Council authorization. While not directly involving Special Political Missions, these episodes have lasting effects on the political environment in which SPM mandates are negotiated and sustained.

Kosovo (1999): NATO's military intervention proceeded without Security Council authorization, establishing an early precedent for bypassing the Council when consensus among permanent members was unattainable. This episode raised foundational concerns about the durability of collective security mechanisms and signaled that Western powers were willing to act outside the Council's framework when they perceived it as deadlocked.

Iraq (2003): The U.S.-led invasion, conducted without Council authorization and in the face of explicit French opposition, exposed deep fractures within the P3 itself. By demonstrating that Western cohesion within the Council could not be assumed, the episode weakened the informal consensus-building architecture on which smooth mandate authorization had depended.

Libya (2011): Resolution 1973 authorized "all necessary measures" to protect civilians, adopted with abstentions from Russia and China. The subsequent NATO-led intervention extended well beyond civilian protection and culminated in regime change. For Russia and China, this outcome fundamentally undermined the credibility of open-ended authorization frameworks: a limited humanitarian mandate had, in their view, been instrumentalized to achieve broader political objectives. The episode is regarded by interlocutors as the decisive turning point in the Council's post-Cold War "authorization culture". [76]

Syria (post-2011): The Libya experience produced an immediate and durable shift in Russian and Chinese behavior. Both states moved from abstention to the active and repeated use of the veto on resolutions perceived as carrying analogous risks, blocking Council action on the Syrian conflict on a total of eighteen occasions. [77] This marked the normalization of veto use in politically sensitive conflicts and the effective end of the post-Cold War consensus model.

Ukraine (2022): Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and its use of the veto to shield that action from Council response, exposed the structural ceiling of the collective security system: when a permanent member is itself the party to a conflict, the Council's core enforcement mechanisms are rendered inoperable. This episode reinforced perceptions of institutional paralysis and deepened the skepticism of Global South member states toward a Council seen as selectively enforcing its own norms.

These episodes have produced a more constrained authorization environment, characterized by narrower mandates, more cautious enforcement language, and diminished willingness to endorse open-ended or intervention-oriented frameworks. The progressive erosion of trust among permanent members—particularly following Libya—has directly shaped the design of contemporary Special Political Missions, which are today more frequently configured as lighter, politically focused presences with limited enforcement capacity than the expansive multidimensional missions of the post-Cold War era.

C. The Contemporary Era (2010-2026): Fragmentation, New Threats, and Constrained Effectiveness

Since roughly 2010, Special Political Missions have operated in a markedly altered strategic environment. The optimism that characterized the immediate post-Cold War era has given way to a far more fragmented international order, shaped by renewed great-power rivalry, declining consensus among major powers, and the proliferation of transnational pressures that complicate conflict management. As recent Secretary-General reporting emphasizes, SPMs now function amid intensifying geopolitical polarization as well as emerging challenges—including disinformation, hate speech, climate-related insecurity, and widening socio-economic inequalities—that increasingly intersect with traditional peace and security threats. [78]

Although the contemporary period has preserved some earlier patterns of deployment, it has also generated significant adaptation in mission design. Special envoys remain a central instrument of UN political engagement in crises such as Myanmar, Syria, and Yemen. The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), created in 2011 after the collapse of the Gaddafi regime, has remained central to mediation efforts despite persistent instability and fragmented domestic authority. [79] Likewise, the United Nations

Verification Mission in Colombia, established to accompany implementation of the 2016 peace accord, demonstrates that SPMs can still make meaningful contributions in supportive political environments; its mandate was expanded in 2023 to oversee additional provisions of the peace agreement. [80]

One of the clearest structural shifts in this period is the contraction of multidimensional mandates. Since 2015, only two newly established SPMs—BINUH in Haiti and UNITAMS in Sudan—have been given broad multidimensional frameworks. Meanwhile, several earlier multidimensional missions have concluded or entered drawdown phases: UNAMI in Iraq formally closed on 31 December 2025 following Security Council resolution 2732 (2024), which mandated a final 19-month drawdown period at the request of the Iraqi government; [81] UNSOM in Somalia concluded its operations on 31 October 2024 and was succeeded by the United Nations Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS) under resolution 2753 (2024), with a phased transition to the UN Country Team expected by October 2026; [82] UNMHA in Yemen, established in 2019 to support the Stockholm Agreement, had its mandate extended for a final two-month period through 31 March 2026 by resolution 2813 (2026), after which the mission will be liquidated and its residual functions transferred to the Office of the Special Envoy for Yemen. [83] Instead, the United Nations has increasingly favored narrower, politically focused missions. This pattern is also visible in the changing composition of newly established missions. As shown in Figure 6, the post-2010 period features a reduced share of country-based political missions and a growing reliance on narrower formats, including sanctions monitoring and other specialized mechanisms—reflecting the increasing difficulty of sustaining broad, multidimensional mandates in a fragmented political environment.

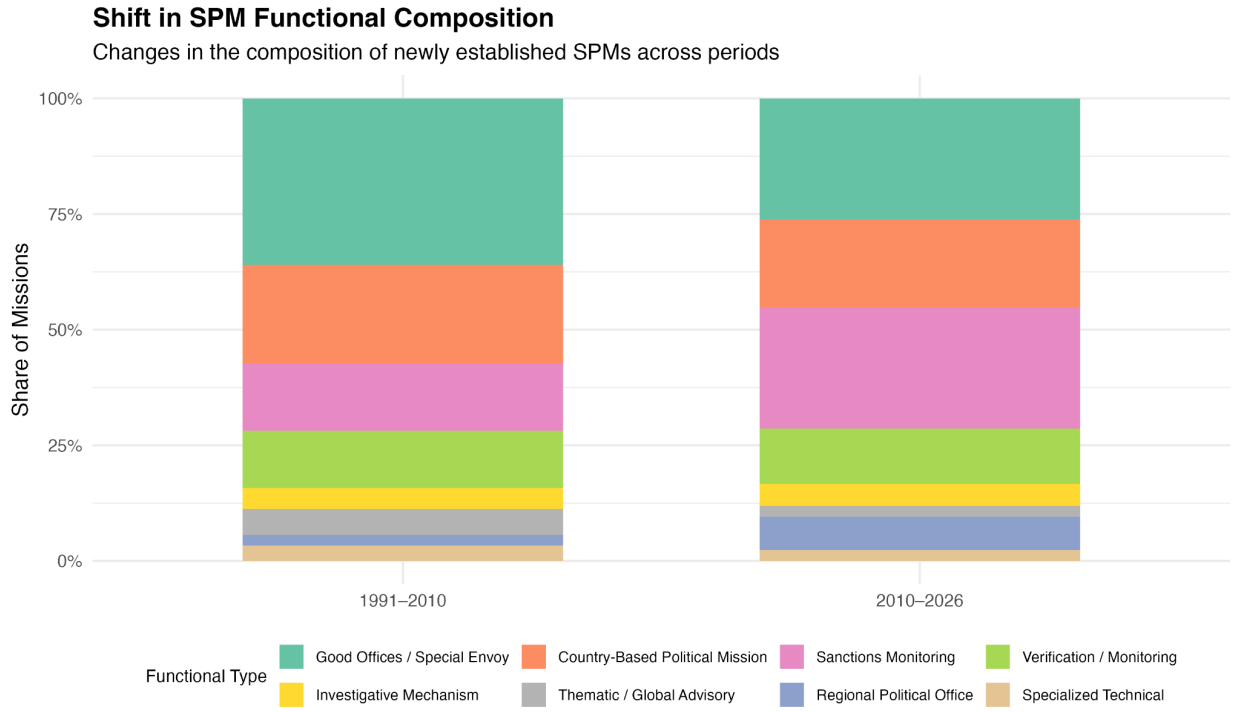


Figure 6. Shift in the Functional Composition of Newly Established SPMs (1991-2010 vs. 2010-2026): *The distribution of functional types among newly established Special Political Missions shows a shift away from broader country-based political missions toward a greater share of specialized formats, including sanctions monitoring and regional political office. While overall mission activity remains stable, this compositional change reflects a narrowing of mandate scope in the contemporary period.*

By September 2025, the global SPM portfolio stood at 40 active missions — a figure that has remained relatively stable over the past decade as closures and new deployments offset one another numerically. [84] Yet this aggregate stability masks significant turbulence beneath the surface: missions are increasingly shorter, narrower, and more politically contingent, even as operational demands grow more complex.

This shift is also reflected in changes to the duration and lifecycle of Special Political Missions. As shown in Figures 7 and 8, the distribution of mission duration varies significantly across historical periods, revealing important differences in how long missions are sustained and under what conditions they operate.

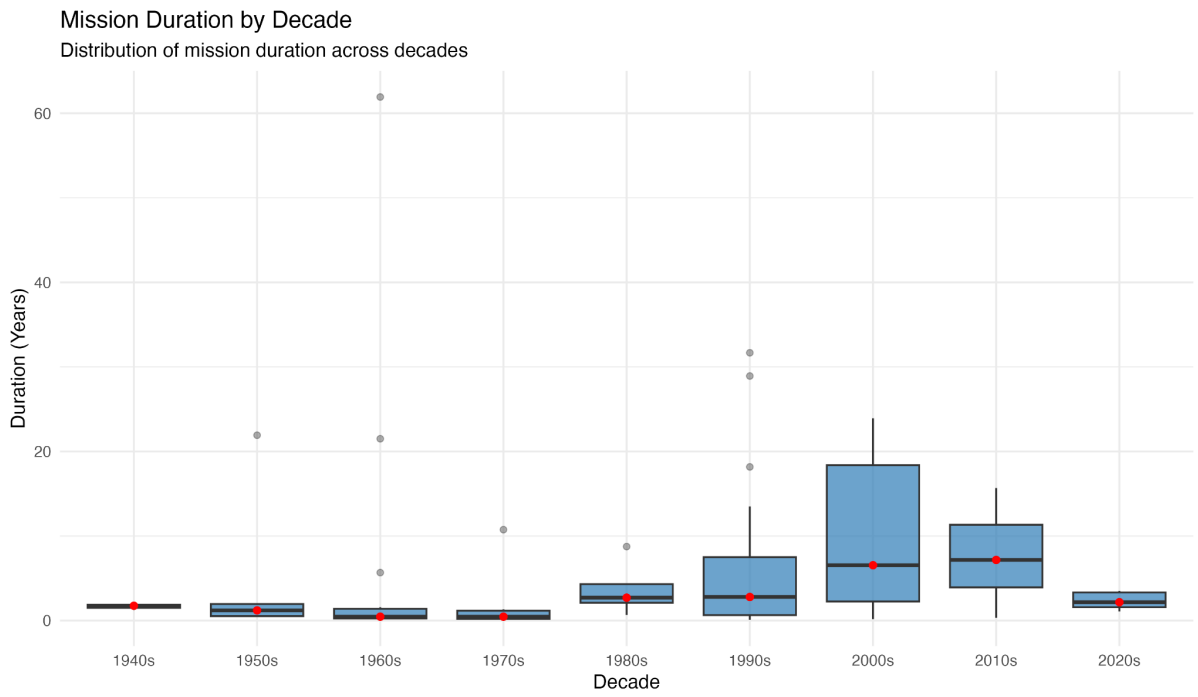


Figure 7. Mission Duration by Decade of Establishment (All Missions): *Distribution of mission duration (in years) across decades of establishment. Recent decades should be interpreted with caution due to right-censoring, as many missions remain ongoing and have not yet reached their full duration. Each box represents the interquartile range (25th to 75th percentile), with the horizontal line indicating the median. Whiskers extend to the range of non-outlier values, and individual points represent outliers.*

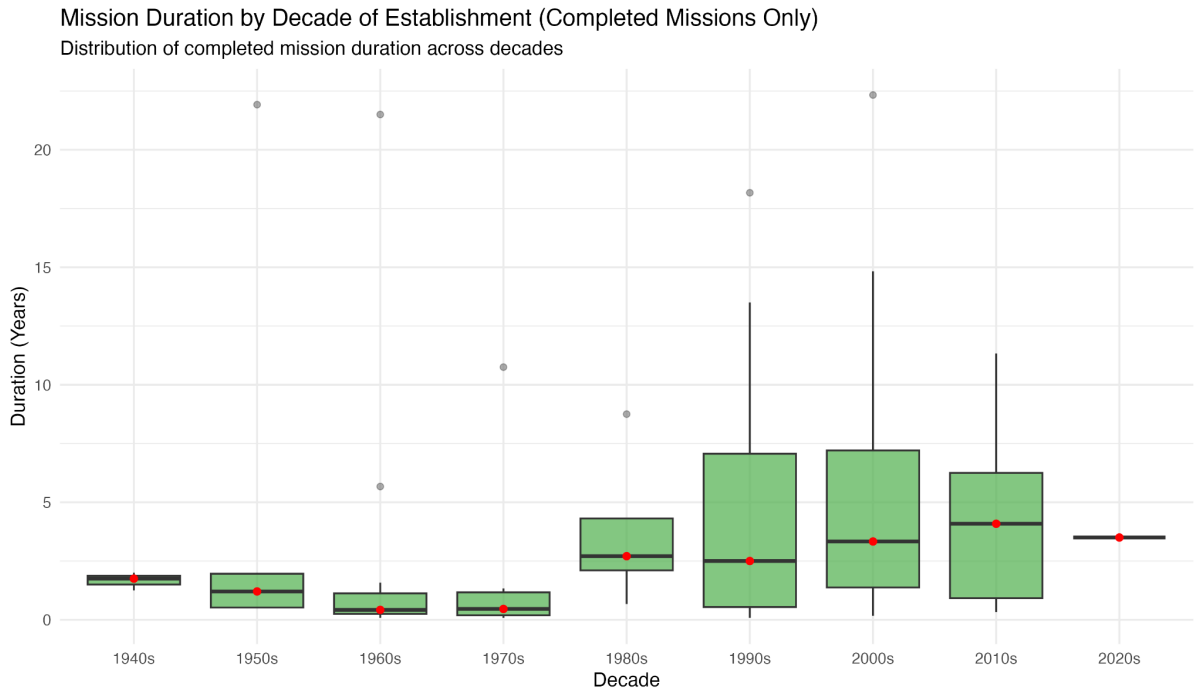


Figure 8. *Mission Duration by Decade of Establishment (Completed Missions Only): Distribution of mission duration (in years) across decades of establishment, restricted to completed missions in order to control for censoring effects. Each box represents the interquartile range (25th to 75th percentile), with the horizontal line indicating the median. Whiskers extend to the range of non-outlier values, and individual points represent outliers.*

Box 2 - SPM Lifecycle Patterns across Historical Periods: Expansion, Contraction, and Growing Variability

During the Cold War, SPMs were generally short and relatively uniform in duration, reflecting a limited and less institutionalized portfolio. The post-Cold War period, by contrast, was marked by a substantial expansion in mission duration, including the emergence of longer-running missions embedded within complex peace processes and transitional political arrangements.

The contemporary period does not continue this trajectory. While some missions remain medium-term in duration, the system no longer consistently produces long-duration missions of the kind observed in the 1990s and early 2000s. At the same time, the distribution of mission duration becomes more dispersed, indicating greater variability and less consistency in mission lifecycles.

Importantly, this pattern is not solely an artifact of right-censoring. As Figure 7 shows, more recent missions appear shorter in part because many remain ongoing. However, even when restricting the analysis to completed missions (Figure 8), the contemporary period does not exhibit a return to the longer and more stable duration patterns characteristics of the post-Cold War expansion. Instead, completed missions display a similar wide and uneven distribution, with fewer long-duration cases.

It is also important to note that mission duration should not be interpreted as a direct measure of effectiveness. Shorter missions may reflect successful and timely completion of narrowly defined mandates, while longer missions may persist in contexts of political stalemate or unresolved conflict. Rather than indicating success or failure per se, variation in mission duration provides insight into the stability and predictability of the political environments in which SPMs operate.

Taken together, these patterns suggest that the defining feature of the contemporary period is not simply shorter missions, but a decline in the durability and predictability of SPM lifecycles. Missions are increasingly shaped by contingent political conditions, operating in environments where sustained engagement is more difficult to maintain and long-term mandates are harder to negotiate and support.

The trajectory of SPMs since 2010 thus reveals a system under mounting strain, seeking to preserve flexibility and political relevance in an international environment less conducive to multilateral problem-solving than the one in which the modern SPM architecture expanded.

The consequences of this increasingly constrained and volatile operating environment are especially visible in mission effectiveness. In Yemen, mediation efforts led by the Special Envoy helped secure the 2022 truce, significantly reducing violence and reopening space for humanitarian relief, yet failed to translate into a comprehensive political settlement. Similar limitations are evident in Syria, where successive envoys have struggled to move beyond stalemate despite sustained diplomatic engagement. [85] In Sudan, UNITAMS faced severe operational disruption after the outbreak of war in April 2023, forcing large-scale relocation and remote mission management. [86] These cases illustrate a broader pattern: SPMs can still generate localized political gains, but their ability to convert tactical successes into durable settlements is increasingly constrained.

A central reason for this diminished effectiveness lies in the weakening of collective political backing from Member States. Renewed geopolitical rivalry has deepened divisions within the Security Council, reducing the consistency and coherence of support available to missions in contested crises. [87] In this environment, the principal constraint on SPM effectiveness is often not technical capacity but the weakening of unified political backing from Member States, which the Secretary-General identifies as the essential source of legitimacy for special representatives and envoys. [88] Without such backing, mediators lack the leverage necessary to transform negotiations into enforceable political outcomes, leaving missions structurally weakened from the outset.

At the same time, contemporary SPMs have broadened their substantive engagement with cross-cutting policy agendas. Women, peace, and security has become increasingly embedded in mission practice, with missions in Colombia, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen supporting women's participation in peace processes. [89] Youth inclusion has similarly become a strategic priority, with missions such as UNRCCA, UNSOM, and the Colombia Verification Mission creating channels for younger actors to engage in peacebuilding and governance dialogues. [90] Climate-related security risks have also become more prominent in mission analysis, particularly in regional offices such as UNOWAS, where climate stress is increasingly treated as a driver of instability in the Sahel. These thematic expansions illustrate how SPM mandates are adapting substantively even as they narrow institutionally.

Looking ahead, the challenge is not simply to preserve SPMs as institutional tools, but to sustain the multilateral political foundations on which they depend. As the Secretary-General warned in *A New Agenda for Peace*, unless Member States can better manage their competition and rebuild practical forms of cooperation, the effectiveness of UN peace and security instruments—including SPMs—will continue to erode. [91] SPMs remain indispensable to the UN conflict-management architecture, but their future effectiveness will depend less on institutional redesign alone than on whether the political consensus necessary to empower them can be restored.

D. Long-Term Structural Patterns Across the Historical SPM Portfolio

Building on the dataset constructed for this report, this section advances an original analytical interpretation of the long-term evolution of Special Political Missions. While earlier sections have traced changes in functional scope and operational practice, the

data also reveal deeper structural patterns in how the SPM system is governed and reproduced over time.

As Special Political Missions have expanded in number, geographic reach, and functional diversity, their governance architecture has become increasingly centralized rather than diffuse. Behind the apparent variety of mission forms lies a highly structured system in which authority over mandate creation, renewal, and adaptation is concentrated in a limited set of institutional actors, above all the Security Council and a narrow group of penholder states.

At the same time, SPMs rarely emerge as entirely new creations: most are embedded in longer chains of institutional succession, evolving incrementally from earlier diplomatic, monitoring, peacekeeping, or envoy mechanisms. This section examines the political architecture that governs how SPM mandates are authorized, drafted, contested, and reproduced. It argues that while the SPM system has diversified operationally, its underlying governance has become more centralized in decision-making and more layered in institutional evolution, producing a system characterized simultaneously by adaptive flexibility and concentrated political control.

1. From Concentrated Deployment to Global Expansion of SPMs

The contemporary system of Special Political Missions did not emerge fully formed, but rather evolved from a relatively limited set of deployments into a globally distributed institutional architecture. During the Cold War, SPMs were limited in both number and geographic scope, often focused on specific decolonization contexts and a narrow set of politically salient regions. Their deployment reflected a constrained and selective use of political instruments within a highly polarized international system.

This pattern shifted significantly in the post-Cold War period, as the number of missions expanded and their geographic reach broadened across multiple regions. As shown in Figure 9, the 1990s and 2000s witnessed a marked increase in mission establishments, with particularly strong growth in Africa and Asia, reflecting both the proliferation of intra-state conflicts and the growing willingness of the United Nations to engage in diverse political environments. This expansion represents the moment at which SPMs transitioned from a limited diplomatic tool into a central component of the UN's conflict management architecture.

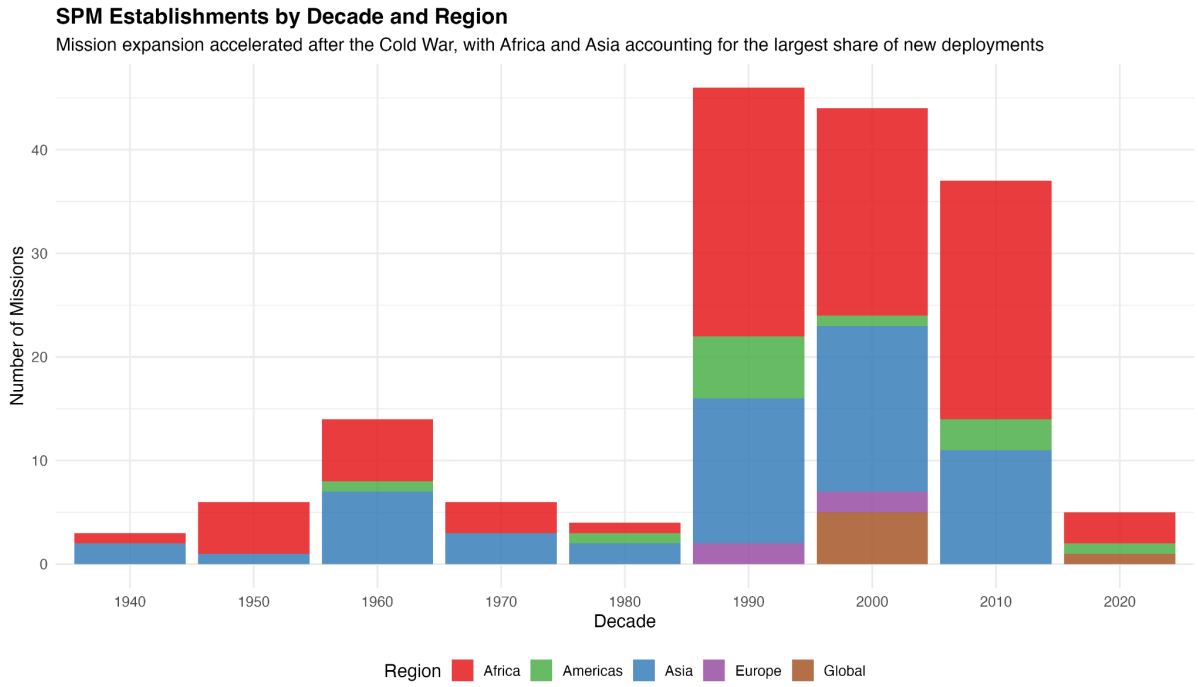
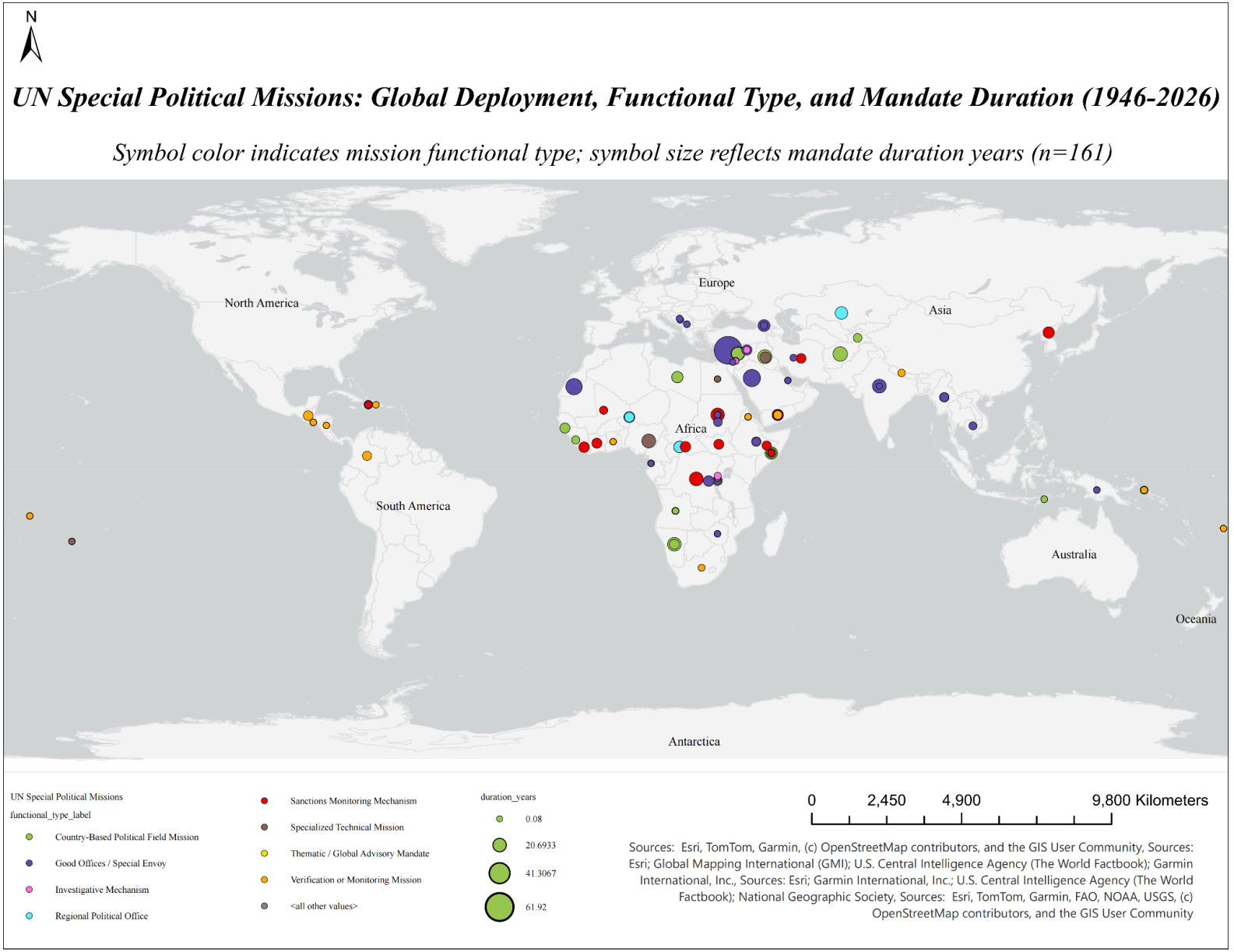


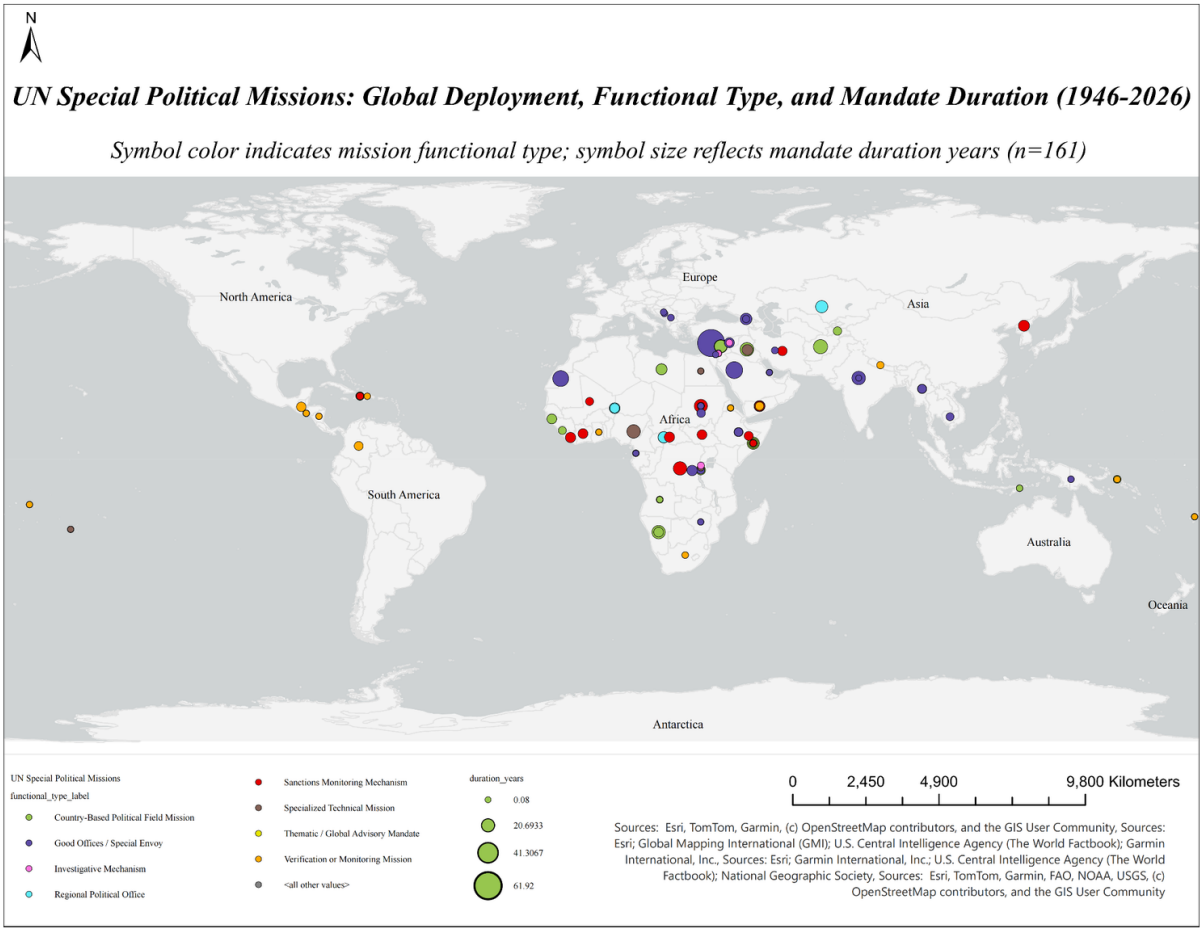
Figure 9. SPM Establishments by Decade and Region: *This figure shows the number of newly established Special Political Missions (SPMs) by decade and region of deployment. It illustrates the sharp increase in mission creation after the Cold War, particularly in the 1990s and 2000s, and shows that Africa and Asia account for the largest share of new deployments. The figure also indicates that while the SPM system expanded geographically over time, this expansion remained regionally uneven rather than globally uniform.*



Historical Patterns of Special Political Missions

Map 1 provides a comprehensive spatial overview of the full historical SPM portfolio, mapping 161 missions by functional type and mandate duration across the 1946-2026 period. Thematic and global advisory mandates are excluded as they are not associated with a specific deployment location.

Map 1. *Global Deployment, Functional Type, and Mandate Duration of UN Special Political Missions (1946-2026): Each symbol represents a single mission, with color indicating functional type and symbol size proportional to mandate duration in years (n=161). Thematic and global advisory mandates are excluded from the map as they are not associated with a specific geographic deployment location. The map reveals pronounced geographic concentration in Africa and the Middle East, alongside substantial variation in mission duration across regions and functional categories. Missions in the Middle East include several of the longest-running deployments in the portfolio, while Africa exhibits the greatest density of country-based political field missions. North America, Europe, and Oceania host comparatively few missions, underscoring the spatially uneven character of UN political engagement across the historical portfolio.*



However, this expansion did not produce a uniform global distribution. Instead, SPMs have remained structurally concentrated in a limited number of regions. As Figure 10 illustrates, Africa and Asia together account for the majority of missions in the dataset, while regions such as Europe and the Americas host significantly fewer. This uneven distribution becomes even more pronounced at the sub-regional level (Figure 11), where missions cluster in specific conflict-prone areas, including the Middle East, East Africa, West Africa, and the Horn of Africa. These patterns suggest that SPM deployment follows the geography of persistent instability rather than any logic of balanced global coverage.

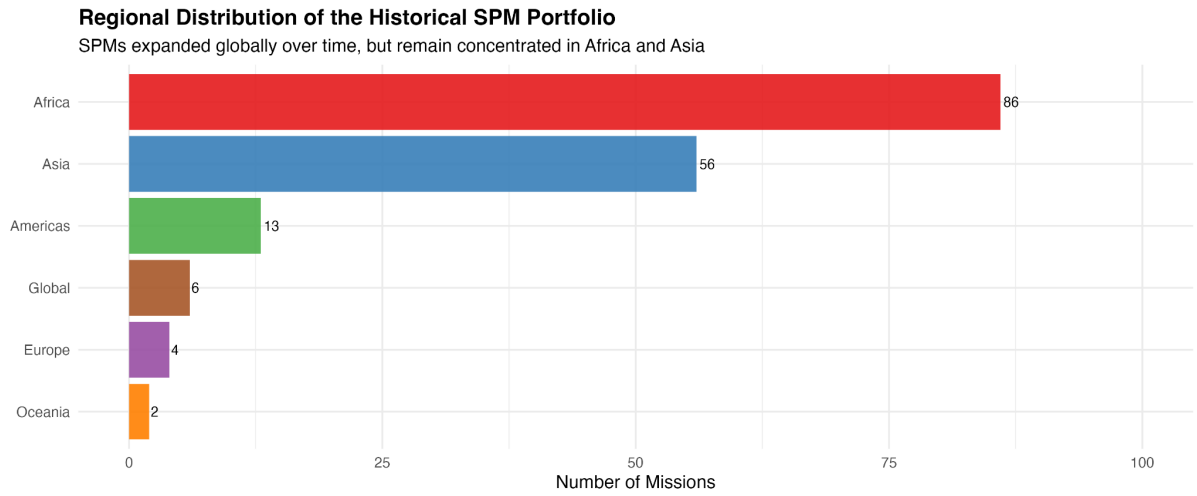


Figure 10. Regional Distribution of the Historical SPM Portfolio: *This figure presents the total number of Special Political Missions (SPMs) by primary region of deployment across the full dataset (1948-2026). The distribution reveals a pronounced geographic concentration, with Africa and Asia accounting for the majority of missions, while other regions host comparatively fewer SPMs. This pattern underscores the uneven spatial distribution of UN political engagement and provides a baseline for assessing subsequent trends in geographic expansion over time.*

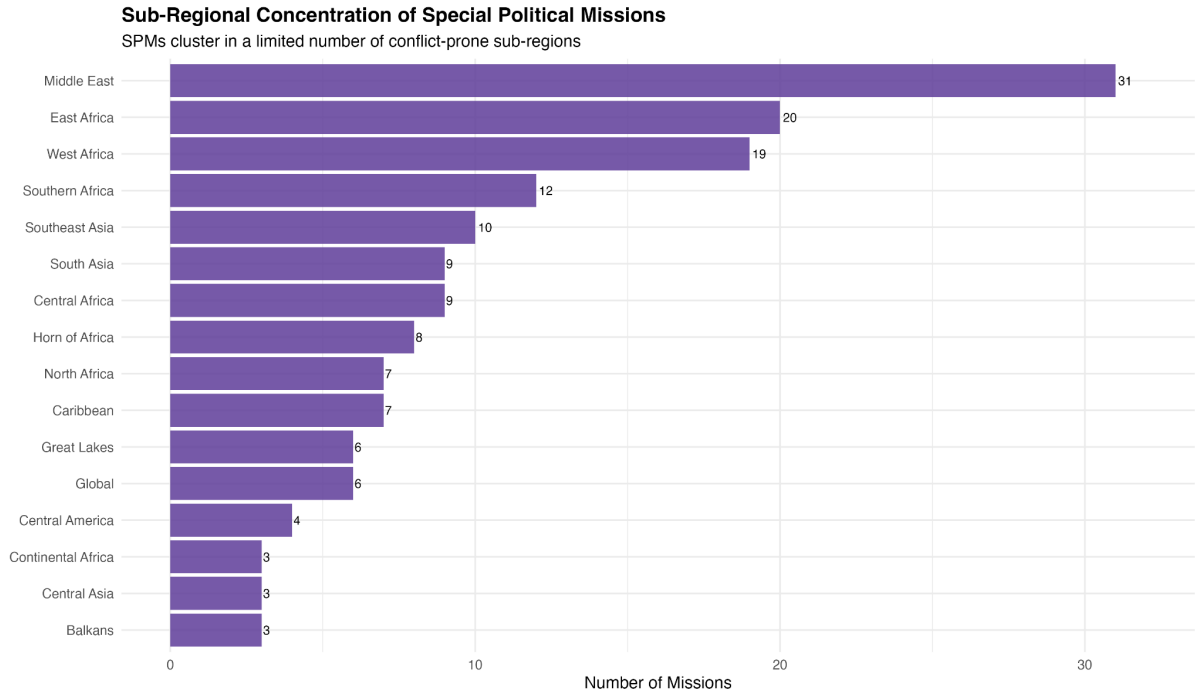


Figure 11. Sub-Regional Concentration of Special Political Missions: *This figure shows the distribution of Special Political Missions (SPMs) across sub-regions, highlighting the concentration of missions within a limited number of conflict-prone areas. The Middle East, East Africa, and West Africa emerge as the primary centers of SPM activity, with additional clustering in regions such as the Horn of Africa and Southern Africa. These patterns indicate that, beyond regional concentration, SPM deployment is further localized within specific zones of persistent instability, reflecting the geographically uneven nature of contemporary conflict environments.*

Regional differences are also reflected in mission duration. As Figure 12 shows, missions in Africa and Asia display broader distributions of duration than those in Europe or the Americas, indicating a wider range of institutional trajectories in the regions where SPM activity is most heavily concentrated. While duration should not be treated as a direct measure of effectiveness, this pattern is consistent with the concentration of missions in regions marked by more persistent instability, repeated political crises, and more complex peace processes.

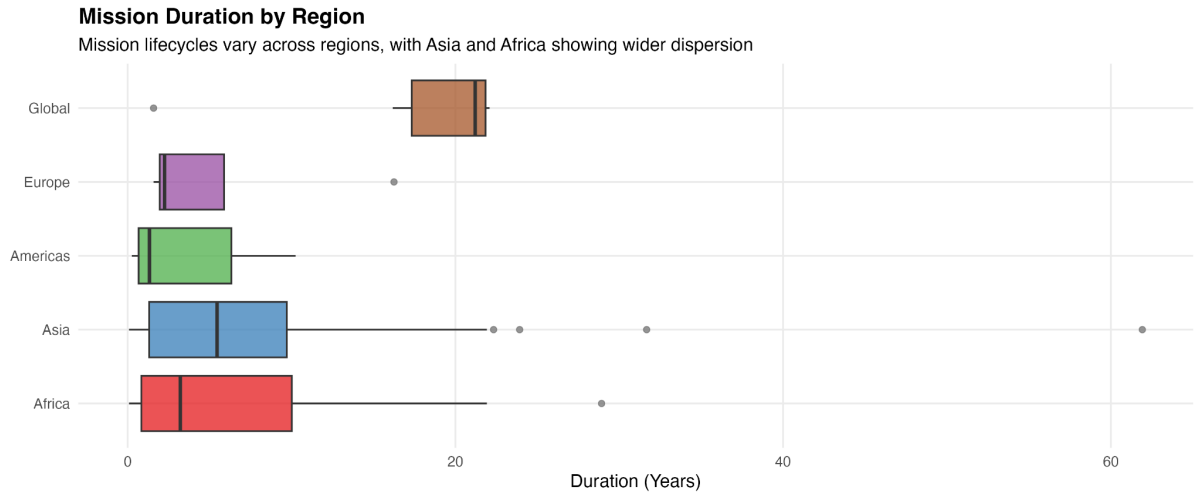


Figure 12. Mission Duration by Region: *Distribution of Special Political Mission (SPM) durations across primary regions. The figure displays median values, interquartile ranges, and outliers, highlighting variation in mission lifecycles across regions. Missions in Africa and Asia show greater dispersion and a wider range of durations compared to Europe and the Americas.*

A small subset of missions classified as “global” further illustrates the evolving logic of the system. Unlike regionally anchored SPMs, these mandates—most of which were established after 2004—are not tied to specific geographic contexts but instead address transnational challenges such as counter-terrorism, sanctions monitoring, and genocide prevention. Examples include the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, and the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide.

Their emergence reflects a partial shift from territorially defined interventions toward functionally oriented mandates designed to operate across regions. In this sense, the geographic logic of SPM deployment is no longer exclusively spatial, but increasingly incorporates issue-based forms of governance. At the same time, the limited number of such global mandates indicates that this development remains a supplementary layer rather than a dominant pattern. The core of the SPM system continues to be geographically grounded.

Taken together, these trends suggest that the long-term evolution of SPMs is best understood not simply as geographic expansion, but as a process of selective global engagement. While the system has extended its reach beyond its Cold War origins, it continues to operate in a spatially uneven manner, concentrating resources and attention in regions characterized by persistent political instability and strategic importance.

2. From Narrow Diplomatic Instrument to a Differentiated Functional Portfolio

As the geographic footprint of SPMs expanded, their functional roles also diversified, transforming the system from a narrow diplomatic instrument into a differentiated portfolio of mission types. In the early decades, the system was dominated by good offices and special envoy mandates, with only a limited number of country-based political missions, verification mechanisms, and specialized technical functions. As the system expanded after the Cold War, however, it did not simply grow in volume; it also diversified in purpose. Newer mission types emerged alongside older ones, producing a more heterogeneous institutional landscape in which different functional forms were used for different political and operational contexts.

The functional categories used in this analysis are derived from the *Compendium* and have been standardized and consolidated by the team to enable consistent comparison across the dataset.

This shift toward functional differentiation can first be observed at the aggregate level of the SPM portfolio. As shown in Figure 13, while good offices and special envoy mandates remain the largest category, the system now encompasses a broad range of mission types, including country-based political missions, sanctions monitoring bodies, verification mechanisms, and specialized technical mandates.

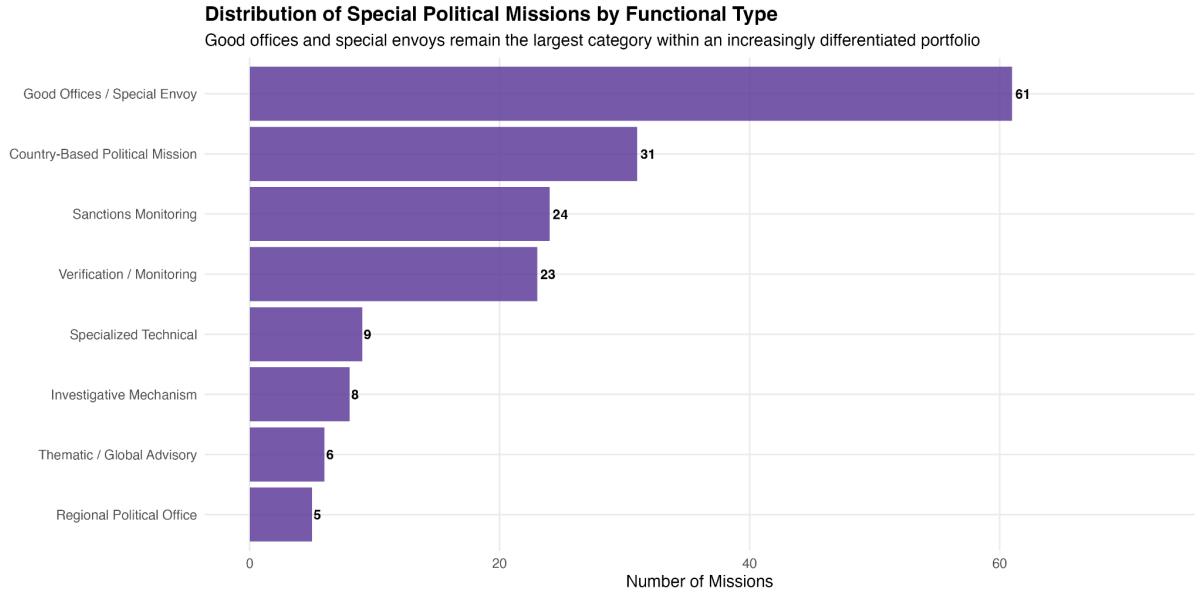


Figure 13. Distribution of Special Political Missions by Functional Type: *This figure shows the cumulative distribution of Special Political Missions (SPMs) by functional type across the full historical dataset. Good offices and special envoy mandates constitute the largest category, but the overall portfolio includes a substantial range of other mission forms, including country-based political missions, sanctions monitoring bodies, verification mechanisms, specialized technical missions, investigative mechanisms, regional political offices, and thematic or global advisory mandates. The distribution illustrates that the SPM system, while retaining a strong diplomatic core, has evolved into a functionally differentiated institutional portfolio.*

Importantly, this diversification did not occur through the displacement of older mission types. Rather, newer forms were layered onto an existing diplomatic foundation, allowing mediation-oriented mandates to coexist with more specialized instruments. The historical evolution of the portfolio therefore reflects not a simple replacement dynamic, but a cumulative process in which additional mission forms were added in response to changing political and operational demands.

This cumulative pattern becomes clearer when shifting from overall composition to the profile of newly established missions. As shown in Figure 14, the functional profile of new SPMs changed significantly across decades. The 1990s and early 2000s were marked by strong growth in country-based political missions and good offices mandates, while later decades saw a more visible presence of sanctions monitoring, regional political offices, thematic or global advisory mandates, and other specialized forms.

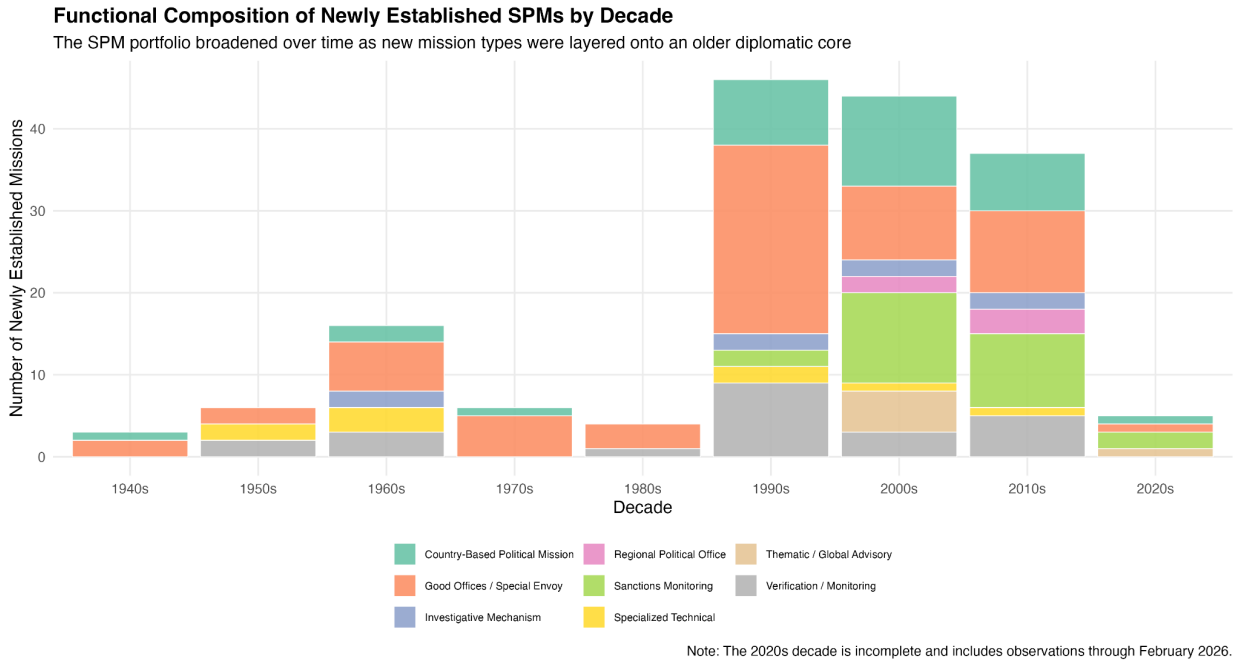


Figure 14. Functional Composition of Newly Established SPMs by Decade: *This figure displays the functional composition of Special Political Missions (SPMs) by decade of establishment, illustrating how different mission types emerged and accumulated over time.*

The significance of this shift lies not only in the increasing number of mission types, but in the fact that these forms entered the system in historically distinct waves. The post-Cold War era introduced a broader range of politically embedded missions, while the 2000s and 2010s saw the further development of narrower and more specialized instruments. Functional diversification therefore unfolded as a staged process of institutional layering, in which the UN retained mediation-oriented mandates while gradually expanding its toolkit to include more targeted and functionally differentiated forms of engagement.

Yet these newer mission types were not merely additional labels. They also carried distinct institutional profiles, as reflected in their association with different legal, technical, and operational attributes.

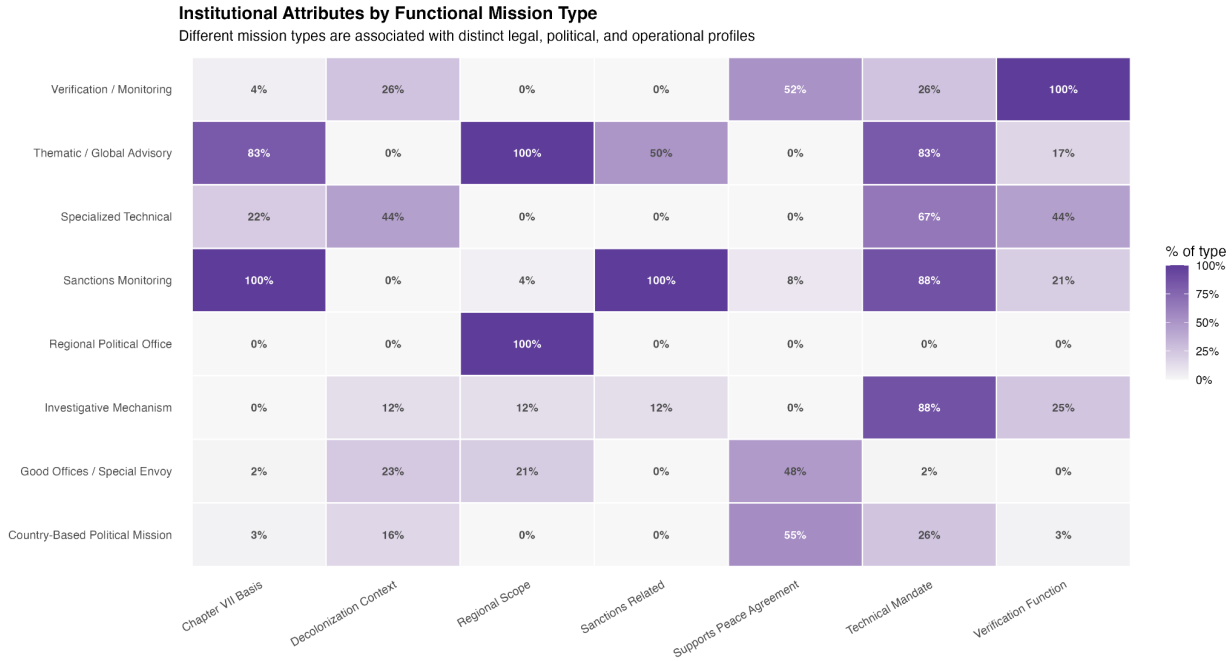


Figure 15. Institutional Attributes by Functional Mission Type: *This figure shows the share of missions within each functional category carrying selected institutional attributes, including Chapter VII basis, decolonization context, regional scope, sanctions-related functions, peace agreement support, technical mandates, and verification roles. The heatmap demonstrates that different mission types are associated with distinct attribute profiles, indicating that functional diversification in the SPM system reflects substantive variation in institutional design rather than simple categorical proliferation.*

Several patterns stand out in Figure 15. Sanctions monitoring missions are, unsurprisingly, almost entirely associated with sanctions-related functions and also display a high degree of technical content. Verification and monitoring missions are the category most strongly linked to formal verification functions, while still retaining a meaningful connection to peace agreement support. Thematic and global advisory mandates stand apart through their strong association with Chapter VII basis, regional scope, and technical mandates, indicating a distinct institutional logic that differs from territorially embedded political missions. By contrast, good offices and country-based political missions are more closely associated with support for peace agreements and broader political accompaniment than with narrowly bounded technical or sanctions-based tasks.

Functional diversification, therefore, was substantive rather than merely categorical: as the SPM system expanded, it developed mission types with genuinely different legal, political, and operational profiles.

This transformation is also visible when examining how specific functional attributes have evolved over time. A related long-term pattern is that some functional attributes became more prominent over time while others receded. Decolonization context, which was central to the early historical portfolio, declines sharply across decades and largely disappears in the contemporary period. By contrast, attributes such as Chapter VII basis, sanctions-related mandates, regional scope, and technical mandates become more visible in later decades. This shift indicates a broader transformation in what SPMs are for: from politically bounded mandates shaped by decolonization and interstate

diplomacy toward more specialized instruments designed to manage transnational threats, implement agreements, support sanctions regimes, or provide targeted technical and political support.

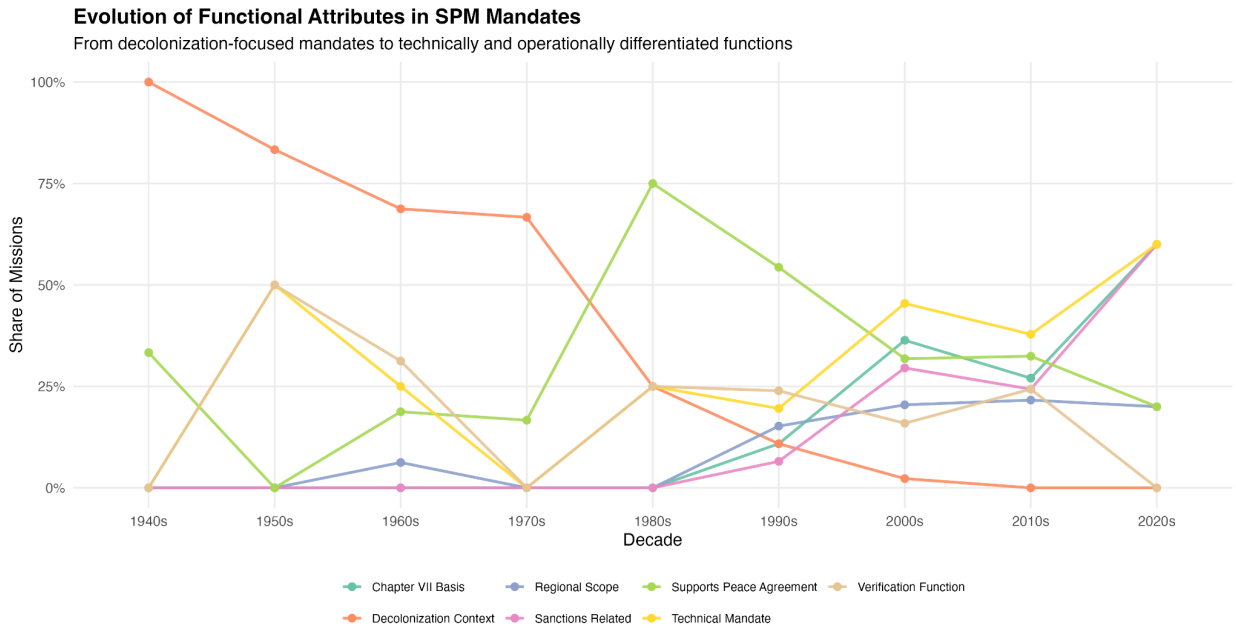


Figure 16. Evolution of Functional Attributes in SPM Mandates: *This figure shows the share of Special Political Missions (SPMs) carrying selected functional attributes by decade of establishment. It illustrates a long-term shift away from decolonization-related mandates toward increasing emphasis on peace agreement support, technical functions, sanctions-related roles, and other specialized attributes.*

This diversification should not be mistaken for simple institutional fragmentation. The overall pattern suggests a more adaptive functional architecture: the UN has retained mediation-oriented instruments while gradually adding mission forms suited to more specific governance tasks. In this sense, the contemporary SPM system is both broader and more segmented than its earlier predecessors. It no longer relies on a single dominant model of political engagement, but instead operates through a portfolio of differentiated mission types tailored to distinct conflict environments and institutional purposes.

At the same time, diversification has been accompanied by a degree of functional specialization that may also reflect political constraint. The rise of sanctions monitoring, investigative mechanisms, and technical mandates suggests that as comprehensive and multidimensional missions became harder to negotiate and sustain, the system increasingly relied on narrower formats with more bounded tasks. Functional diversification, therefore, does not only reflect innovation; it also reflects adaptation to a more contested multilateral environment in which politically ambitious mandates are more difficult to authorize and maintain.

While the previous figures examine diversification in terms of composition and functional attributes, an additional question is whether different mission types are associated with distinct temporal patterns of engagement.

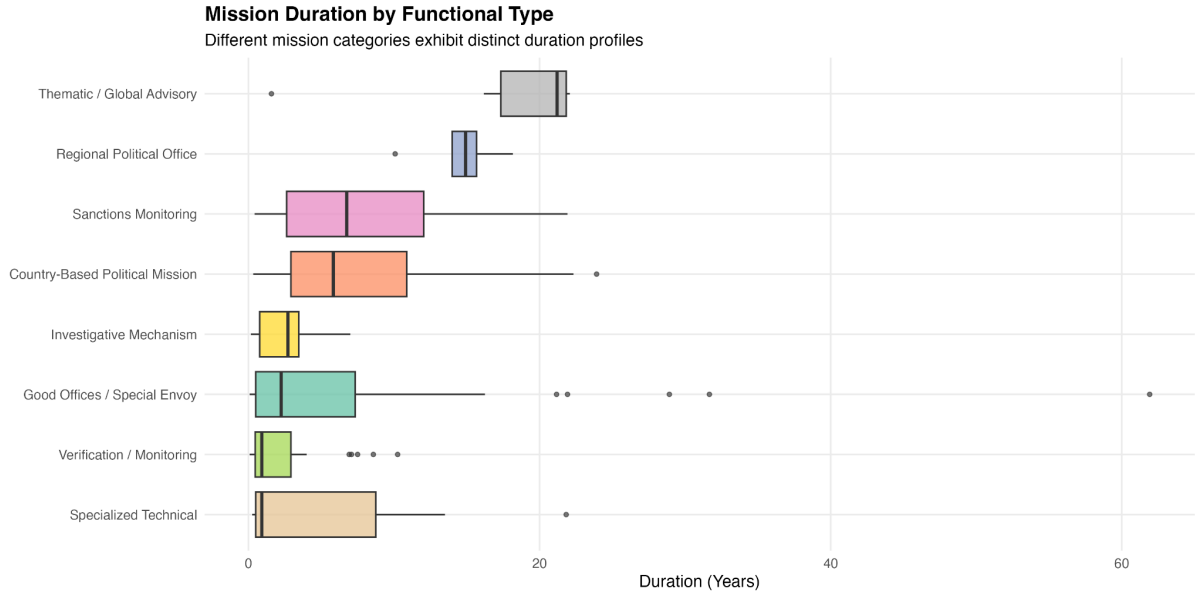


Figure 17. Mission Duration by Functional Type: This figure shows the distribution of Special Political Mission (SPM) durations across functional types. It highlights variation in both median duration and dispersion, suggesting that different mission categories may be associated with distinct temporal profiles and operational roles.

Figure 17 provides an initial indication that functional differentiation may also be reflected in mission duration. Certain mission types—such as thematic or global advisory mandates—tend to exhibit longer and more stable lifecycles, while others, including verification or investigative mechanisms, are generally shorter in duration and more tightly linked to specific operational tasks. Country-based political missions and sanctions monitoring mechanisms occupy an intermediate position, combining relatively long durations with substantial variation across cases.

These patterns suggest that functional diversification is not only a matter of mandate content, but may also correspond to different temporal logics of engagement. Some mission types appear designed for sustained political accompaniment, while others are structured as more time-bound, task-specific interventions.

3. Centralization Governance in the Security Council and the Dominance of the P3

Despite this expansion and diversification, the governance of SPMs has remained highly centralized, both in formal institutional terms and in the distribution of agenda-setting power within the Security Council. At the most basic level, the authority to establish SPMs is overwhelmingly concentrated in the Security Council. As shown in Figure 18, the vast majority of missions are authorized by the Council, while only a small minority originate from the General Assembly. This imbalance highlights the Council's dominant role in determining when and where political missions are deployed.

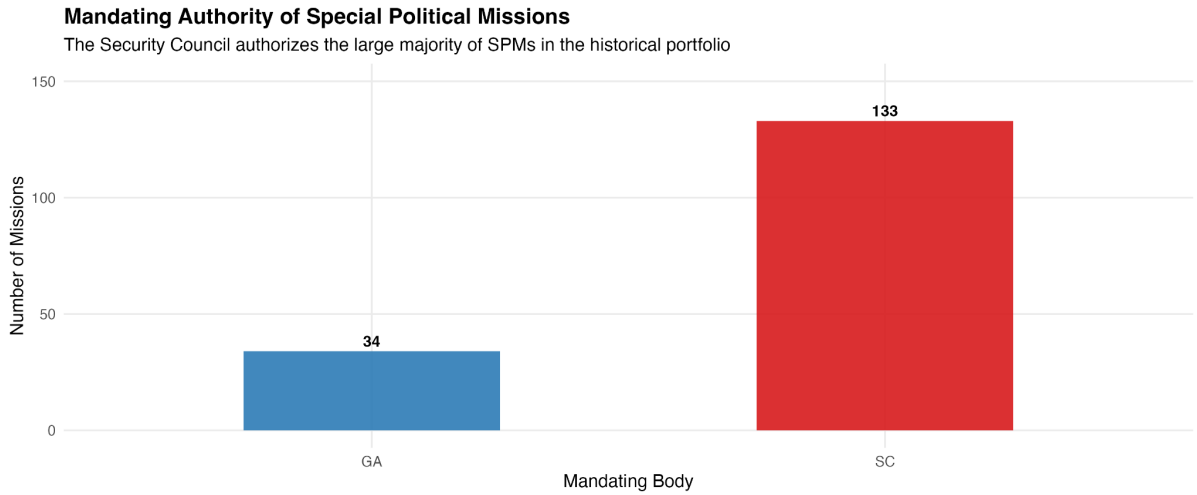


Figure 18. Mandating Authority of Special Political Missions: *This figure shows the distribution of establishing mandates for Special Political Missions (SPMs) by the mandating body. It indicates that the Security Council authorizes the large majority of missions in the historical portfolio, while the General Assembly accounts for a much smaller share.*

This concentration of authority is not only structural but also historically contingent. Figure 19 demonstrates that Security Council authorization became particularly pronounced after the end of the Cold War, with a sharp increase in Council-mandated missions from the 1990s onward. While the General Assembly played a more visible role in earlier decades, its relative importance declined as the Council emerged as the central institutional venue for authorizing political missions. The expansion of the SPM system therefore coincided with a consolidation—ranther than diffusion—of mandating authority within the Council.

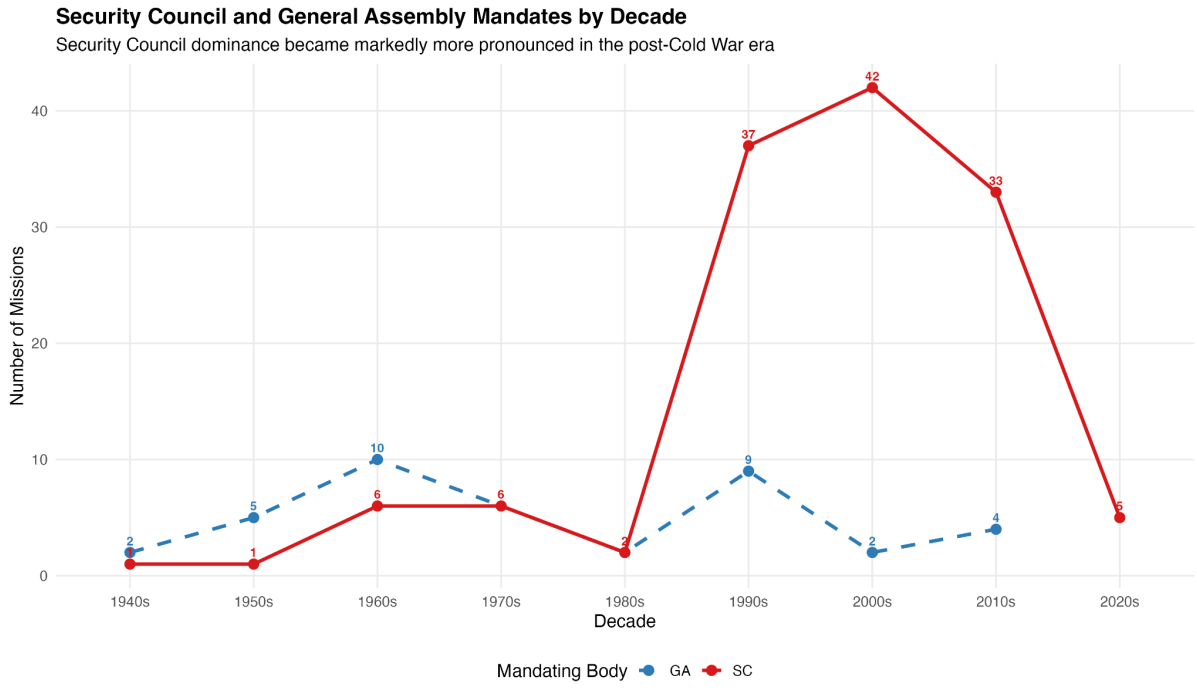


Figure 19. Security Council and General Assembly Mandates by Decade: *This figure shows the number of establishing mandates for Special Political Missions (SPMs) by decade and mandating body. It indicates that while both the Security Council and General Assembly authorized missions in earlier decades, the post-Cold War expansion of the SPM system was overwhelmingly driven by Security Council mandates.*

Beyond formal authorization, however, governance is also shaped by informal practices within the Council itself. In particular, the distribution of penholder roles reveals a strong concentration of agenda-setting power. As shown in Figure 20, mandate drafting is dominated by P3 countries, with significantly fewer cases led by elected members or mixed arrangements. This concentration indicates that control over the content and framing of establishing mandates is not evenly distributed among Council members but is instead structured around a relatively small group of actors. Governance centralization thus operates not only through formal authority, but also through informal control over drafting processes and agenda setting.

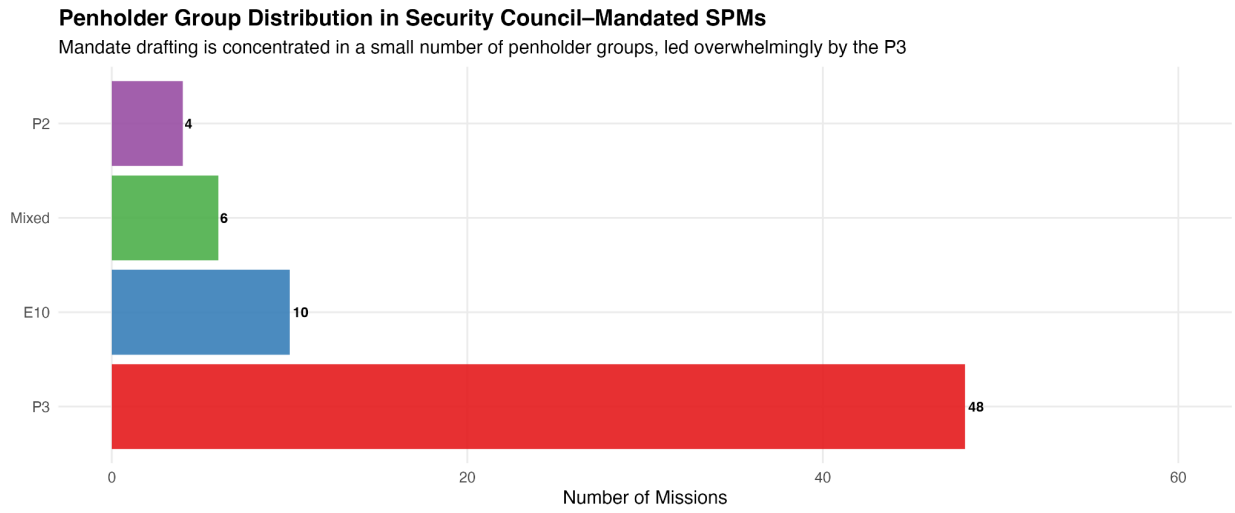


Figure 20. Penholder Group Distribution in Security Council–Mandated SPMs: *This figure shows the distribution of penholder groupings across the Security Council–mandated establishing mandates for Special Political Missions (SPMs). It indicates that mandate drafting is overwhelmingly concentrated in P3 (US, UK, France)-led arrangements, with much smaller shares associated with elected-member penholders, mixed groupings, or other configurations.*

At the same time, the way mandates are adopted suggests a more complex political dynamic. As illustrated in Figure 21, a large share of SPM mandates are adopted unanimously, while a smaller share are adopted with abstentions and only a very limited number with outright opposition. This pattern indicates a strong outward appearance of consensus at the point of formal adoption. However, such consensus should not be interpreted as evidence of low political contestation. Rather, it reflects institutional practices that often produce agreement through negotiation and compromise before formal adoption.

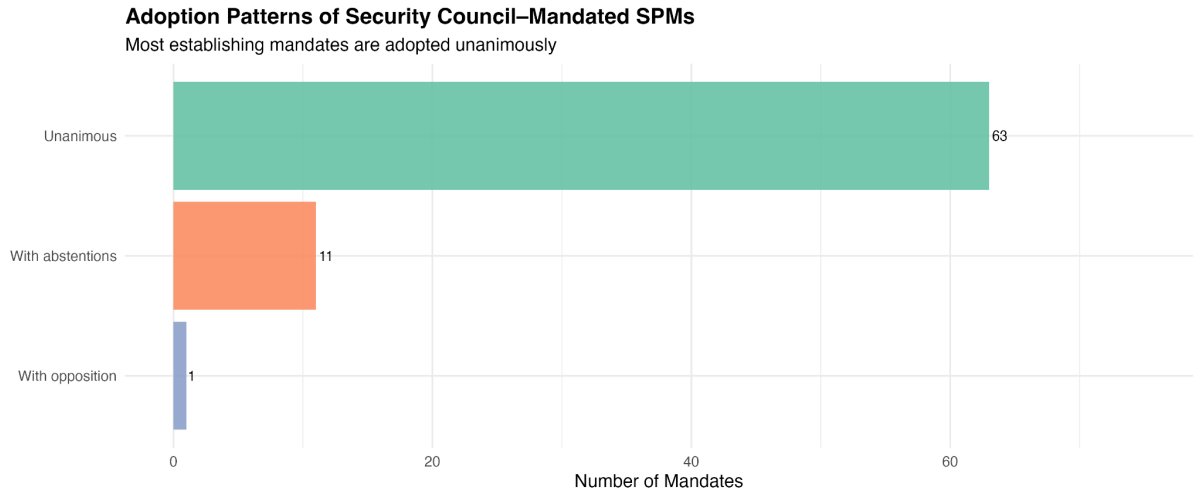


Figure 21. Adoption Patterns of Security Council–Mandated SPMs: *This figure shows the distribution of adoption vote types across Security Council–mandated establishing mandates for Special Political Missions (SPMs) with recorded votes. Most mandates are adopted unanimously, while a smaller share are adopted with abstentions and only a very limited number with outright opposition. These figures are based on adopted resolutions and therefore do not capture draft resolutions that failed to pass, including those subject to veto.*

This dynamic becomes more evident when examining the legal basis of mandates and their association with voting behavior. Figure 22 shows that most SPM mandates do not explicitly invoke a Charter chapter, while Chapter VII mandates remain relatively limited in number. Nevertheless, when Chapter VII is invoked, it tends to be associated with a higher likelihood of contested voting outcomes, as shown in Figure 23. This suggests that the legal framing of mandates is not neutral but reflects differing levels of political sensitivity and disagreement among Council members.

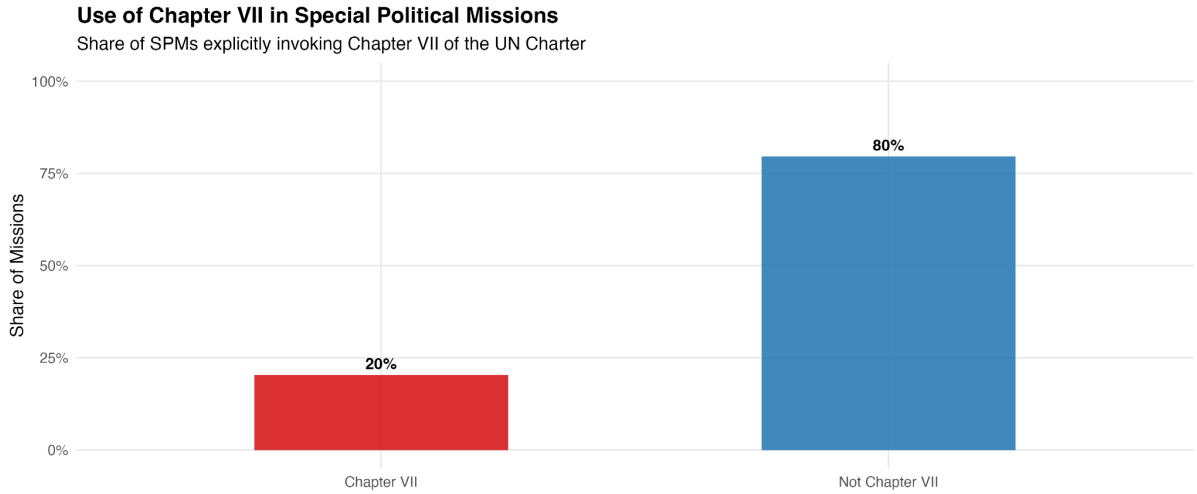


Figure 22. Use of Chapter VII in Special Political Missions: *This figure shows the share of SPMs that explicitly invoke Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Only a minority of missions rely on Chapter VII authority, while the majority operate without an explicitly specified chapter basis.*

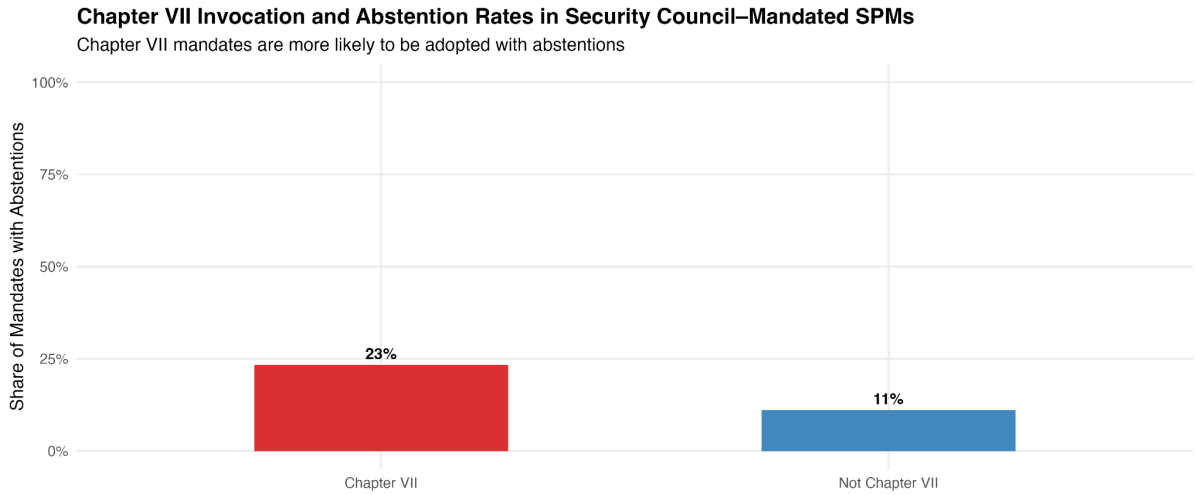


Figure 23. Chapter VII Invocation and Abstention Rates in Security Council–Mandated SPMs: *This figure compares the share of mandates adopted with abstentions among Security Council–mandated Special Political Missions that do and do not invoke Chapter VII. It shows that Chapter VII mandates are more likely to be associated with visible contestation at the point of adoption, although the majority of mandates in both categories are still adopted without abstentions.*

Taken together, these patterns indicate that SPM governance is centralized along multiple dimensions. Formally, authority is concentrated in the Security Council; operationally, mandate drafting is dominated by a small group of penholders; and politically, decision-making is structured through patterns of negotiation, legal framing, and managed consensus. The result is a governance architecture that is both hierarchical and adaptive, combining concentrated authority with institutional practices that enable agreement in a politically fragmented environment.

4. The Gradual "Southernization" of SPM Leadership

Leadership patterns in Special Political Missions (SPMs) reveal a governance structure that is simultaneously unequal in representation and differentiated across time, space, and mission function. While leadership appointments formally fall under the authority of the Secretary-General, the empirical distribution of mission heads suggests the presence of underlying political and institutional logics that shape who leads SPMs.

At the aggregate level, two broad patterns stand out. First, leadership appointments show a modest predominance of Global South nationals. As illustrated in Figure 24, approximately 57 percent of first mission heads originate from the Global South, compared to 43 percent from the Global North. This suggests that, at least in aggregate terms, leadership selection reflects a degree of geographic balancing within the UN system. Second, however, gender representation remains highly uneven. As shown in Figure 24, 93 percent of first mission heads are male, with only a small minority of missions led by women. This indicates that, despite broader institutional commitments to gender parity, leadership in SPMs continues to be overwhelmingly male-dominated.

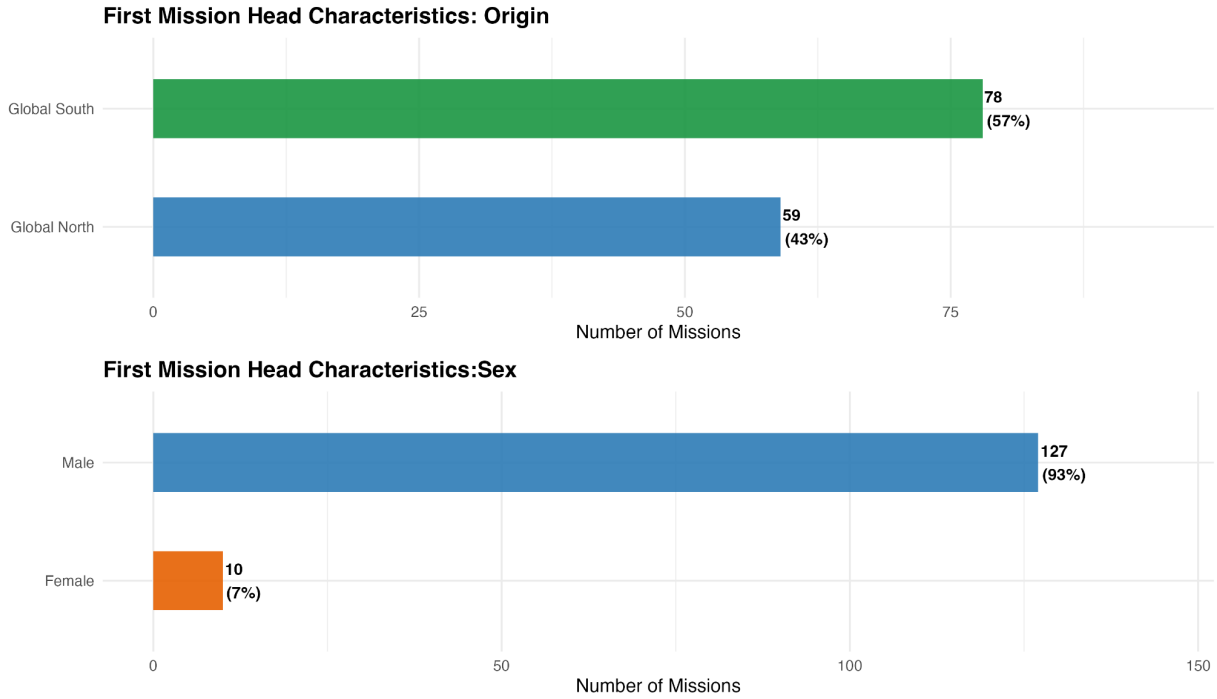


Figure 24. Distribution of First Mission Heads by Origin and Gender: *This figure shows the overall distribution of first-appointed mission heads in Special Political Missions (SPMs) by geographic origin (Global South vs. Global North) and gender. It indicates that a slight majority of mission heads originate from the Global South, while leadership remains overwhelmingly male-dominated, with female representation accounting for only a small share of appointments.*

These aggregate patterns mask important temporal variation. Figure 25 shows that female leadership has historically been extremely limited, with most decades characterized by exclusively male mission heads. Only in more recent decades—most notably the 2010s—does female representation become more visible, reaching roughly one quarter of appointments. While this suggests some gradual progress, the overall trajectory remains uneven and far from parity. Female leadership appears episodic rather than structurally embedded, indicating that gains are recent and not yet consolidated.

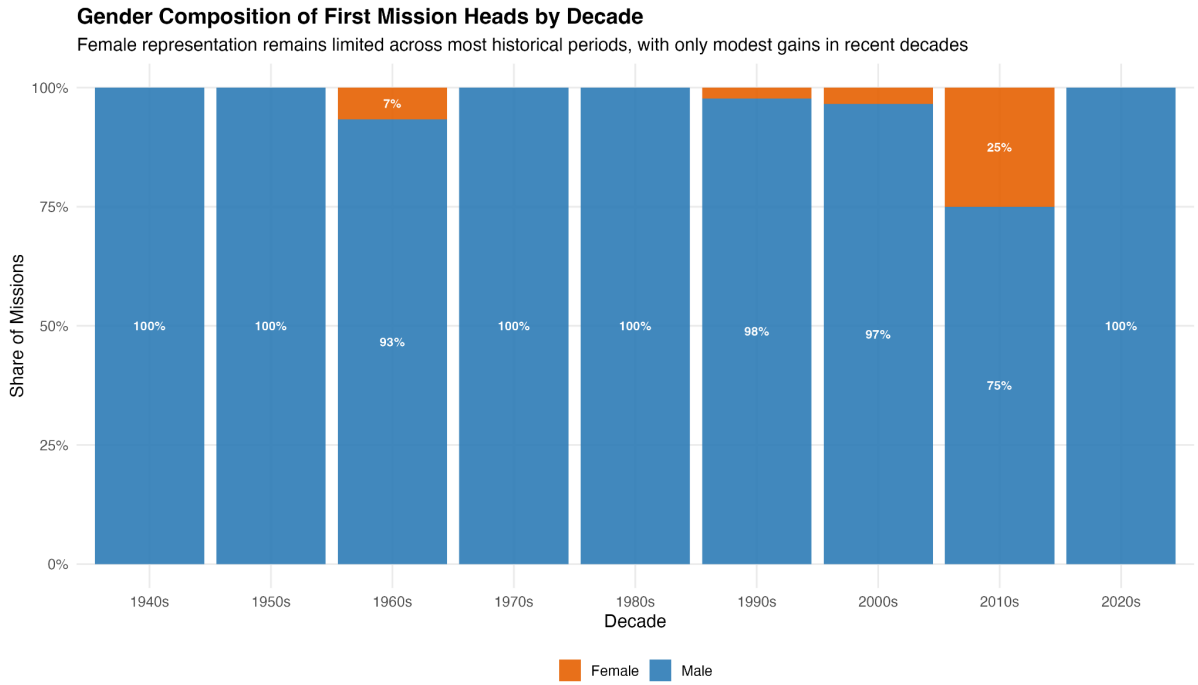


Figure 25. Gender Composition of First Mission Heads by Decade: *This figure shows the gender distribution of first-appointed mission heads in Special Political Missions (SPMs) by decade. It indicates that leadership has remained overwhelmingly male-dominated across most historical periods, with female representation becoming more visible only in recent decades and still remaining limited overall.*

A similar temporal dynamic can be observed in the geographic origin of mission heads. As shown in Figure 26, early decades were dominated by Global North leadership, but this pattern shifted significantly from the mid-Cold War period onward. From the 1950s and 1960s, Global South representation increased substantially, in some decades exceeding two-thirds of appointments. The post–Cold War period exhibits a more balanced distribution, with both Global North and Global South actors playing significant roles. This suggests that leadership appointments have gradually adapted to broader shifts in UN membership, legitimacy concerns, and expectations of geographic representation, even as no single pattern has remained dominant over time.

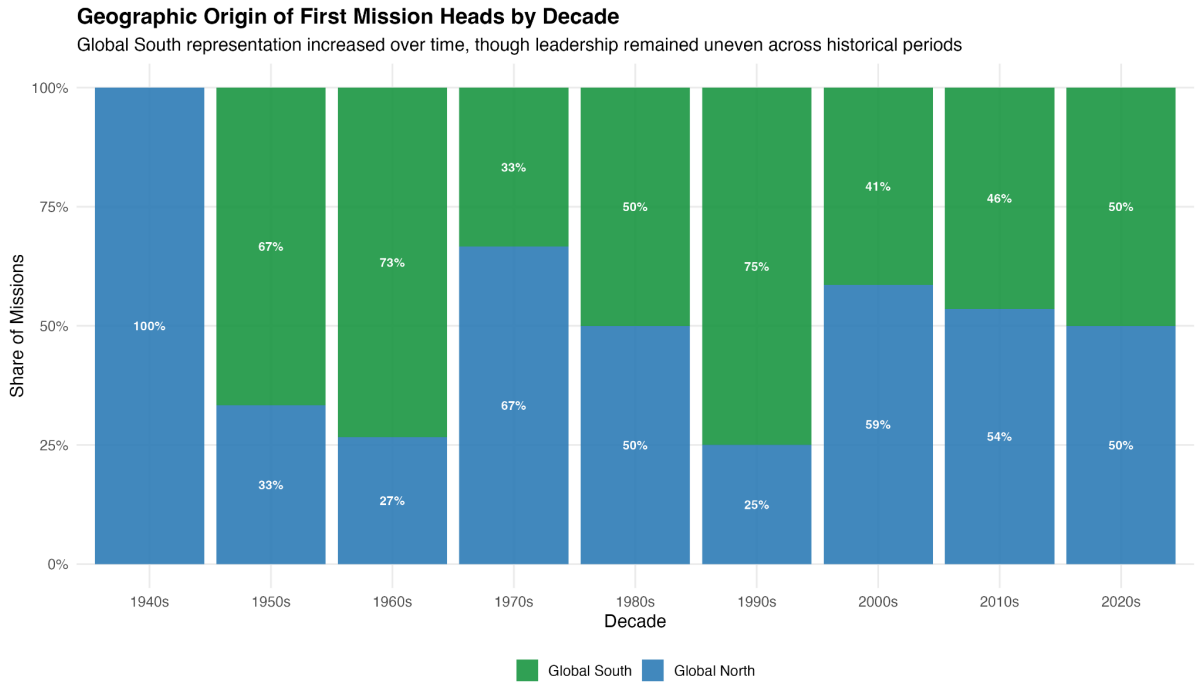


Figure 26. Geographic Origin of First Mission Heads by Decade: *This figure shows the distribution of first-appointed SPM mission heads by geographic origin across decades. It indicates that Global North nationals dominated early appointments, while Global South representation increased substantially over time, though the balance between the two remained uneven across historical periods.*

Beyond temporal trends, leadership patterns also vary systematically across regions of mission deployment. Figure 27 examines the relationship between mission head origin and host country region. A clear alignment emerges in the Global South: in Africa and the Americas, a majority of missions are led by Global South nationals, indicating a tendency toward regional or South-based representation. In Asia, however, the pattern is reversed, with Global North nationals leading a majority of missions. In Europe, leadership is exclusively drawn from the Global North. These differences suggest that leadership selection is not governed by a uniform principle of representation, but instead reflects region-specific political dynamics, including perceptions of neutrality, expertise, and geopolitical sensitivity.

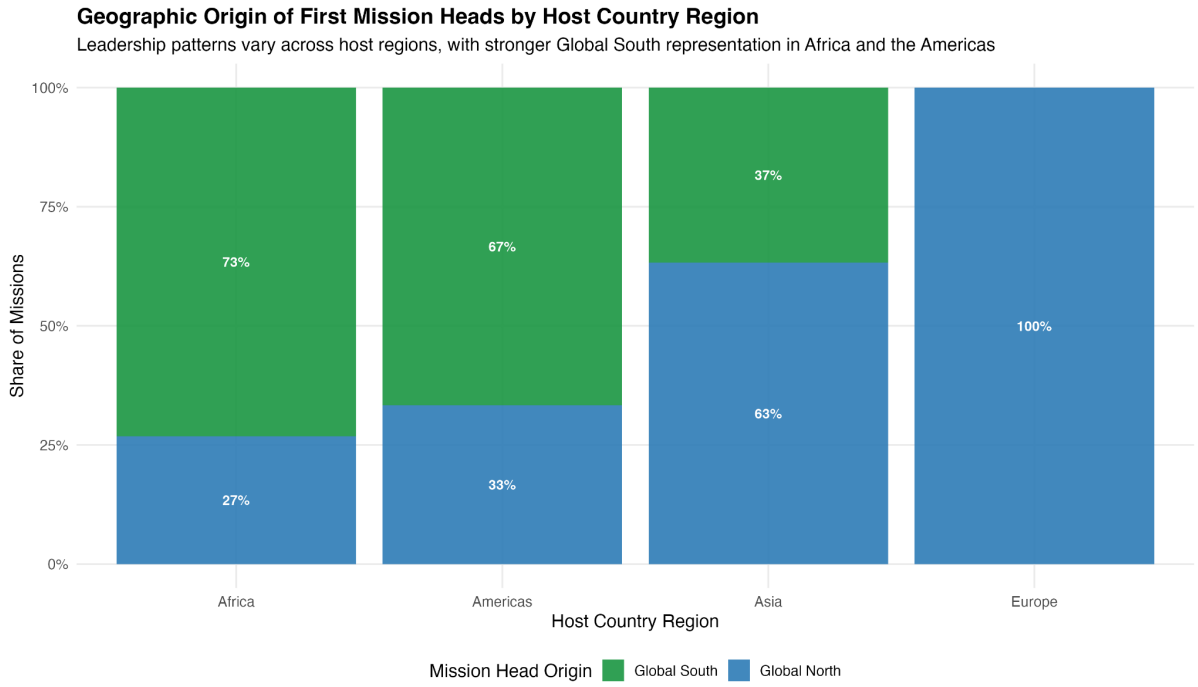


Figure 27. Geographic Origin of First Mission Heads by Host Country Region: *This figure shows the geographic origin of first-appointed SPM mission heads by host country region. It indicates that Global South leadership is more prevalent in Africa and the Americas, while Global North leadership is more common in Asia and universal in Europe, suggesting that leadership selection varies systematically across regional contexts.*

Functional variation further reinforces this pattern of differentiated leadership. As shown in Figure 28, mission type is strongly associated with the geographic origin of leadership. Regional political offices and verification or monitoring missions are more likely to be led by Global South nationals, suggesting that these functions are considered more compatible with locally grounded or regionally proximate leadership. In contrast, thematic or global advisory roles are more frequently led by Global North nationals, indicating that these positions may be associated with different expectations regarding technical expertise, global legitimacy, or institutional trust. Other mission types, such as country-based political missions and good office roles, show a more balanced distribution, reflecting a hybrid logic of representation and capability.

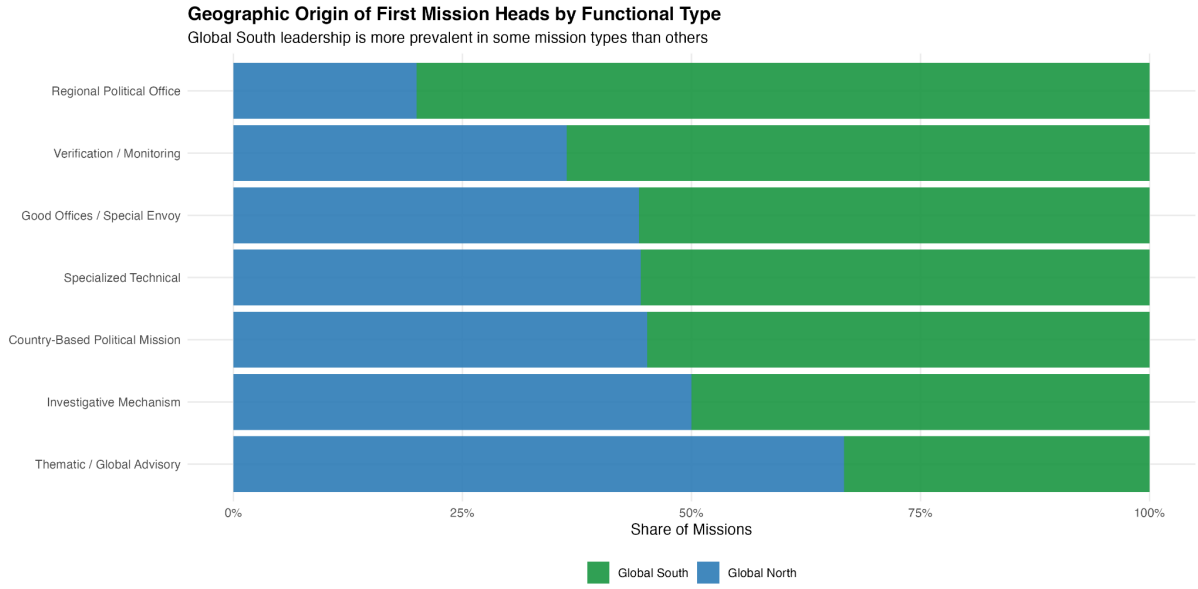


Figure 28. Geographic Origin of First Mission Heads by Functional Type: *This figure shows the geographic origin of first-appointed SPM mission heads across functional mission types. It indicates that leadership composition varies by mission function, with Global South nationals more prevalent in regional political offices and verification or monitoring missions, and Global North nationals more prominent in thematic or global advisory roles.*

These patterns suggest that leadership in SPMs is shaped by multiple, overlapping logics rather than a single governing principle. Gender representation remains structurally constrained, with only limited signs of recent change. Geographic representation, by contrast, appears more responsive to institutional and political pressures, producing a partial shift toward Global South leadership over time. At the same time, both regional context and mission function condition how these broader patterns are expressed in practice. Leadership selection thus reflects a negotiated balance between representation, perceived expertise, and political acceptability, operating within a broader governance structure that remains uneven but adaptive.

These historical patterns suggest that the evolution of Special Political Missions has not been linear, but structured by a combination of expansion, differentiation, and concentration. Over time, the SPM system has moved from a relatively limited and geographically concentrated set of deployments to a globally distributed and functionally diverse institutional portfolio. Yet this expansion has not been accompanied by a corresponding decentralization of authority. Instead, governance remains highly centralized within the Security Council, with agenda-setting power concentrated among a small group of actors, particularly the P3.

At the same time, leadership patterns reveal a parallel dynamic of partial adaptation. While gender representation remains structurally constrained, geographic representation has shifted more noticeably, with increasing participation from Global South nationals over time. However, this shift is neither uniform nor unconditional. Both regional context and mission function continue to shape leadership selection, reflecting a negotiated balance between representation, perceived expertise, and political acceptability.

These findings point to a system that is simultaneously hierarchical and adaptive: authority is concentrated, but practices evolve in response to changing political, institutional, and legitimacy pressures. The SPM architecture that emerges from this historical analysis is therefore not only a product of institutional design, but also of ongoing negotiation among member states and within the UN system.

Building on this macro-level perspective, the following section turns to cross-mission analysis to examine how these structural patterns are expressed in specific cases and mandate cycles. By moving from system-wide trends to mandate-level variation, the analysis seeks to identify the mechanisms through which governance, mandate design, and implementation dynamics interact in practice.

V. Cross-Mission Analysis (2010-2026)

Building on the historical overview presented in the previous section, this chapter shifts from long-term institutional evolution to a systematic empirical analysis of mandate dynamics across Special Political Missions between 2010 and 2026. Drawing on a mandate-cycle dataset capturing discrete renewal decisions, the analysis focuses on missions governed through standardized renewal processes — primarily country-based political field missions, regional political offices, sanctions monitoring bodies, and panels of experts — enabling consistent comparison across time and mission types. Rather than revisiting historical trajectories, this section examines observable patterns in mandate duration, voting behavior, and changes in mandate design, with the aim of identifying system-wide trends in how mandates are structured, maintained, and adjusted under contemporary Security Council conditions.

A. Temporal Structure: Stability and Renewal Cycles

A defining feature of Special Political Missions (SPMs) over the 2010-2026 period is the remarkable stability of their mandate renewal structure. Across missions and over time, mandate durations cluster tightly around a 12-month cycle, reflecting a highly standardized annual renewal practice within the Security Council. This pattern holds consistently across mission types, indicating that renewal periodicity is not primarily driven by functional variation, but rather by institutional convention. Figure 29 presents the distribution of mandate cycle durations across all observed renewal events.

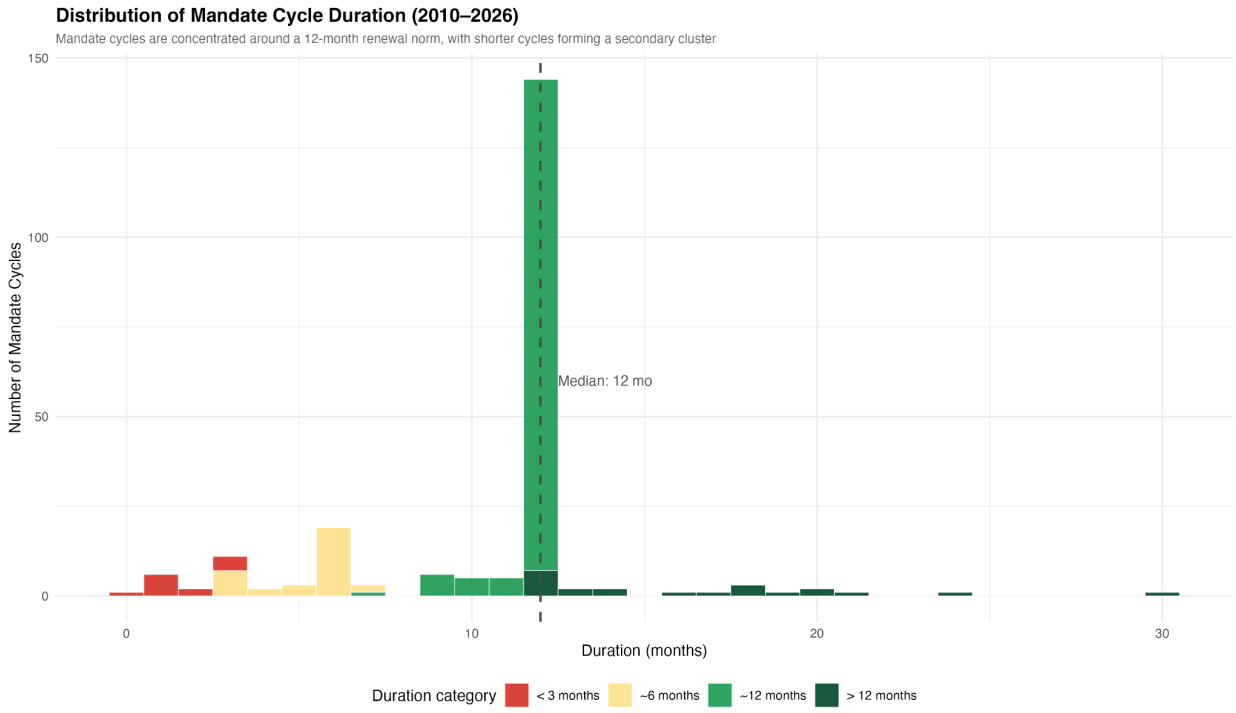


Figure 29. Distribution of Mandate Cycle Duration (2010-2026): *Mandate cycles are strongly concentrated around a 12-month renewal norm, indicating a standardized annual cycle. Shorter durations form a distinct secondary cluster, reflecting episodic shorter renewals under conditions of political uncertainty or operational constraint.*

While this annual rhythm dominates, deviations from the one-year cycle—particularly shorter renewal periods—appear intermittently and are analytically significant. These shorter mandates are not randomly distributed, but tend to emerge in a range of conditions, including both moments of political uncertainty within the Council and periods of rapidly deteriorating security or operational conditions on the ground. As shown in Figure 30, short renewal cycles do not follow a steady trend, but instead appear episodically, often corresponding to moments of political strain.

At the same time, the drivers of shorter renewal cycles vary across cases. In some instances, reduced duration reflects Council-level disagreement and uncertainty; in others, it may serve as a deliberate operational decision to preserve flexibility in rapidly evolving contexts. For example, the shift to six-month mandates for UNSMIL in 2014 occurred amid acute security deterioration and a mission evacuation, at a time when the Council sought to maintain responsiveness to a fluid situation. Shorter renewal periods should therefore not be interpreted as a uniform signal of political disagreement, but rather as a context-dependent indicator shaped by both political and operational considerations.

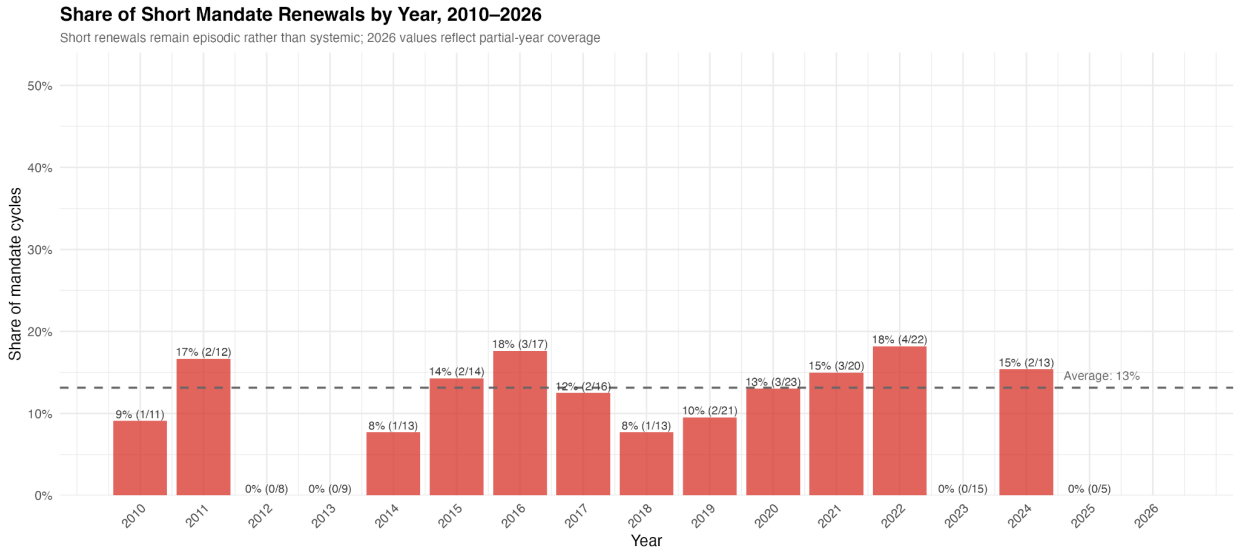


Figure 30. Share of short mandate renewals by year, 2010-2026: *Short renewal cycles occur episodically rather than as a sustained trend. The drivers of shorter cycles vary across cases, reflecting a combination of Council-level political dynamics and rapidly evolving operational conditions on the ground. The dashed line denotes the period average (13%). Values for 2026 reflect partial-year coverage.*

At the aggregate level, however, these deviations do not disrupt the overall structure. Mean and median mandate durations remain stable over time, suggesting that the institutional framework governing mandate renewals has remained largely intact despite evolving conditions on the ground and increasing geopolitical complexity. This persistence points to a form of procedural continuity within the Council, even as substantive aspects of mandates—and the political dynamics surrounding them—undergo more visible change.

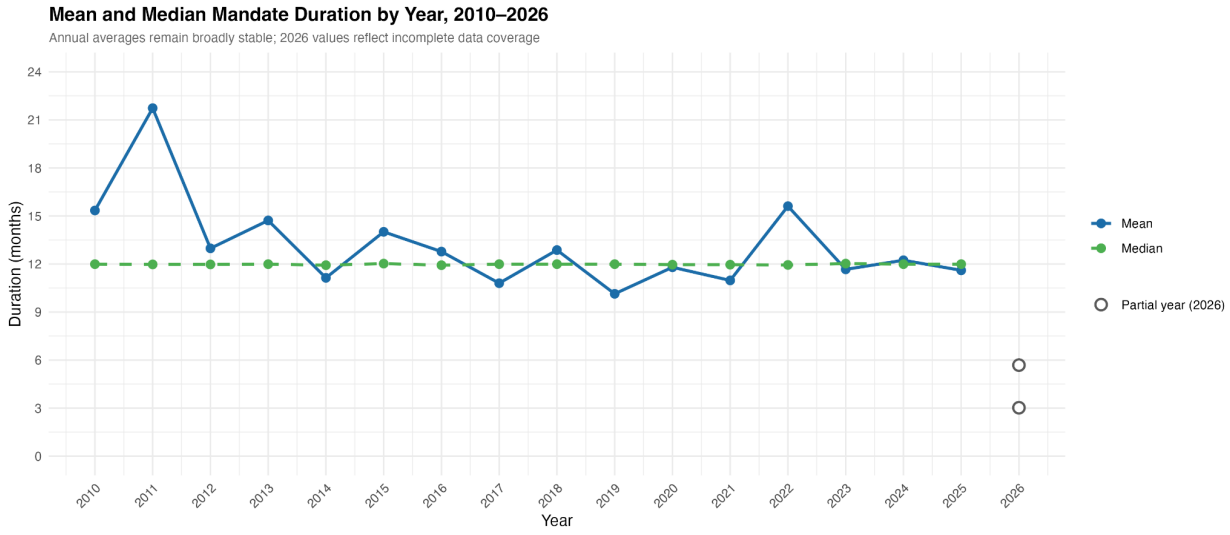


Figure 31. Mean and median mandate duration per year, 2010-2026: *Average mandate durations remain closely centered around the one-year renewal norm, with limited variation over time despite episodic deviations in individual cycles. The dashed line indicates the median. The spike observed in 2011 is attributable to a small number of long-duration mandate cycles associated with global and technical mechanisms, whose renewal logic differs from standard country-based missions, illustrating the sensitivity of annual averages to compositional effects. This suggests that even within cycle-based governance, different institutional logics coexist, with country-based mandates exhibiting high temporal standardization and global mechanisms displaying greater flexibility in renewal structure. Values for 2026 reflect partial-year coverage.*

Taken together, the evidence indicates that SPM mandates are embedded in a highly routinized renewal system that prioritizes temporal consistency. This stability provides an important baseline for interpreting subsequent patterns in voting behavior and mandate evolution, where change is more pronounced. This underlying stability is reflected in the consistency of average mandate durations over time, as shown in Figure 31.

B. Political Dynamics: From Consensus to Contestation

At an aggregate level, mandate renewals for Special Political Missions (SPMs) appear to be governed by a strong norm of procedural consensus. As shown in Figure 32, the majority of mandate cycles between 2010 and 2026 were adopted unanimously (69 percent), with an additional 18 percent adopted without a formal vote. Only a small minority involved abstentions (13 percent), and outright opposition from elected members (E10) was exceedingly rare. Taken at face value, this distribution suggests a highly cooperative decision-making environment within the Security Council.

However, this apparent consensus should be interpreted with caution. Because the analysis is based on adopted resolutions, it does not capture draft resolutions that failed to pass, including those subject to veto. The veto — and the threat of its use — therefore represents a structurally significant but analytically less visible dimension of Security Council decision-making. This dynamic is sometimes described as a “pocket veto”, whereby draft resolutions may be withdrawn, never tabled, or substantively diluted in anticipation of a veto before reaching a formal vote. [92]

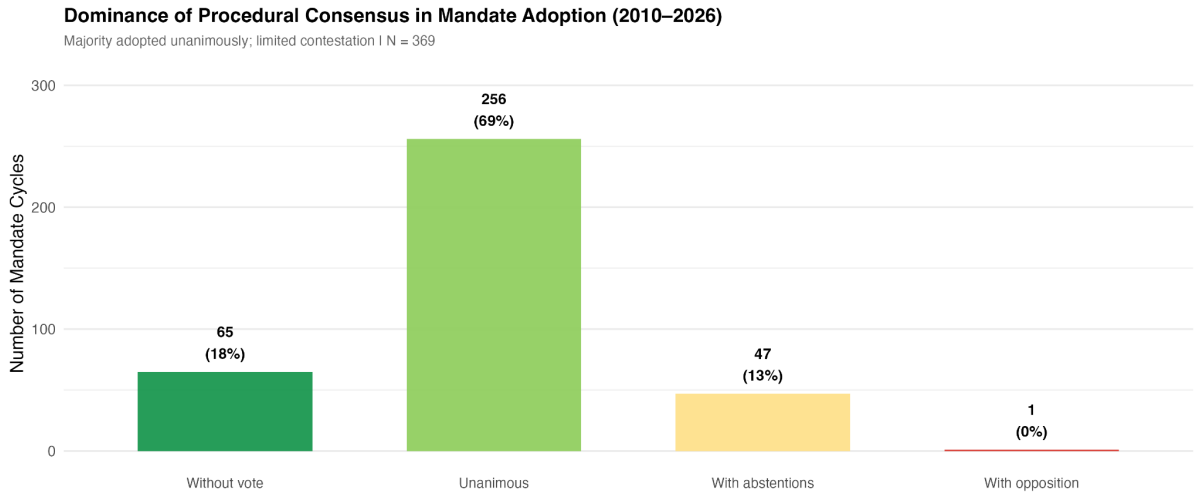


Figure 32. Distribution of mandate adoption types, 2010-2026: *The vast majority of mandate cycles are adopted unanimously (69%) or without a vote (18%), indicating a strong norm of procedural consensus within the Security Council. Instances of contestation—measured through abstentions (13%) or opposition (rare) — remain limited at the aggregate level. These figures are based on adopted resolutions and therefore do not capture draft resolutions that failed to pass, including those subject to veto. A notable case is the UN-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), whose mandate was vetoed in 2017, illustrating that SPM-adjacent mechanisms are not immune to formal veto action.*

However, this aggregate picture masks a significant temporal shift. When disaggregated over time, a different pattern emerges. As illustrated in Figure 33, the share of contested mandate renewals—defined as those adopted with abstentions or opposition—remained minimal throughout the early 2010s but began to increase steadily after 2017. This trend becomes particularly pronounced after 2020, with several recent years exhibiting markedly high levels of contestation. Although 2026 reflects partial-year coverage, the persistence of elevated contestation rates in the preceding years suggests that this is not a statistical anomaly but a structural shift in Council dynamics.

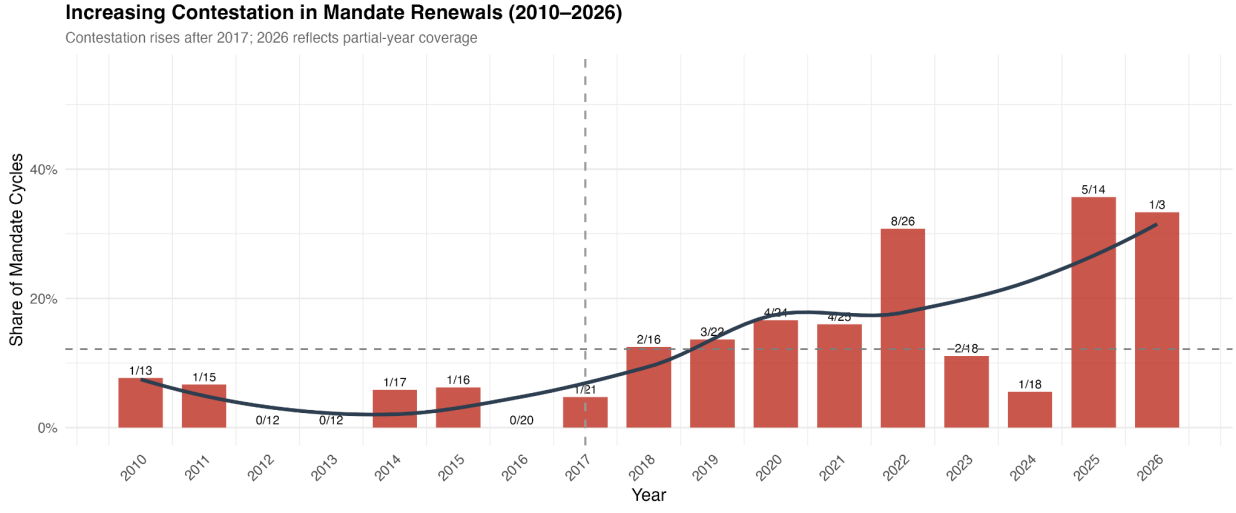


Figure 33. Share of contested mandate renewals by year, 2010-2026: *Contestation—defined as mandates adopted with abstentions or opposition—remains minimal throughout the early 2010s but increases noticeably after 2017, with several recent years exhibiting elevated levels of disagreement. The fitted trend line highlights the upward trajectory over time, while the vertical reference line marks the approximate onset of this shift. Values for 2026 reflect partial-year coverage and should be interpreted with caution.*

This evolution from consensus toward contestation is not random. Rather, it reflects broader shifts in geopolitical dynamics within the Council, particularly among the

permanent members. While the penholder system—whereby one or more Council members take the lead in drafting resolutions—remains structurally stable, it continues to shape both the content of mandates and the political dynamics surrounding their adoption. In this context, concentrated drafting authority may shape how contestation is expressed when underlying political divisions are pronounced.

As shown in Figure 34, penholdership remains highly concentrated among the P3 (United Kingdom, United States, and France), with the United Kingdom emerging as the most active penholder across mandate cycles. This concentration reflects long-standing institutional practices and advantages, involving drafting capacity, procedural expertise, and linguistic dominance in English-language negotiations. While broader geopolitical shifts have contributed to increasing contestation, this structural concentration of drafting authority has remained remarkably resilient.

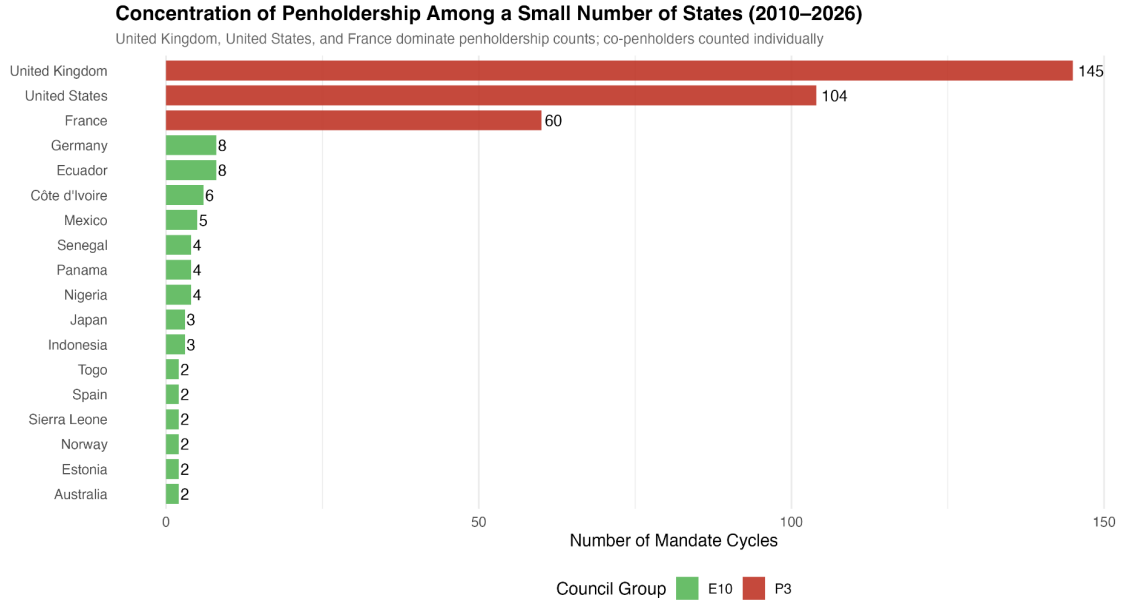


Figure 34. Concentration of Penholdership Among a Small Number of States (2010 - 2026): *Penholdership is highly concentrated among a small number of states, with the United Kingdom, United States, and France accounting for the highest number of mandate cycles. This distribution highlights the continued structural dominance of the P3 in resolution drafting. Counts are calculated across mandate cycles in the dataset, with co-penholders counted individually.*

At the same time, there are signs of gradual change. Figure 35 shows that while P3-led penholdership continues to dominate throughout the period, mixed penholder arrangements—where drafting responsibilities are shared among multiple states—begin to emerge more frequently after 2022. Figure 36 further illustrates a rise in co-penholdership arrangements, suggesting a partial diffusion of drafting authority. These developments indicate that while the penholder system remains structurally entrenched, it is not entirely static.

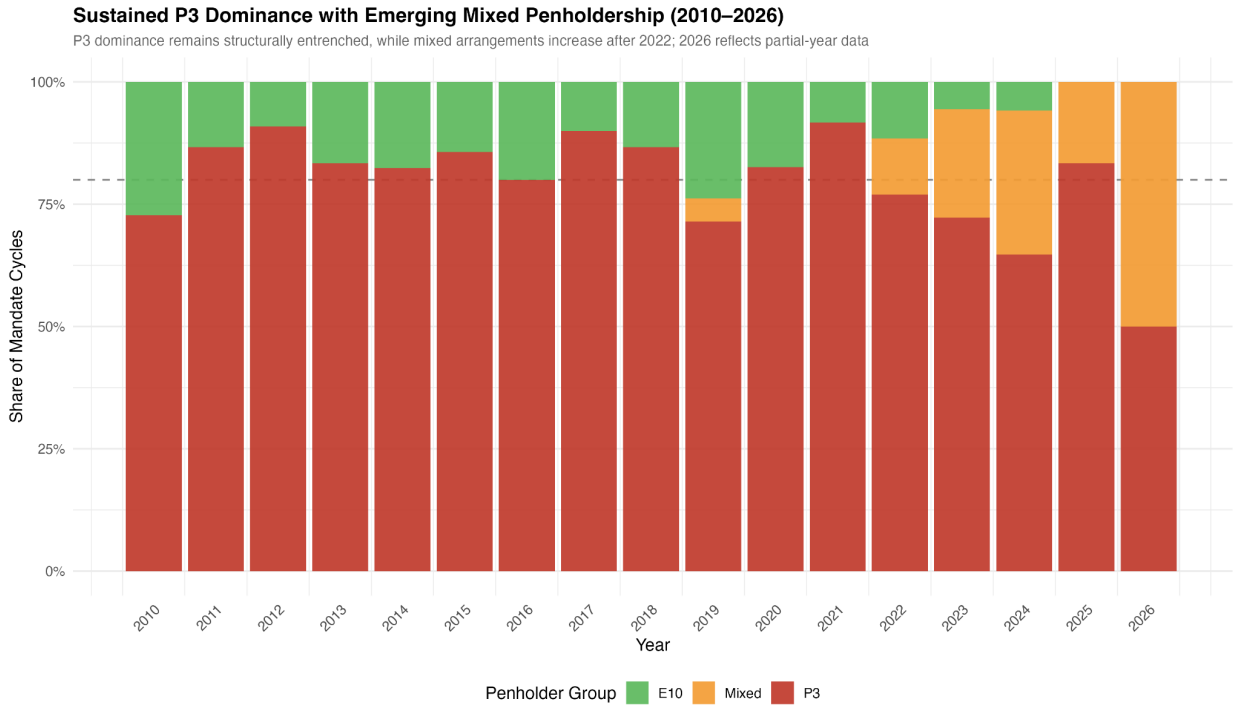


Figure 35. Sustained P3 Dominance with Emerging Mixed Penholdership: *The composition of penholder groups over time shows the sustained dominance of the P3 (United Kingdom, United States, and France) in drafting Security Council mandates. While this dominance remains structurally entrenched, mixed penholder arrangements—where drafting responsibilities are shared—begin to increase after 2022, suggesting a partial diffusion of drafting authority. The P2 category is not included due to the very limited number of observations and their procedural distinctness (in this dataset, this consists of a single case: China serving as penholder for UNAMA in 2026), and is therefore not directly comparable to other penholder groups. Data for 2026 reflect partial-year coverage and should be interpreted with caution, as the apparent variation in penholder distribution is likely driven by incomplete annual data.*

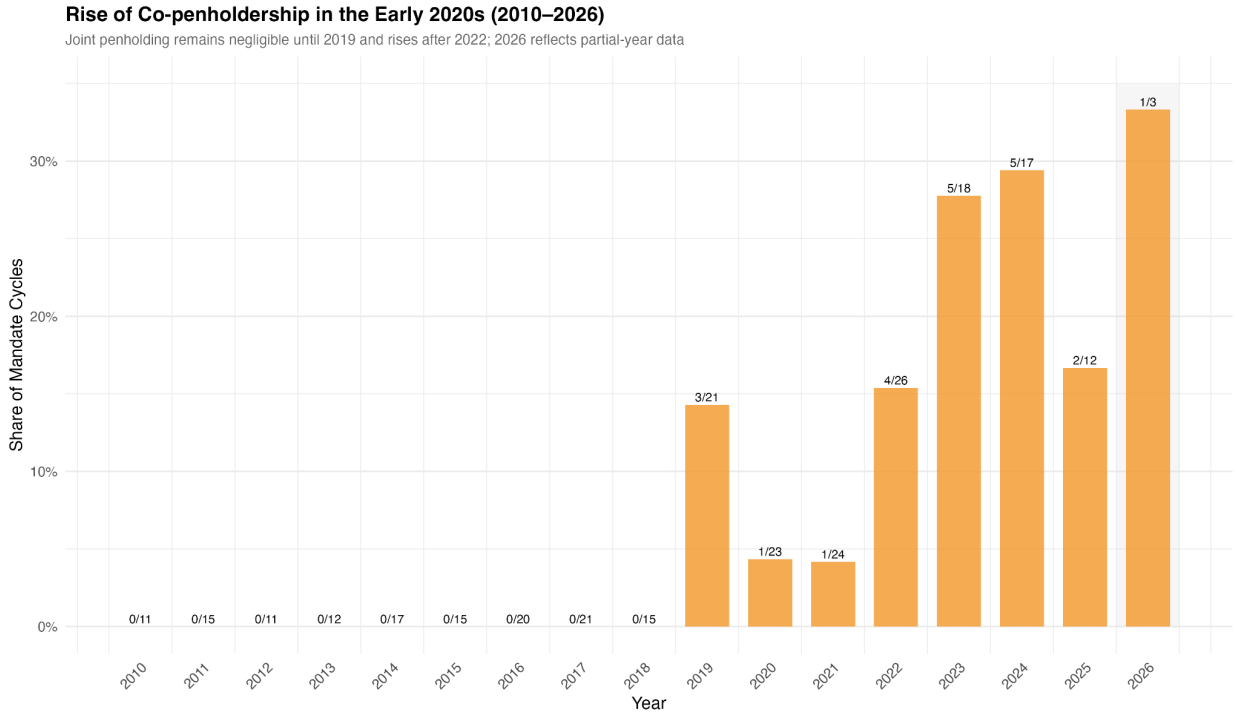


Figure 36. Rise of Co-penholdership in the Early 2020s (2010-2026): *Share of mandate cycles involving co-penholdership, 2010-2026. Joint penholding arrangements are virtually absent through most of the 2010s, begin to appear after 2019, and increase more visibly after 2022. This pattern suggests a recent, though still limited, diffusion of drafting authority beyond single-state penholder arrangements. Values for 2026 reflect partial-year coverage and should be interpreted with caution, as the apparent increase is driven by incomplete annual data.*

The distribution of penholdership is associated with patterns of contestation, though this relationship should be interpreted as suggestive rather than causal. As shown in Figure 37, mandates led by P3 penholders are disproportionately associated with contested outcomes, including abstentions and, in rare cases, opposition. By contrast, mandates led by elected members (E10) are far more likely to be adopted unanimously or without a vote. Here, "without a vote" refers to cases—particularly for certain regional or special political missions—where renewals occur through exchanges of letters rather than formal Council voting, as seen in missions such as UNOWAS and UNOCA.

Mixed arrangements fall between these two patterns, suggesting a more intermediate dynamic. However, this relationship should be interpreted with caution. The inclusion of mandates renewed through non-standard procedures, including exchanges of letters, may affect the observed distribution, as such processes do not involve the same drafting dynamics or voting behavior as standard Security Council resolutions. Co-penholdership may also be more common in comparatively less contentious mandates, and E10-led processes may reflect a greater willingness to compromise or more limited negotiating leverage, rather than the effects of penholdership structure alone.

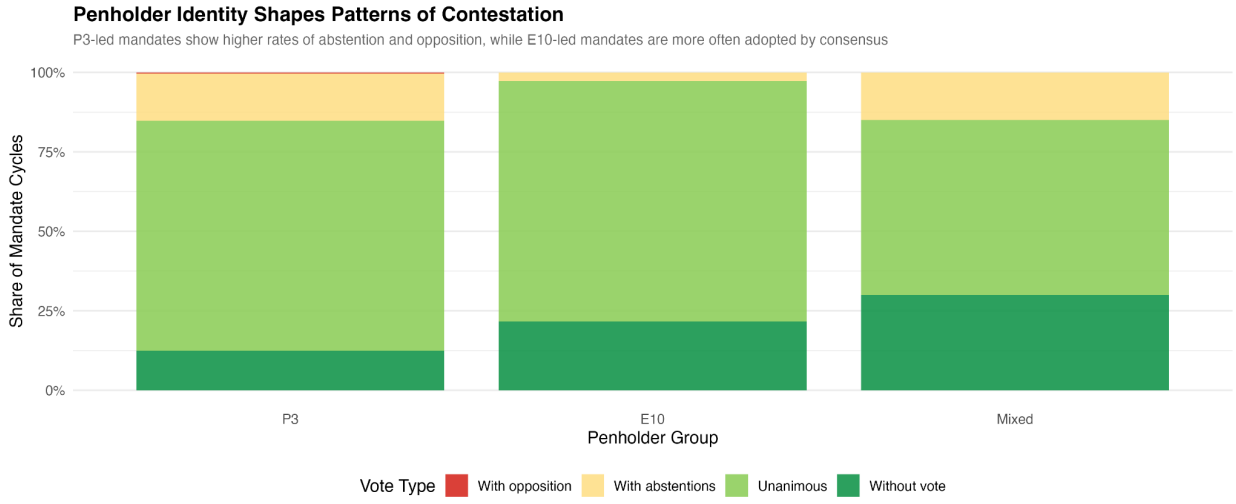


Figure 37. Adoption outcomes vary systematically by penholder group: *Mandates led by the P3 exhibit higher shares of abstentions and the only instances of outright opposition, while E10-led mandates are more frequently adopted by consensus. Mixed arrangements fall between these two patterns. Across the dataset, P3-led mandates account for 291 mandate cycles, E10-led mandates for 37, and mixed arrangements for 20. The P2 category is not shown in the figure due to the very limited number of observations and their procedural distinctness (in this dataset, this consists of a single case: China serving as penholder for UNAMA in 2026).*

A further dimension of this dynamic can be observed in the differentiated participation of permanent members themselves. While the penholder system is structurally dominated by the P3, this dominance does not extend uniformly across all permanent members. Notably, China is almost entirely absent from penholdership roles across the

period under study, with only a very recent and highly contested instance of assuming drafting responsibility in UNAMA, which has been widely interpreted as a potential shift in China's approach to Security Council engagement. [93] This absence is analytically significant, as it highlights that participation in Council decision-making is not only a function of formal power but also of strategic choice and institutional practice.

This pattern is also consistent with the broader absence of Chinese nationals in senior mission leadership roles within the mission-level dataset. In particular, China is the only permanent member not represented among first mission heads of newly established Special Political Missions. Taken together, these patterns suggest a mode of engagement that prioritizes influence through negotiation and oversight rather than direct ownership of either drafting or operational leadership.

Rather than seeking visibility through drafting ownership, China appears to prioritize influence through negotiation and selective intervention in the consultation process. In this sense, it adopts a negotiation-focused rather than drafting-intensive diplomatic approach. This strategy reduces exposure to political responsibility associated with authorship—particularly in contentious mandates—while still allowing for substantive influence over outcomes. It also aligns with broader principles of Chinese foreign policy, including sensitivity to issues of sovereignty and non-interference, which may make direct ownership of politically sensitive mandates less attractive.

Taken together, these patterns suggest that contestation in the Council cannot be explained solely by issue-specific or regional dynamics. While the distribution of drafting authority shapes how negotiations are structured, the data do not indicate a straightforward relationship between broader penholdership and reduced contestation. In fact, recent years have seen both an increase in contestation and a modest diversification of penholder arrangements, suggesting that shifts in drafting practices alone do not resolve underlying political disagreements.

These dynamics may also shed light on broader patterns often described as a "West–East divide" within the Council. To some extent, differences in contestation may be partly related to asymmetries in participation in the drafting process, alongside broader ideological and geopolitical divergence. When certain members are less directly involved in shaping initial texts, they may be more likely to express reservations during negotiation or voting. Conversely, when drafting authority becomes more contested or shifts across actors, other members may similarly perceive their interests as insufficiently reflected.

At the same time, the persistence of the P3-led penholder system reflects strong institutional inertia. Drafting practices are deeply embedded in working methods, supported by technical expertise, linguistic advantage, and accumulated procedural knowledge. New entrants—including other permanent members—face both formal and informal barriers to assuming penholder roles. As a result, variation in participation across the P5 should not be interpreted as a lack of influence, but rather as evidence of differentiated models of engagement within the Council's political ecosystem.

Further evidence of this dynamic can be seen in how mandate changes are distributed across penholder groups. As shown in Figure 38, the data reveal distinct patterns across penholder configurations. Among P3-led mandates (n=291), 77.0 percent involve no formal change, with contraction accounting for only 3.1 percent of cycles—consistent with an institutional preference to preserve existing mandate structures and avoid reopening texts that could invite more contentious negotiation. E10-led mandates present a different profile: among the 37 E10-penned cycles, 24.3 percent involve reprioritization—the highest share of any penholder group—while the "no change" rate (62.2 percent) is notably lower than the P3 average. This pattern may reflect the incentive structure facing elected members, who serve limited two-year terms and have comparatively fewer opportunities to shape Council products, potentially encouraging more active adjustment of mandate focus during their tenure. Mixed arrangements fall between these patterns but should be interpreted with caution, as they remain relatively rare in the dataset and the small sample size may affect the observed distribution. While mixed mandates are associated with a high share of "no change" outcomes (85.0 percent), this pattern should not be overinterpreted as a general effect of shared penholdership.

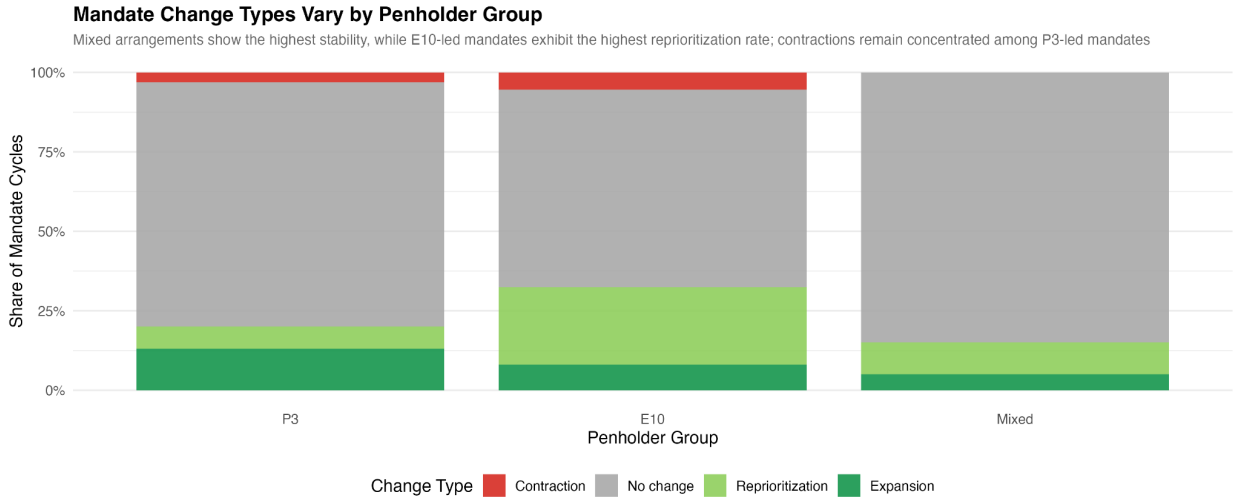


Figure 38. Mandate Change Types Vary Systematically Across Penholder Groups: *Mixed penholder arrangements are associated with the highest share of unchanged mandates, suggesting greater stability. E10-led mandates exhibit the highest rates of reprioritization, indicating a tendency toward incremental adjustment. Contractions remain relatively rare across all groups. The P2 category is not shown in the figure due to the very limited number of observations and their procedural distinctness (in this dataset, this consists of a single case: China serving as penholder for UNAMA in 2026), and is therefore not directly comparable to other penholder groups.*

Finally, variation across functional types provides additional context. As shown in Figure 39, contestation is unevenly distributed across mission categories, with sanctions monitoring and politically sensitive mandates exhibiting higher rates of abstention and disagreement. By contrast, technical or advisory mandates tend to be adopted without significant contestation. While these differences are informative, they do not fully account for the observed temporal shift, reinforcing the central role of institutional dynamics within the Council.

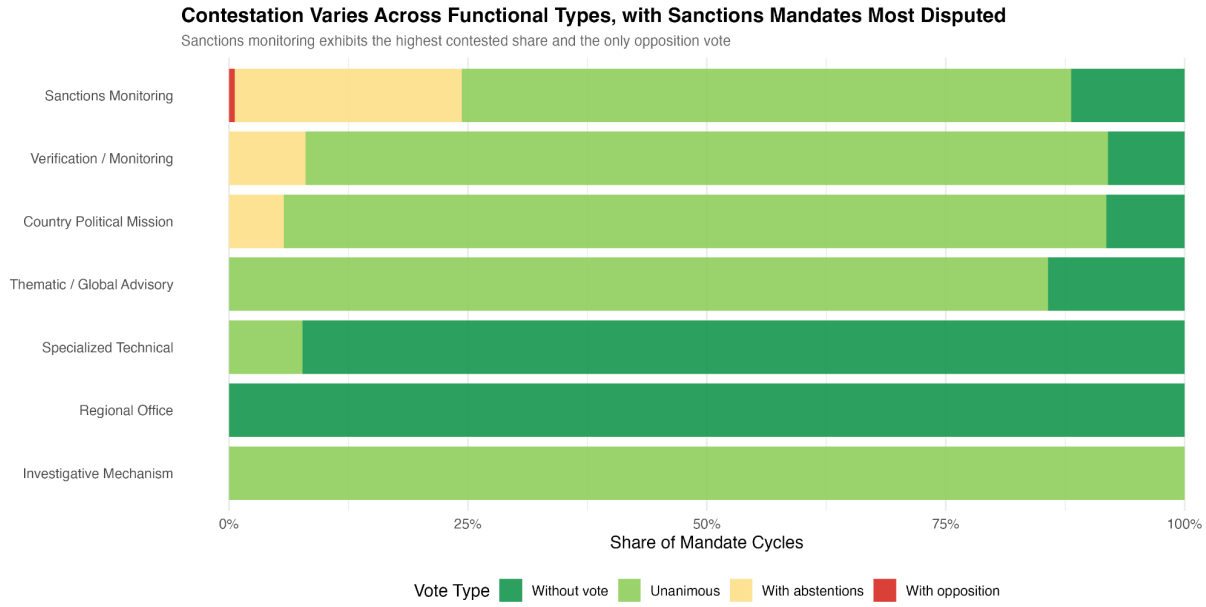


Figure 39. Contestation Varies Across Functional Types,with Sanctions Mandates Most Disputed: *Adoption outcomes vary across functional types, with sanctions monitoring mandates exhibiting the highest share of contested renewals and the only instance of outright opposition. Verification and country-based political missions also show notable levels of abstention, while technical and regional mandates are more frequently adopted without contestation. These differences provide useful contextual variation, but they do not fully account for the broader temporal shift toward greater contestation in the Council.*

The dataset's structural limitation with respect to vetoes and failed drafts warrants explicit acknowledgement. Between 2010 and 2026, the Security Council's broader voting record reflects a marked increase in veto use: since 2015, 47 vetoes were cast on 37 draft resolutions, compared with 36 vetoes on 30 draft resolutions in the preceding 25 years. While most of these vetoes concerned situations rather than SPM mandates directly, their cumulative effect on the authorization environment is analytically significant. The erosion of trust among permanent members—particularly following NATO's intervention in Libya in 2011, after which Russia and China moved from abstention to active veto use on resolutions perceived as analogous risks—has shaped the political conditions under which SPM mandates are drafted and renewed. In this sense, the contestation visible in the dataset represents only the surface layer of a deeper and less measurable dynamic: the anticipatory narrowing of mandate language in response to veto threat. [94]

In this sense, the emergence of contestation should not be understood as a breakdown of the system. The Council continues to produce mandates on a regular basis, but the processes through which these mandates are negotiated and adopted are becoming more politically visible, more contested, and more reflective of underlying institutional and power dynamics.

C. Mandate Evolution: Expansion without Structural Disruption

Across the period under study, mandate evolution in Special Political Missions (SPMs) is characterized less by structural transformation than by incremental adjustment. As

shown in Figure 40, the overwhelming majority of mandate cycles are associated with no formal change in scope. This pattern remains remarkably stable over time, even as the broader political environment becomes more contested. While instances of expansion and reprioritization do occur, they represent a secondary layer of adjustment rather than a dominant mode of change. Contraction, by contrast, is rare and episodic, underscoring the political sensitivity associated with reducing mandate scope once established.

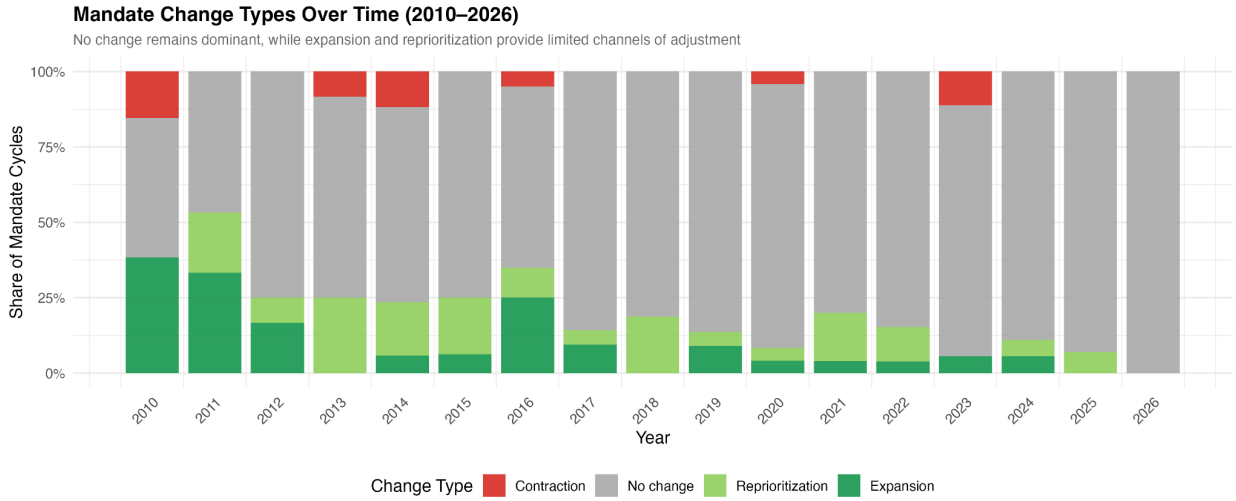


Figure 40. Mandate change types over time (2010-2026): *Across the period, most mandate cycles involve no formal change in mandate scope. Expansion and reprioritization appear intermittently as secondary modes of adjustment, while contraction remains rare. Together, these patterns suggest that mandate evolution occurs primarily through incremental adaptation rather than structural disruption.*

Temporal variation does not fundamentally alter this baseline. In earlier years, expansion played a more visible role, reflecting periods of active mandate-building and institutional consolidation. Over time, however, the system appears to settle into a more stable equilibrium in which existing mandates are largely maintained, with occasional recalibration. The persistence of this pattern suggests that despite shifts in geopolitical dynamics, the Council continues to operate within a framework that favors continuity over structural revision.

Further variation emerges when mandate changes are disaggregated by functional type. As illustrated in Figure 41, different categories of missions exhibit distinct patterns of evolution. Verification and monitoring missions display relatively higher levels of expansions, consistent with their operational nature and the need to adjust monitoring capacities over time. Country-based political missions and sanctions monitoring mechanisms, by contrast, show a greater incidence of contraction, reflecting their closer entanglement with politically sensitive processes and shifting Council priorities.

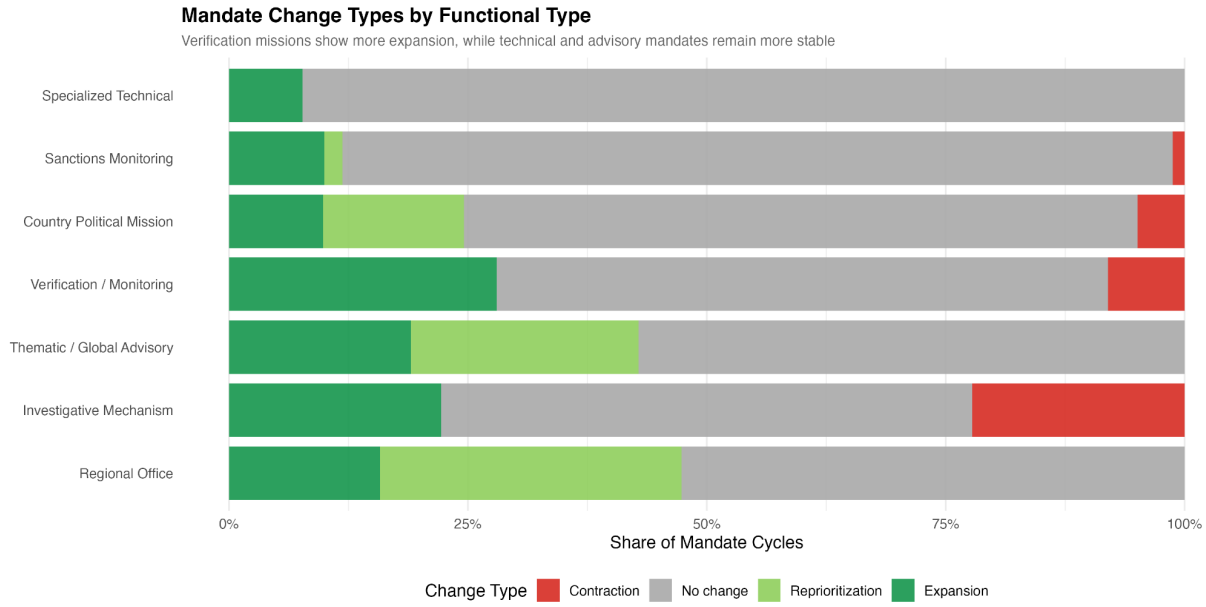


Figure 41. Mandate Change Types by Functional Type: *Patterns of mandate evolution vary across mission categories. Verification and monitoring missions show comparatively higher shares of expansion, while technical and advisory mandates are overwhelmingly associated with unchanged mandates. Country-based political missions and sanctions mechanisms display more mixed patterns, including occasional contraction, reflecting their closer connection to politically sensitive processes.*

At the same time, technical and advisory mandates—such as specialized technical missions and thematic or global advisory roles—are overwhelmingly associated with "no change" outcomes. This suggests that once established, these mandates tend to operate within relatively stable parameters, with limited need for structural adjustment. Regional offices similarly exhibit a strong tendency toward stability, although they also show a notable degree of reprioritization, indicating periodic shifts in focus rather than scope.

Taken together, these patterns point to a model of mandate evolution that is adaptive but not transformative. Changes are primarily realized through expansion or reprioritization, allowing the Council to respond to emerging needs without fundamentally altering the institutional architecture of missions. Contraction remains an exception rather than a norm, and structural redesign is largely absent. In this sense, mandate evolution in SPMs reflects a process of layering and recalibration, rather than one of disruption or institutional overhaul.

D. Functional Complexity: Layering of Mandate Components

While mandate change patterns suggest limited structural disruption, a different picture emerges when examining the functional content of mandates. Rather than transforming through discrete expansions or contractions, Special Political Missions (SPMs) increasingly evolve through the layering and recombination of mandate components. This process produces a form of functional complexity that is cumulative rather than disruptive.

At the system level, a relatively stable set of core mandate components appears across a large share of mandate cycles. As shown in Figure 42, elements such as use of force authorization (68%), human rights (51%), protection of civilians (51%), and international coordination (49%) are consistently present.

The prominence of use of force authorization warrants clarification. In the SPM context, this component does not imply coercive military capacity analogous to peacekeeping operations. Rather, it is largely driven by the inclusion of Chapter VII-based sanctions monitoring mechanisms in the dataset—including panels of experts on the DRC, DPRK, Libya, Yemen, Sudan, and Somalia—whose founding resolutions incorporate use-of-force language as part of sanctions enforcement frameworks. Country-based political missions and special envoys, by contrast, rarely carry such authorizations, consistent with their civilian and consent-based character.

Taken together, these components form a common functional backbone across missions, suggesting that contemporary mandates draw from a standardized repertoire of policy tools rather than being designed de novo for each context. At the same time, a broader set of secondary components—such as sanctions support, electoral assistance, and political process engagement—appears with moderate frequency, indicating flexibility in how mandates are tailored to specific operational environments.

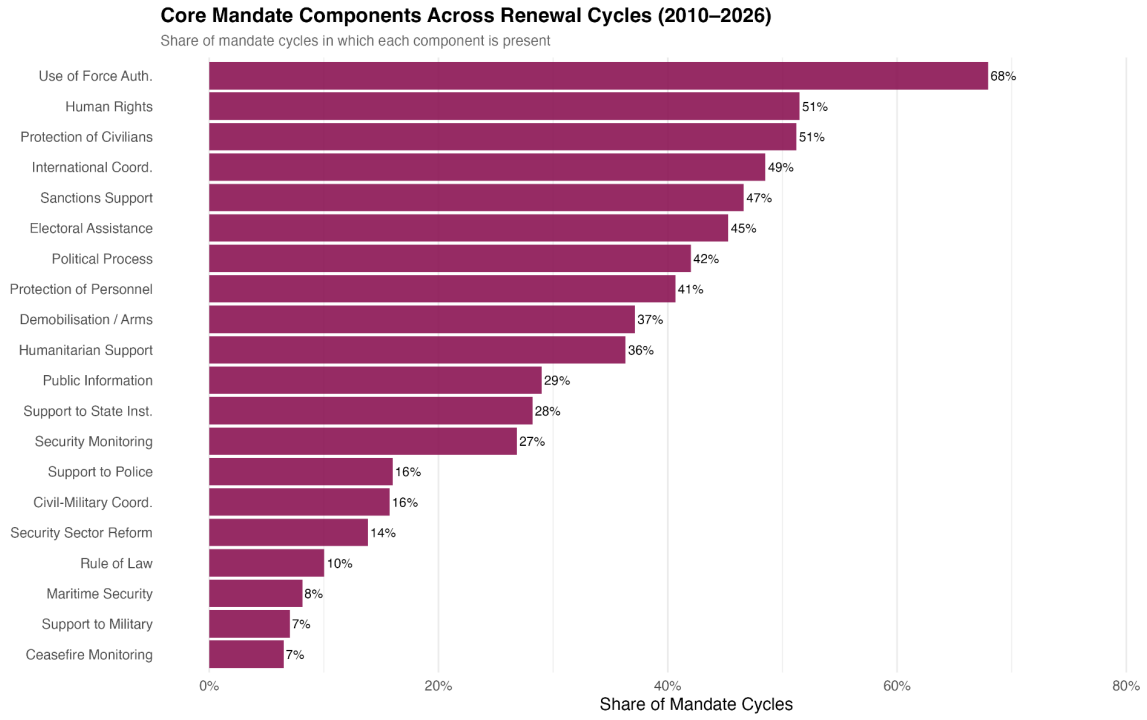


Figure 42. Core Mandate Components Across Renewal Cycles (2010-2026): *Certain functions recur across a large share of Special Political Mission mandate cycles, indicating a relatively standardized repertoire of mandate design. Use of force authorization appears most frequently, followed by human rights, protection of civilians, and international coordination. This distribution suggests that contemporary SPM mandates are built around a stable set of recurring functional elements, to which additional components are layered depending on mission context.*

This layering is reflected not only in the presence of individual components but also in the overall density of mandates. As shown in Figure 43, the mean number of active components per mandate cycle remains relatively stable over time, generally ranging between six and eight components. This stability suggests that functional complexity

does not increase indefinitely but instead operates within an implicit bandwidth. However, variation across mission types is significant. Figure 44 illustrates that country-based political missions tend to incorporate a larger number of components, reflecting their broad governance and state-building roles, while investigative mechanisms and specialized technical mandates remain more narrowly focused. Verification missions occupy an intermediate position, combining a limited core function with selected additional tasks.

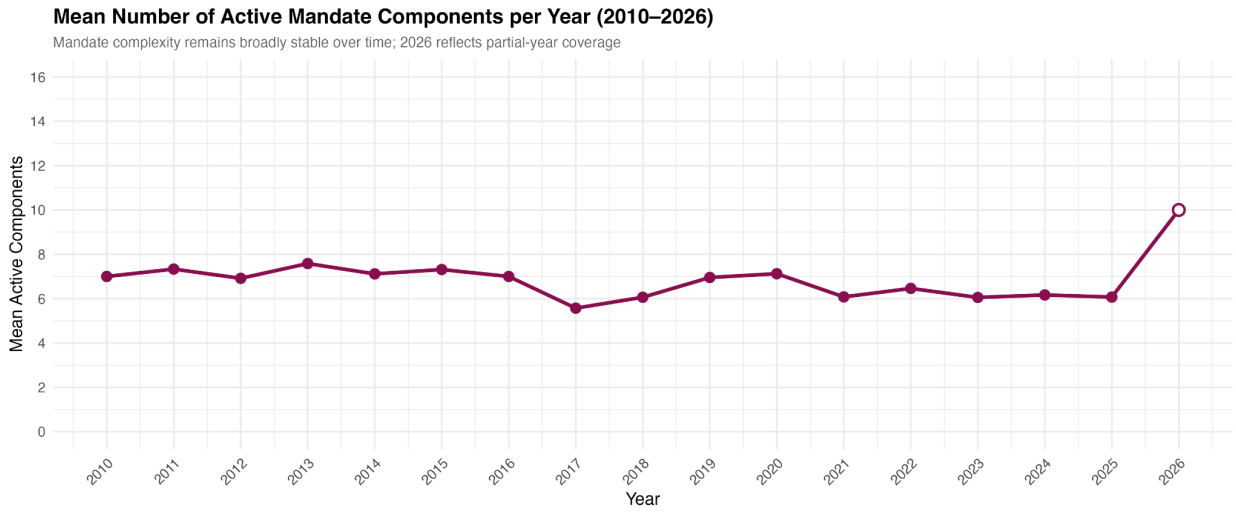


Figure 43. Mean Number of Active Mandate Components per Year (2010–2026): *The average number of active components per mandate cycle remains relatively stable across most of the period, generally within a bounded range rather than rising continuously. This suggests that mandate complexity evolves through recombination and layering within an established functional bandwidth. The 2026 value should be interpreted cautiously, as it reflects partial-year coverage and a smaller number of observations.*

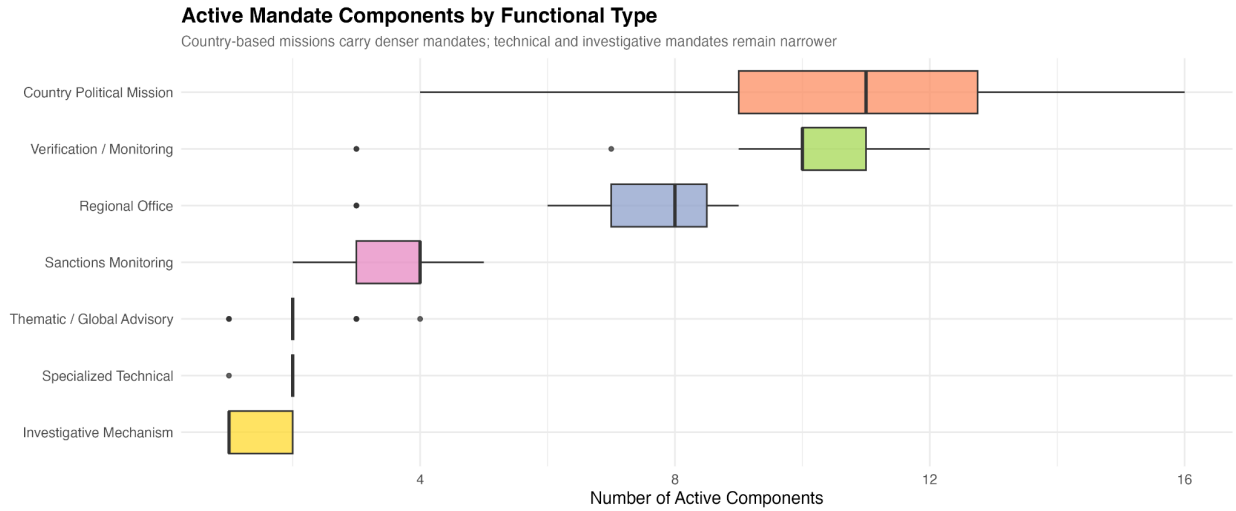


Figure 44. Active Mandate Components by Functional Type: *Functional complexity varies significantly across mission categories. Country-based political missions carry the densest mandates, while verification missions occupy an intermediate position. Technical, thematic, and investigative mandates remain substantially narrower, indicating that increasing complexity is concentrated in specific mission forms rather than distributed evenly across the SPM system.*

Crucially, mandate complexity is not simply the result of adding independent components but reflects patterned co-occurrence among specific functional elements.

As illustrated in Figure 45, certain components frequently appear together, forming recognizable clusters. For example, political process, human rights, and international coordination exhibit high levels of co-occurrence, suggesting an integrated governance-oriented approach.

A similar pattern can be observed in protection-related functions. Elements such as protection of civilians and protection of personnel frequently co-occur with use of force authorization, forming a security-oriented cluster. This co-occurrence is primarily driven by sanctions monitoring mechanisms, which systematically combine Chapter VII language with protection-related provisions as part of their standard mandate architecture. These patterns suggest that mandate design is not purely context-specific, but is shaped by institutional templates that structure how functions are bundled and deployed.

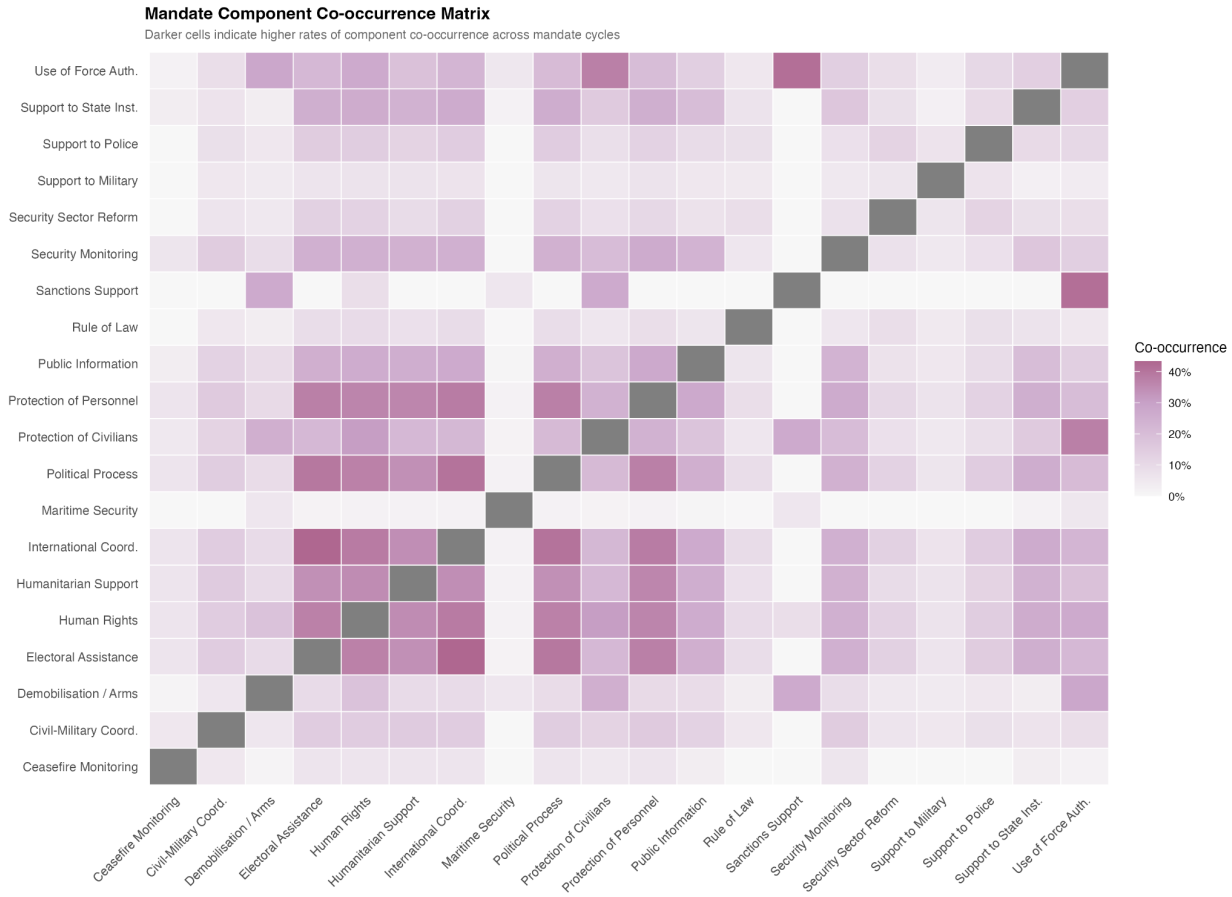


Figure 45. Mandate Component Co-occurrence Across Renewal Cycles (2010-2026): *Darker cells indicate higher rates at which two components appear together within the same mandate cycle. The matrix suggests that mandate complexity is structured through recurring functional bundles rather than random accumulation. In particular, governance-oriented components such as political process, human rights, and international coordination frequently co-occur, while protection- and security-related functions also appear in recognizable clusters.*

Taken together, these findings suggest that mandate evolution is characterized less by episodic structural change than by the gradual layering and recombination of

standardized components. Functional complexity emerges through accumulation and recombination rather than expansion in scope alone. This pattern reinforces the broader argument of the report: that the Security Council adapts SPM mandates through incremental and modular adjustments, producing continuity in institutional form alongside increasing sophistication in functional design.

E. System-Wide Patterns: Standardization under Strain

The patterns identified across mandate duration, political dynamics, mandate evolution, and functional composition point to a central paradox in the contemporary Special Political Mission (SPM) system: while mandates are becoming more complex and politically contested, the underlying institutional structures governing their renewal remain highly standardized.

At the temporal level, mandate cycles exhibit a remarkable degree of stability. The near-universal adherence to annual renewal cycles indicates that, despite changing geopolitical conditions and operational environments, the Security Council continues to rely on a deeply institutionalized rhythm of decision-making. Deviations from this pattern, such as shorter renewal periods, are episodic and closely associated with moments of political strain, rather than indicative of structural transformation. This suggests that temporal flexibility functions primarily as a short-term instrument for managing disagreement, rather than a shift in the overall governance model.

At the political level, however, a clear transformation is underway. While aggregate adoption patterns continue to reflect a strong norm of procedural consensus, disaggregated trends reveal a sustained increase in contestation, particularly after 2017. This shift is best understood in relation to the intersection of two dynamics: deepening geopolitical divisions among the P5, and the structure of the penholder system, where a small group of actors retains disproportionate control over drafting. Penholdership concentration did not itself change significantly over this period—it has remained a persistent structural feature. Rather, the intensification of geopolitical rivalry, particularly among the P5, has made this long-standing institutional arrangement a more visible site of political friction. The persistence of P3 dominance, combined with the gradual emergence of mixed and co-penholdership arrangements, reflects a system that is adapting under pressure but not fundamentally redistributing authority. Contestation, in this sense, is not an anomaly but part of a broader pattern in which concentrated drafting authority operates within an increasingly polarized Council.

At the level of mandate evolution, change is predominantly incremental. Most mandate cycles involve no formal alteration of scope, and when adjustments occur, they take the form of expansion or reprioritization rather than contraction or redesign. This pattern indicates a strong institutional preference for continuity, where existing mandates are preserved and modified at the margins rather than restructured.

This stability is most visible in missions operating in relatively bounded or lower-salience political environments. The Panel of Experts on the Sudan, for instance, recorded no formal mandate change across all 17 cycles in the dataset. Similarly, UN support to the Cameroon–Nigeria Mixed Commission remained unchanged across all 12 cycles, and UNOWAS across all five cycles. It is important to note, however, that CNMC and UNOWAS are procedurally distinct: their mandates are established and renewed through exchanges of letters rather than through the standard Security Council drafting and voting process. This streamlined renewal pathway may contribute to their observed stability.

These cases nonetheless illustrate how mandates with clearly defined technical or advisory functions, or those embedded in stable bilateral arrangements, can persist without structural revision over extended periods.

By contrast, politically sensitive missions exhibit more frequent adjustment. UNAMA provides a clear example: of its 18 cycles in the dataset, 77.8 percent involved formal change—predominantly reprioritization (12 instances)—reflecting the need to continuously recalibrate the mission's focus in response to Afghanistan's evolving political environment, particularly following the Taliban takeover in August 2021.

A similar, though distinct, pattern is evident in Haiti. BINUH recorded formal changes in 50 percent of its eight cycles, with all changes taking the form of mandate expansion rather than contraction or reprioritization—suggesting a gradual broadening of scope in response to deteriorating governance and security conditions.

Taken together, these patterns reinforce the view that mandate evolution is shaped by both functional role and political context: technical and advisory missions tend toward stability, while politically sensitive missions are more prone to adjustment, and procedural differences in mandate renewal can further condition these dynamics.

A different dimension of change becomes visible when examining functional complexity. Rather than evolving through discrete shifts in mandate scope, SPMs increasingly develop through the layering and recombination of mandate components. A relatively stable set of core functions appears across a large share of mandate cycles, while additional components are selectively incorporated depending on mission context. The overall number of active components remains bounded, suggesting that complexity operates within an implicit functional bandwidth. Crucially, this complexity is structured rather than additive: components tend to co-occur in recognizable clusters, forming governance-oriented and security-oriented bundles that shape how mandates are constructed in practice.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the SPM system is characterized by adaptive stability. Institutional forms—such as annual renewal cycles and the penholder system—remain highly durable, even as the political and functional content of mandates becomes more dynamic. Change occurs not through structural redesign, but through layered adjustments, negotiated contestation, and modular recombination of standardized elements.

This pattern has important implications. It suggests that the Security Council's capacity to adapt lies less in its ability to transform institutional frameworks than in its ability to absorb political pressure within existing structures. As geopolitical divisions deepen, the system does not fragment, but instead becomes more visibly contested while continuing to operate within familiar procedural constraints. In this sense, contemporary SPM mandates reflect a form of governance under strain: resilient in form, but increasingly complex and politically negotiated in substance.

VI. Comparative Case Analysis

A. Case Selection Rationale

The comparative case analysis focuses on field-based Special Political Missions (SPMs) that are sufficiently similar in size and complexity to support systematic comparison across mandate design, political dynamics, and implementation conditions. These missions generate consistent and relatively rich data across key variables,including mandate texts, voting behavior, budgetary and staffing figures , and implementation constraints, making them particularly well-suited for linking dataset-based findings with within-case analysis.

Three core considerations are established during case selection. First, selected missions exhibit repeated mandate cycles, typically through annual or near-annual renewals. This allows the analysis to trace how mandate language, scope, duration, and political framing evolve over time . Given that the report's central concern is institutional adaptation rather than isolated crisis response, repeated renewals provide critical longitudinal leverage for observing patterns of consensus, contestation, and adjustment within the Security Council.

Second, cases are selected based on institutional continuity and the richness of the data. The missions included in the analysis produce a sufficiently detailed and continuous documentary record across Security Council resolutions, Secretary-General reports, and budgetary processes. This ensures that both qualitative interpretation and dataset-based analysis can be conducted consistently across cases, without introducing distortions due to uneven data availability.

Third, the selection prioritizes analytical variation within a comparable universe of cases. Rather than focusing exclusively on exceptional or highly idiosyncratic missions, the cases capture different configurations of geopolitical contestation, host-state relations, and mandate structure while remaining comparable as field-based SPMs operating under recurring Security Council authorization.

Based on these criteria, the analysis focuses on five missions: the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia (UNVMC), and the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement in Yemen (UNMHA). These cases reflect distinct but comparable political and institutional environments. Libya illustrates a context of high geopolitical contestation and fragmented state authority, while Afghanistan reflects de-facto authority consolidation combined with humanitarian engagement under conditions of contested legitimacy. Haiti represents a chronic governance crisis in which the Mission performs multidimensional institutional advisory functions, whereas Colombia captures a verification mandate operating under conditions of increasing

political contestation. Yemen, in turn, reflects a limited monitoring mandate under fragile ceasefire conditions, complemented by the parallel mediation architecture of the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (OSESGY).

Importantly, these cases are not confined solely to the most contentious P5-driven agenda items. Instead, they capture a broader range of Council dynamics, including the role of elected members, penholder practices, regional politics, and shifting coalitions around mandate scope. This allows the analysis to examine how geopolitical fragmentation operates not only through overt great power rivalry, but also through routine mandate negotiations and incremental institutional adjustments. Their analytical value lies less in their exceptional nature than in how clearly they reveal the effects of political constraint in everyday Council practice.

The comparative design therefore balances variation and comparability. While the selected missions differ in political context, mandate type, and operational constraints, they share a common institutional structure that enables meaningful cross-case analysis.

To ensure consistency across the comparative section, each case study follows a common analytical sequence. The analysis begins by situating each mission within its broader conflict environment, providing a concise overview of the political context and key developments shaping the case. The analysis then traces the evolution of the mandate across successive cycles, identifying major turning points in scope, priorities, and institutional structure. The core analytical focus examines Security Council dynamics, including voting behavior, P5 interactions, penholder roles, and negotiation processes shaping mandate outcomes. This is followed by an assessment of implementation conditions, with particular attention to host-state relations, operational constraints, and resource limitations. Dataset-based visualizations are integrated throughout to support and interpret observed patterns.

Each case concludes by evaluating how mandate design translated into practice, identifying gaps between formal authorization and implementation, and drawing out implications for understanding mandate evolution under conditions of political constraint.

B. United Nations Assistance Mission In Afghanistan (UNAMA)

Summary:

The UNAMA case shows how a UN mission can stay in place over many years, even as the political situation around it changes completely. While the core structure of the mandate—focused on political engagement, coordination, and human rights—has remained largely the same, what the mission is actually able to do has shifted significantly over time. Much of the mandate reflects what the Security Council can agree on, not only what is needed on the ground. As conditions in Afghanistan became more complex—and especially after 2021—the gap between what the mission is

expected to achieve and what is realistically possible has grown. As a result, UNAMA's role has moved from supporting long-term state-building to maintaining presence and engagement under very constrained conditions. Overall, the case highlights a broader pattern: UN political missions can adapt and remain present, but their impact is always shaped—and often limited—by political realities.

1. Background and context

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) was established in March 2002 following the U.S.-led intervention and the collapse of the Taliban regime. [95] The mission emerged as part of a broader international effort to stabilize Afghanistan, rebuild state institutions, and support a political transition under the framework of the 2001 Bonn Agreement.[96] The conflict setting was characterized by a fragmented political landscape, the presence of multiple armed actors, and the continued influence of international military forces, particularly through the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).[97]

At that time, Afghanistan's political environment in the early 2000s reflected both opportunity and fragility. While there was significant international consensus supporting state-building, human rights, and reconstruction, domestic political authority remained weak, with power dispersed among regional warlords, emerging central institutions, and international actors.[98] The Afghan government's limited capacity, combined with persistent insurgent activity—particularly the resurgence of the Taliban from 2003 onward—created a complex environment for UNAMA to operate and implement its mandate.[99]

UNAMA was established in 2002 as an integrated political mission intended to coordinate the United Nations' civilian engagement in Afghanistan across political affairs, human rights, rule of law, humanitarian relief, recovery, reconstruction, gender, and governance.[100] Yet it is important to place UNAMA within the wider UN architecture that developed around Afghanistan over time, rather than treating it as the sole institutional expression of UN engagement. Before UNAMA, Afghanistan had already hosted several UN political mechanisms, including the Secretary-General's Personal Representative for Afghanistan, the United Nations Special Mission in Afghanistan (UNSMA), and the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Afghanistan.[101] These earlier missions were centered largely on mediation, political facilitation, and good offices, reflecting the UN's repeated effort to support dialogue, national rapprochement, and negotiated settlement in the Afghan context. [102]

At the same time, not all UN mechanisms in Afghanistan were political missions of the same kind. Alongside these good offices roles, the Security Council also established the Monitoring Group under the 1267 sanctions regime, which was tasked with monitoring compliance with measures such as the arms embargo, travel ban, and asset freeze directed at the Taliban, Usama bin Laden, and associated entities.[103] That mechanism operated on a different legal and operational basis from UNAMA: it was tied to Chapter

VII enforcement measures and reported to the relevant sanctions committee, rather than serving as a field-based platform for political engagement inside Afghanistan. This broader picture matters analytically because it shows that the UN presence in Afghanistan was divided across multiple mission types, with different mandates and different tools—some aimed at mediation and political support, others at monitoring and enforcement-related functions.[104]

Seen in that wider institutional setting, UNAMA is best understood as the UN's principal country-level integrated political platform in Afghanistan, but not as a stand-alone actor operating in isolation. Its role was to provide good offices, support the Afghan government and the peace and reconciliation process, promote human rights and civilian protection, encourage good governance, and coordinate the broader UN civilian presence.[105] This gave UNAMA a central convening and coordination function, especially after the Bonn Agreement. Still, it also meant that its influence depended less on coercive leverage than on political access, cooperation from Afghan actors, and continued backing from external partners. As conflict intensified and the political environment fragmented, those limitations became more visible. In other words, UNAMA's importance lay not in replacing the wider UN machinery around Afghanistan, but in serving as the main integrated mission within a larger ecosystem of envoys, special missions, and sanctions-related mechanisms that coexisted and divided labor across the Afghan file.[106]

Over time, the political dynamics surrounding UNAMA shifted significantly. The initial period of relative international unity gradually gave way to growing geopolitical fragmentation, both within Afghanistan and within the UN Security Council.[107] Domestically, contested elections, corruption, intra-elite political disagreements, governance challenges, and shifting power dynamics between Kabul and local actors complicated the mission's mandate implementation.[108] Internationally, diverging priorities among key stakeholders—particularly regarding counterterrorism, state-building, and eventual withdrawal—affected the coherence of the broader strategy. [109]

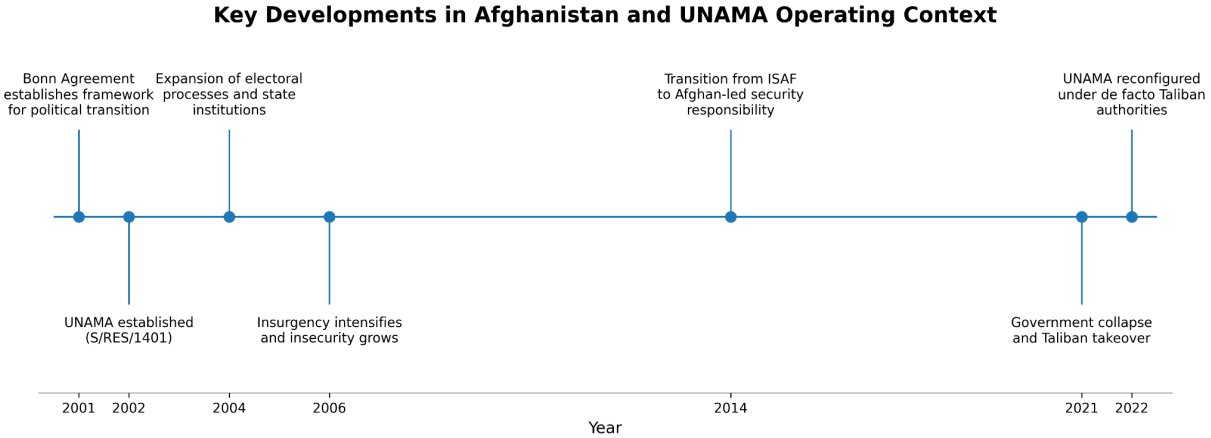


Figure 45. Key Developments in Afghanistan and UNAMA's Operating Context (2001–2022): *Timeline of major political and security events shaping UNAMA's mandate and operations, from the Bonn Agreement and mission establishment to the Taliban takeover and UNAMA's reconfiguration under de facto authorities.*

This trajectory reflects a transition from an internationally supported state-building mission to a politically constrained presence operating in a non-recognized governance context. These evolving conditions are critical for understanding subsequent changes in

mandate design, implementation constraints, and the shifting role of UNAMA within Afghanistan's political landscape. [110]

2. Mandate Evolution

As Afghanistan's security environment, governance structures, and overall conflict complexity evolved, the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has not remained fixed over time. Instead, it has evolved alongside changes in Afghanistan's political and security landscape, as well as shifting priorities within the Security Council.[111] Across mandate cycles, the key pattern is not a complete transformation of the mission's core purpose, but a gradual reorientation in emphasis—from post-conflict state-building to long-term political engagement under increasingly constrained conditions. [112]

UNAMA was established in 2002 through Security Council resolution 1401, at a moment of strong international consensus following the Bonn Agreement, and the initial mandate was broad but clearly centered on supporting Afghanistan's political transition.[113] The Council tasked the mission with providing good offices, assisting the Afghan government, coordinating international aid, promoting human rights, especially women's rights, and facilitating the reconstruction process.[114] In this sense, UNAMA was designed as a classic special political mission: a civilian instrument focused on political facilitation rather than enforcement.[115] As the SPM Compendium notes, such missions operate primarily through diplomacy, coordination, and support to national processes, rather than coercive authority.[116]

During the first mandate cycles (2002–2005), renewals largely reaffirmed these core objectives. The language of the resolutions remained relatively consistent, with a strong emphasis on political transition, institution-building, and electoral support.[117] This stability reflected both the early optimism surrounding Afghanistan's reconstruction and the relatively high degree of international policy coherence during this period.[118]

However, beginning in the mid-2000s, as the situation changed in Afghanistan, the mandate started to reflect a more complex and deteriorating context. As the Taliban insurgency intensified, Security Council resolutions increasingly referenced security concerns and the need for stronger coordination between UNAMA and other actors, particularly international military forces, as Afghanistan's security environment deteriorated.[119] While UNAMA itself did not assume a direct security role, its operational scope expanded in response to these dynamics.[120] The mandate began to place greater emphasis on coordination, reflecting the growing number of international stakeholders involved in Afghanistan. This marked an early turning point in the mandate's evolution, as priorities shifted toward coordination and political management. [121]

Another important turning point was in 2014. When the international military forces started drawing down and transferred responsibility of security to Afghan authorities, the mandate began to emphasize Afghan ownership more clearly.[122] While the overall structure of the mandate remained similar, the framing shifted. The mission started

supporting Afghan-led political processes rather than overseeing a transition driven by external actors.

The most significant transformation in UNAMA's mandate came after the Taliban's return to power in 2021. This marked a fundamental break in the mission's operating assumptions. Earlier mandate cycles were built around supporting a recognized government and advancing state-building. After 2021, the mission has been operating in a context in which the de facto authorities are not internationally recognized and the political process itself has been fundamentally altered.[123] As reflected in more recent mandate renewals, UNAMA's priorities have shifted toward humanitarian coordination, engagement with de facto authorities, and the protection of human rights, especially the rights of women and girls.[124]

Taken together, these phases of mandate evolution reveal several broader patterns. First, the core structure of the mandate—centered on political facilitation and coordination—has remained relatively stable.[125] The mission identity did not change, but the emphasis within its mandate did. Second, mandate evolution appears largely reactive rather than anticipatory. Changes in mandate language tend to follow developments on the ground rather than anticipate them.[126] Finally, the evolution of UNAMA highlights the flexibility of special political missions more generally.[127] Overall, the trajectory of UNAMA's mandate reflects a broader shift from post-conflict transition to long-term crisis management.[128] This evolution is central to understanding both the possibilities and constraints of the mission.

3. Political Dynamics in the Security Council

The mandate of UNAMA cannot be fully understood without reference to political dynamics within the Security Council. While on paper the mandate looks quite stable over time, in practice it is shaped by negotiations, compromises, and shifting priorities among Council members—especially the P5.[129] Notably, Afghanistan has generally not been among the most divisive files in the Council's agenda, but this does not imply an absence of political contestation. Rather, political dynamics were often expressed through framing and emphasis rather than overt disagreement. Since UNAMA's establishment—particularly before the Taliban's return to power—the Security Council and P5 largely supported the continuation of the mandate.

If we look at voting patterns across mandate cycles, UNAMA resolutions have almost always been adopted unanimously.[130] This indicates a baseline level of consensus among Council members on maintaining the mission.[131] However, unanimity does not necessarily mean agreement on substance. In many cases, it reflects negotiated language that is broadly acceptable to all members, even if it does not fully reflect any single actor's preferences.[132]

The penholder role has also been relatively stable and important in shaping the mandate. The United States and the United Kingdom have traditionally acted as the penholders on

Afghanistan in the early years following 2001, which gave them significant influence over how the mandate was drafted.[133] This influence can be seen in the early mandate language, which closely reflected U.S. and broader Western policy priorities around state-building, elections, and governance reform.[134] The emphasis on democratization and institutional development was particularly prominent during the early cycles of the mission.

At the same time, other P5 members—particularly Russia and China—tended to support the overall mission but placed more emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference.[135] This did not necessarily result in overt disagreement, but shaped negotiation dynamics in more subtle ways. For example, over time, references to Afghan ownership and national sovereignty became more explicit in the mandate language.[136] This reflects a balancing process within the Council, where different actors pushed to ensure that international engagement did not appear to override state authority.

One area where these dynamics become more visible is in how human rights are framed in the mandate. Western members, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, have generally pushed for stronger language on human rights, gender equality, and the protection of civilians.[137] On the other hand, Russia and China have often been more cautious about expanding these elements, particularly when they could be interpreted as interfering in domestic affairs.[138] As a result, the final mandate language often reflects compromise—human rights remain included, but the wording is often more carefully calibrated.

A key turning point in Council dynamics came after 2014, when the international military presence in Afghanistan was reduced. During this period, the Council began to shift its focus toward supporting Afghan-led processes.[139] This shift reflected both developments on the ground and evolving preferences among Council members. There was increasing emphasis on sovereignty and reducing external involvement, while still maintaining UNAMA's presence. This led to a more limited and carefully framed mandate compared to earlier years.

The most significant change in political dynamics, however, occurs after the Taliban takeover in 2021. This marks a point at which divisions within the Council become more visible, even if resolutions continue to pass. [140] The question of how to engage with the Taliban generates clearer tensions among members. Western countries tend to focus more on human rights—especially women's rights—and are more cautious about legitimizing the de facto authorities.[141] In contrast, countries like China and Russia are generally more open to engagement and place greater emphasis on stability and counterterrorism. [142]

These differences do not necessarily lead to vetoes, but they do shape the negotiation process in important ways. The resulting mandates reflect a balancing dynamic. On one hand, they include strong language on human rights and inclusivity. On the other hand, they maintain space for engagement with the Taliban, particularly in areas like

humanitarian assistance.[143] This dual approach reflects the difficulty of reaching consensus in a context where the political situation itself is contested.

Another important aspect is that the Council often responds to developments rather than anticipating them. This reactive dynamic is also visible in how the mandate was adjusted after 2021, as well as in the limits of those adjustments.[144] The Council was able to agree on maintaining UNAMA and redefining its priorities, but it has struggled to articulate a clear long-term political strategy for Afghanistan. [145] This gap between adapting the mandate and defining a broader strategy can also be seen in the mission's budget trends. Many mission costs stay the same no matter how the mandate changes. UNAMA still needed offices, staff, transport, communications, and security to operate across Afghanistan. While some tasks like security sector reform and rule of law were reduced, new priorities grew after 2021, including humanitarian coordination, human rights monitoring, and engagement with the de facto authorities. These activities also required funding. UN budgets also do not usually change quickly. Large missions often keep similar budgets for some time because staff contracts, infrastructure, and operations cannot be reduced immediately. Keeping the budget stable may also have been a political choice to maintain a strong UN presence during an uncertain period.

Overall, political dynamics surrounding UNAMA are characterized less by open conflict than by negotiation, compromise, and incremental shifts in emphasis. The absence of vetoes should not be mistaken for full agreement. Instead, it reflects a situation where all members see value in maintaining the mission, even if they differ on its long-term objectives. In this sense, UNAMA's mandate is not merely a technical document, but a negotiated political product shaped by evolving interests and constraints within the Security Council.

One useful way to understand Council dynamics in the UNAMA case is to look at how the penholder role changed over time—from the United States, to elected members (E10), and later to China. In the Security Council, the penholder usually has important influence because it leads the drafting of resolutions and helps shape negotiations.The fact that the Afghanistan file was passed on relatively easily suggests that UNAMA was not seen as one of the Council's most divisive or politically sensitive issues, unlike cases such as Syria or Ukraine. Instead, there seems to have been general support for keeping the mission in place, even if different members took turns leading the drafting process. The shift also reflects wider political changes. As the United States reduced its role in Afghanistan, it also appeared less interested in keeping control of the file. Although penholding may appear procedural, in this case it helps to show how Afghanistan moved from being a U.S.-led priority to a more shared and differently managed Council issue.

4. Implementation and Constraints

While the mandate defines what UNAMA is expected to do, implementation reflects what the mission can achieve in practice. In the case of Afghanistan, a persistent gap has existed between these two dimensions. The mission has had a broad and sometimes

ambitious mandate, but the conditions on the ground often made it difficult to carry it out fully. [146]

One of the main operational challenges has been the security environment. From the mid-2000s onward, the resurgence of the Taliban and other armed groups made large parts of the country increasingly inaccessible.[147] UNAMA, as a civilian mission, does not have its own enforcement capacity and depends on the broader security environment to function.[148] As a result, even when the mandate includes tasks such as human rights monitoring or support to local governance, access constraints limit their implementation. In practice, activities tend to be concentrated in relatively secure urban areas, while rural and conflict-affected regions remain less accessible. [149]

One illustrative example is UNAMA's mandate to monitor civilian casualties and report on human rights violations across the country.[150] While its reports are widely cited and influential, they often rely on a combination of field presence and indirect verification methods due to security constraints.[151] This reflects a broader structural issue: while the mandate assumes comprehensive monitoring, implementation is shaped by access limitations and security risks.[152]

A further constraint lies in coordination, which is central to UNAMA's mandate but difficult to operationalize in practice. The mission is supposed to coordinate international actors, including UN agencies, NGOs, donors, and at times even military actors.[153] However, in practice, coordination is difficult because these actors often operate with different mandates, funding structures, and priorities.[154] During the peak years of international engagement, especially between 2006 and 2014, Afghanistan became a highly fragmented operational space with overlapping initiatives from NATO, bilateral donors, and development agencies.[155] Although UNAMA was expected to lead coordination, it lacked the authority to enforce it, relying instead on informal mechanisms and negotiation.[156]

Host-state relations also constitute another key constraint on implementation. In the early years, the Afghan government generally supported UNAMA's presence, given its dependence on international assistance.[157] However, tensions still emerged, particularly around elections, governance, and human rights reporting.[158] UNAMA's involvement in electoral processes, for example, sometimes placed it in politically sensitive positions, especially when elections were contested, or allegations of fraud emerged.[159]

Over time, these tensions became more pronounced. Afghan authorities occasionally resisted external criticism, particularly in areas such as corruption or civilian harm caused by national and international forces.[160] This reflects a broader dynamic in the literature on special political missions: host-state consent is necessary but not sufficient for effective implementation.[161] Even when cooperation exists at a formal level, political sensitivities can limit how far a mission can go in practice.[162]

After 2021, host-state relations changed in a much more fundamental way. UNAMA now operates under the Taliban de facto authorities, who are not internationally recognized.[163] This creates a fundamentally different operational environment. On one hand, the mission must engage with these authorities to maintain access and support humanitarian operations.[164] On the other hand, there are significant normative concerns, particularly regarding restrictions on women's rights and participation in public life.[165]

These constraints have very direct operational implications. For example, restrictions on female staff working in NGOs and UN agencies have affected the ability to deliver services, particularly in sectors such as health and education.[166] This results in an ironic situation in which the mandate emphasizes gender equality and human rights, while implementation is constrained by violations of those very principles by authorities on the ground. [167]

Political dynamics at the international level also shape implementation in less visible but consequential ways. Security Council mandates are often the product of compromise among member states.[168] This can result in broad or carefully worded language that allows different interpretations.[169] In practice, this flexibility can lead to variation in how different components of the mission prioritize tasks.[170] For instance, humanitarian actors may focus on immediate needs, while political actors emphasize engagement and dialogue, sometimes leading to internal inconsistencies. [171]

Budgetary and resource constraints further limit implementation. UNAMA operates with finite resources, which do not always match the scale of its mandate.[172] Maintaining field offices, ensuring staff security, and supporting nationwide activities require significant logistical and security capacity.[173] When resources are limited, the mission has to prioritize certain areas or functions over others, leading to uneven implementation.[174]

There are also institutional constraints related to staffing and continuity. High turnover among international staff can make it difficult to build long-term relationships or maintain institutional memory.[175] In a context like Afghanistan, where local dynamics are complex and trust is essential, this becomes a significant operational challenge for implementation.[176]

More broadly, the mandate itself can create constraints. UNAMA's mandate often combines multiple objectives—political facilitation, human rights monitoring, humanitarian coordination, and governance support—without clearly prioritizing among them.[177] This creates internal trade-offs, where prioritization is driven by feasibility rather than formal mandate hierarchy. [178]

Taken together, a clear pattern emerges in the relationship between mandate design and implementation. The mandate reflects what the Security Council aims to achieve, while implementation reflects what is actually feasible in a complex environment.[179] This gap should not be interpreted as a failure, but rather as a structural feature of special political missions operating under constraints.[180]

In the case of UNAMA, this gap becomes more pronounced over time. In the early years, there was greater alignment between ambition and capacity, supported by strong international engagement.[181] However, as the conflict became more protracted and the political environment more fragmented, that alignment weakened.[182] After 2021, the gap is even more visible. The mandate continues to include important objectives, particularly in relation to human rights and engagement, but the constraints on implementation are significantly greater.[183]

Overall, UNAMA's experience shows that implementation is always shaped by context. The mission has had to adapt continuously, often working within limits that are not fully reflected in the mandate itself.[184] Understanding these constraints is essential, as it explains why outcomes often diverge from mandate expectations and highlights the limits of political missions operating in highly constrained environments.

5. Assessment of Effectiveness

Assessing the effectiveness of UNAMA is inherently complex, largely because the mandate has been broad and evolving. Rather than focusing solely on outcomes, a more appropriate approach is to assess the degree of alignment between mandate objectives and implementation in practice.

In the early years, there was a relatively strong alignment between mandate objectives and implementation. The mission was tasked with supporting political transition, elections, and coordination of international assistance, and these objectives were partially achieved. UNAMA played a central role in facilitating the Bonn process and later electoral cycles, including the 2004 and 2009 elections.[185] At that stage, there was strong international backing and fewer constraints, allowing the mission to operate relatively closely to its mandate objectives.

However, even during this period, some gaps were already visible. For example, while the mandate emphasized governance and institution-building, implementation in these areas was uneven. Issues such as corruption, weak state capacity, and reliance on external actors limited the extent to which these goals could be fully realized.[186] Even where objectives were formally implemented, their long-term effectiveness remained uncertain.

The gap between mandate and implementation becomes more evident from the mid-2000s onward. As the insurgency intensified, UNAMA's mandate continued to expand—particularly in areas such as human rights monitoring, governance support, and coordination—but the operating environment became much more restrictive.[187] In this period, effectiveness shifted from outcome achievement to the maintenance of presence and continued engagement under constraint.

For example, UNAMA has consistently reported on civilian casualties and human rights violations, which is widely regarded as one of its most consistent functions.[188] These reports have contributed to international awareness and policy discussions. However, the mandate also implies that such monitoring should lead to accountability and improved protection of civilians. In practice, that link has been weak. Violations continued, and accountability mechanisms remained limited. This illustrates a key limitation: implementation of mandate activities does not necessarily translate into the achievement of mandate objectives.

Another area where this gap is visible is coordination. UNAMA was tasked with coordinating international actors, which is a central part of its mandate.[189] While the mission did facilitate dialogue and coordination forums, it did not have the authority to enforce coordination across actors with different priorities. As a result, coordination was partial and sometimes ineffective, especially during the peak years of international involvement.[190] This reinforces the point that the mandate's expectations exceeded what the mission could realistically deliver.

After 2014, effectiveness became even more difficult to assess in traditional terms. The mandate shifted toward supporting Afghan-led processes, but the capacity of the Afghan state remained limited, and political fragmentation increased.[191] In this context, UNAMA's role became more about sustaining engagement rather than driving outcomes. The mission continued to operate, but its ability to influence political developments was constrained.

A fundamental shift occurs after 2021. With the Taliban's return to power, the assumptions underlying the mandate changed entirely. UNAMA is no longer supporting a recognized government in a state-building process, but instead operating in a context of de facto authorities and limited international recognition.[192] The mandate continues to include objectives related to human rights, inclusivity, and engagement, but implementation is heavily constrained.

For instance, the mandate emphasizes the protection of women's rights, but in practice, UNAMA has limited leverage to influence Taliban policies in this area.[193] Similarly, while the mission plays a key role in facilitating humanitarian assistance, this is often done through negotiation with authorities whose policies are themselves part of the problem. So the mission is implementing parts of the mandate, without necessarily achieving the intended outcomes.

This raises a broader conceptual question regarding how effectiveness should be defined in this context. If effectiveness is defined as full achievement of mandate objectives, then UNAMA would appear largely ineffective, especially in later years. However, if effectiveness is instead defined as the ability to maintain presence, sustain engagement, and implement elements of the mandate under constraints, then the picture is more mixed.

A more balanced assessment suggests that UNAMA has been partially effective. It has consistently implemented core functions such as political engagement, reporting, and humanitarian coordination. However, a persistent gap remains between what the mandate aims to achieve and what is realistically possible on the ground. This gap has widened over time, particularly as the political and security environment became more complex.

In that sense, the effectiveness of UNAMA reflects not only mission performance but also the limits of mandate design itself. The Security Council often sets broad and ambitious objectives, but the tools available to the mission—especially as a civilian political mission—are limited. What emerges is not simply implementation failure, but a structural mismatch between mandate expectations and operational realities.[194]

6. Data Visualization

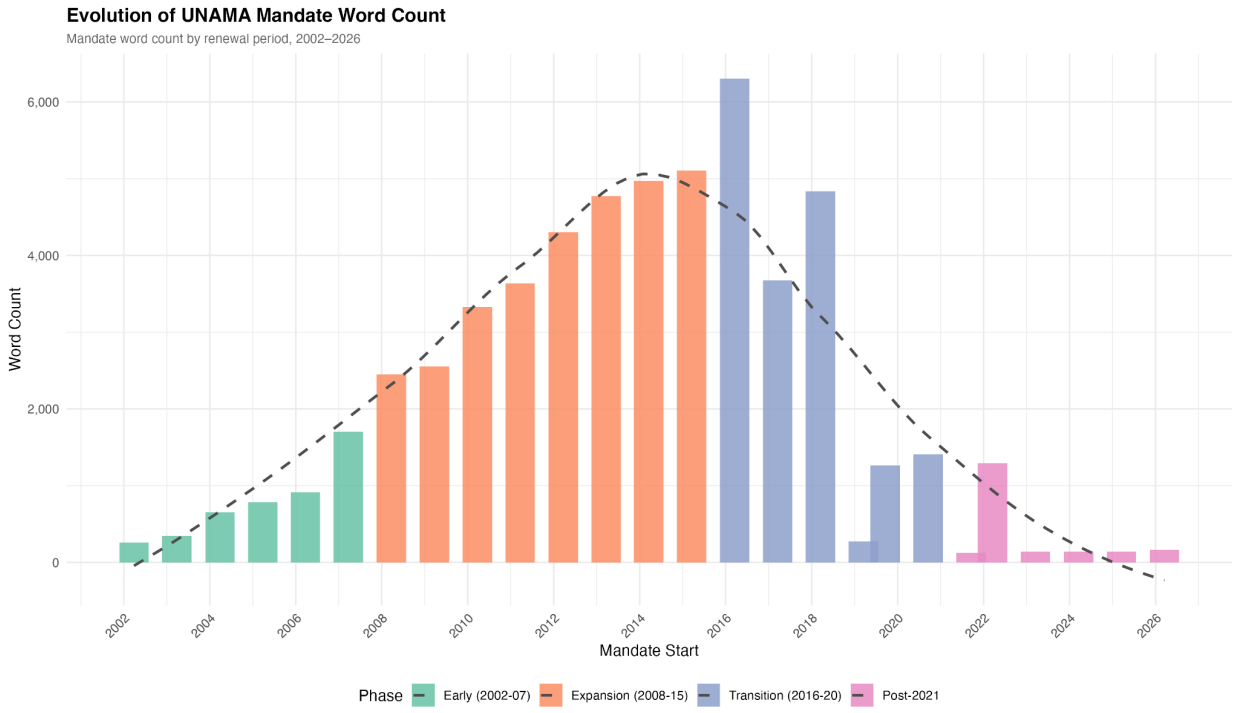


Figure 46. Evolution of UNAMA Mandate Word Count (2002–2026): *This figure shows changes in the length of UNAMA Security Council mandate renewal resolutions, using word count as a proxy for mandate scope and political attention. Mandates were shorter in the early years (2002–2007), expanded significantly during the peak state-building period (2008–2015), fluctuated during the transition phase (2016–2020), and became shorter and more targeted after 2021 following the Taliban's return to power. Overall, the trend reflects changing Security Council priorities and UNAMA's shift from post-conflict reconstruction to crisis management.*

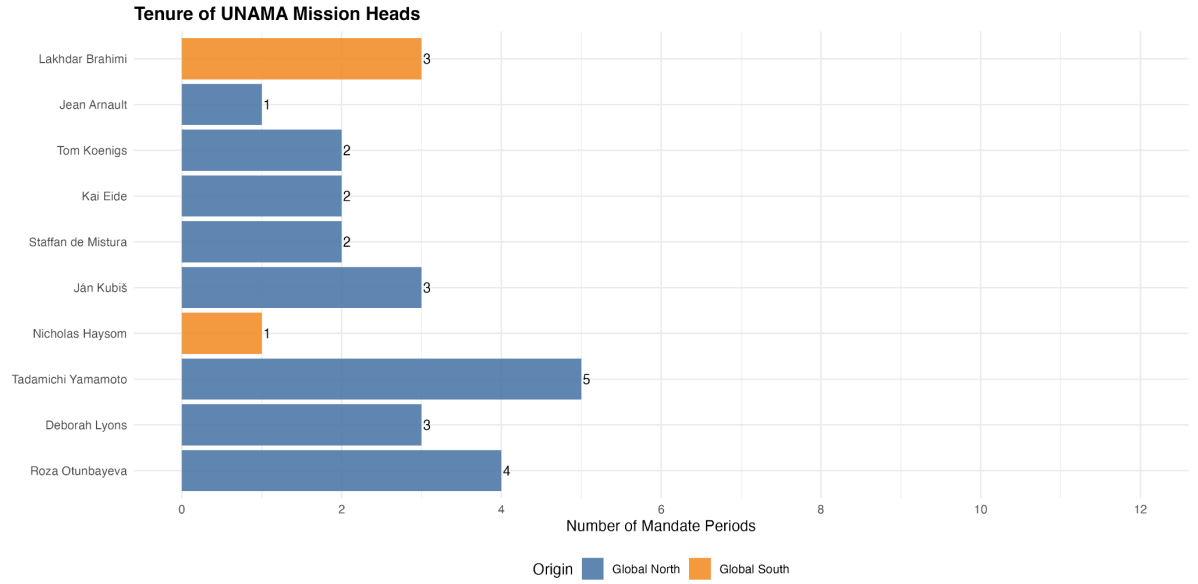


Figure 47. Tenure of UNAMA Mission Heads: *This figure shows the number of mandate periods served by each UNAMA mission head, illustrating patterns of leadership continuity over time. Longer tenures—such as those of Tadamichi Yamamoto and Roza Otunbayeva—suggest periods of relative institutional stability and sustained diplomatic engagement. In comparison, shorter tenures may reflect moments of political transition or shifting mission priorities. The figure also highlights the geographic diversity of UNAMA leadership, with representatives from both the Global North and Global South.*

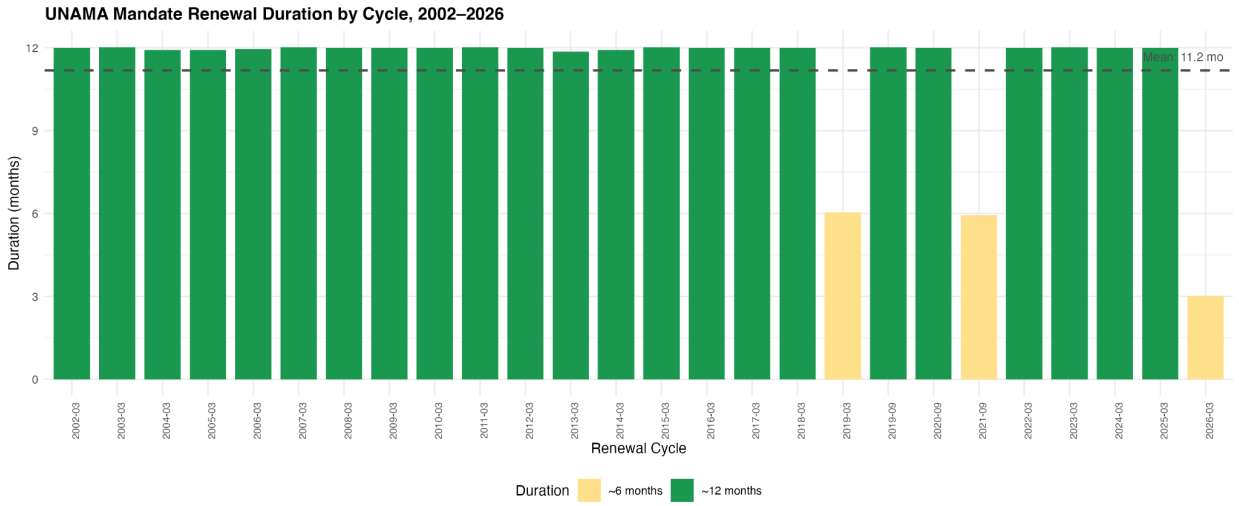


Figure 48. UNAMA Mandate Renewal Duration by Cycle (2002–2026): *This figure shows the length of each UNAMA mandate renewal period in months. Most renewals were granted for approximately twelve months, indicating a consistent pattern of annual Security Council support and institutional continuity. Shorter renewals in 2019, 2021, and 2026 suggest periods of heightened uncertainty or political transition, when the Council preferred temporary extensions rather than full annual mandates. The pattern reflects broad long-term support for UNAMA, with shorter cycles used during more sensitive political moments.*

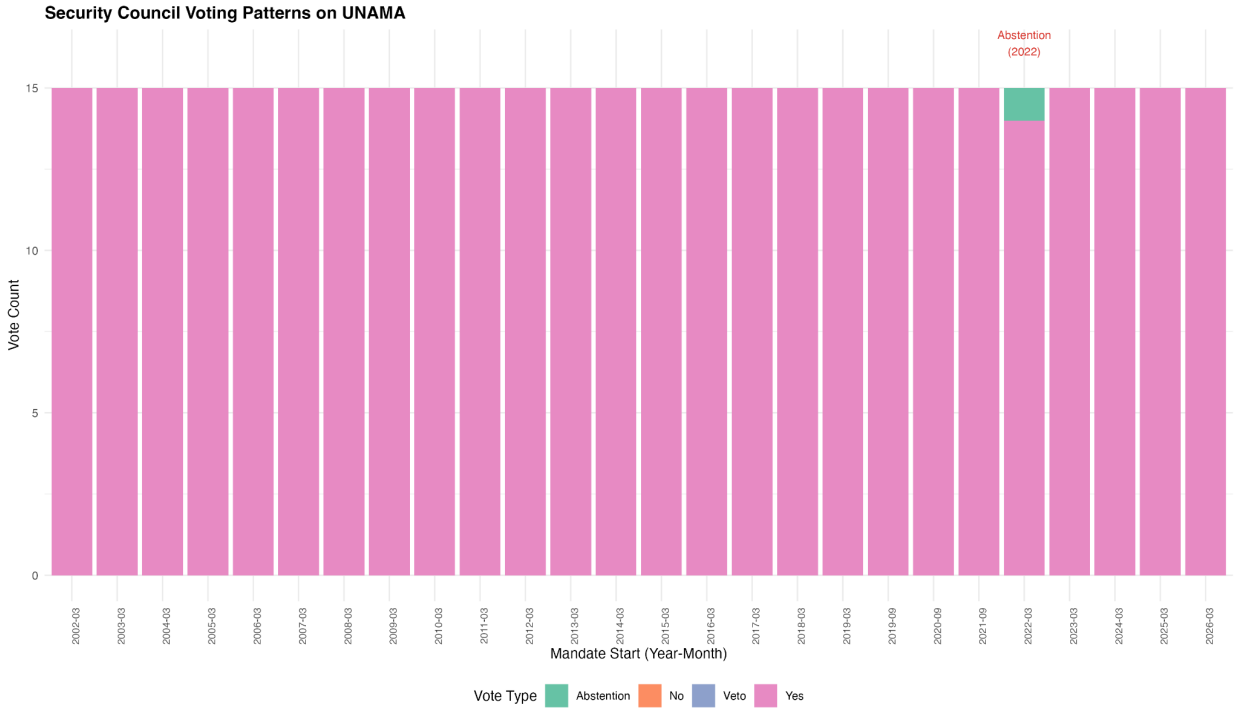


Figure 49. Security Council Voting Patterns on UNAMA: *This figure displays voting outcomes on UNAMA mandate renewal resolutions from 2002 to 2026. Nearly all renewals were adopted unanimously, indicating sustained cross-member support for maintaining the mission despite broader disagreements on Afghanistan. The sole exception was the 2022 renewal, which included one abstention, reflecting sharper divisions after the Taliban's return to power. The pattern suggests that UNAMA remained one of the more consensual files on the Security Council agenda.*

7. Key Takeaways

a. Mandate design in UNAMA reflects a balance between political expectations and operational realities

Drawing on the preceding analysis of mandate evolution, political dynamics, and implementation constraints, the UNAMA case demonstrates that mandate design in special political missions is often shaped more by political expectations than by operational realities. While the mandate has remained broadly consistent in structure—centered on political facilitation, coordination, and support to governance—its effectiveness has depended heavily on how adaptable it is to changing conditions on the ground. UNAMA thus illustrates a central tension in mandate design: the need to balance stability with adaptability.[195]

b. Broad and flexible mandates allow continuity but complicate prioritization and implementation

First, UNAMA's mandate demonstrates that broad and flexible mandates can be both a strength and a weakness. The mission's wide scope allowed it to remain relevant across very different phases—from post-conflict state-building to engagement under Taliban rule. This flexibility is consistent with how special political missions are designed to operate, adapting to evolving political contexts rather than following rigid templates.[196] At the same time, this breadth complicated prioritization and implementation. The mandate consistently included multiple objectives—human rights, governance,

coordination, political engagement—without a clear hierarchy, resulting in persistent gaps between ambition and delivery.[197]

c. Mandate effectiveness depends heavily on political context, not just design

Second, the case shows that mandate effectiveness is highly dependent on political context, not just mandate design itself. In the early 2000s, when there was a strong international consensus and relatively supportive host-state relations, UNAMA was able to implement key aspects of its mandate more effectively. However, as the political environment became more fragmented—both domestically and within the Security Council—the same mandate structure became harder to implement.[198] This dynamic becomes particularly evident after 2021. The mandate continues to emphasize human rights and inclusivity, but the mission operates under conditions where it has very limited leverage to influence outcomes, particularly in relation to Taliban policies.[199]

d. Security Council consensus sustains continuity but often produces broad and carefully balanced mandates

The fact that UNAMA mandates have been adopted unanimously suggests clear support for keeping the mission in place. The fact that UNAMA mandates have consistently been adopted unanimously suggests strong support for maintaining the mission.[200] However, this kind of agreement often leads to broad and carefully balanced language instead of a clear and detailed strategy.[201] At the same time, broad mandates are not always a weakness. They can give missions space to adjust, use diplomacy creatively, and respond to changing conditions on the ground. In that sense, the challenge is not only whether the Council gives enough direction, but also whether the mission is able to use that space well and stay ahead of events rather than simply react to them.

e. There is a persistent mismatch between mandate ambition and available tools

A further structural feature is the mismatch between mandate ambition and available tools, particularly for civilian missions like UNAMA. The Security Council often assigns politically significant objectives—such as promoting human rights or supporting governance reforms—without providing the mission with enforcement mechanisms or sufficient leverage.[202] This means that effectiveness depends less on mandate clarity and more on external factors, such as host-state cooperation, security conditions, and international support. In UNAMA's case, this mismatch becomes more pronounced over time, especially as the conflict becomes more protracted.

f. Host-state relations fundamentally shape what the mission can realistically achieve

The case also highlights how host-state relations fundamentally shape what a mission can do, regardless of what the mandate says. Even when the mandate includes strong language on human rights or governance, implementation depends on the willingness—or at least tolerance—of authorities on the ground. Under the Taliban, this constraint becomes especially clear. UNAMA continues to operate and engage, but its ability to influence policy outcomes is limited, particularly in areas such as women's rights.[203] This suggests that mandate design alone cannot ensure effectiveness in the absence of supportive political conditions.

g. UNAMA reflects a broader shift from transition support to long-term crisis management

More broadly, UNAMA reflects a system-wide shift observed across special political missions: from short-term transition support to long-term crisis management. The mission was originally designed to support a post-conflict transition, but it has gradually become a long-term presence operating in a protracted and unresolved conflict setting.[204] This raises questions about whether mandate design has fully adapted to this reality. In many ways, the mandate still reflects transitional assumptions, even though the context has fundamentally changed.

h. Effectiveness in UNAMA is best understood in relative rather than absolute terms

Finally, the UNAMA case suggests that effectiveness is best understood in relative rather than absolute terms. If effectiveness is defined as achieving mandate objectives fully, then UNAMA would appear limited, especially in later years. However, if effectiveness is understood as maintaining engagement, facilitating dialogue, and implementing parts of the mandate under highly constrained conditions, the assessment becomes more nuanced. The mission has continued to function, adapt, and deliver certain outputs, even in very difficult circumstances.[205]

Taken together, these findings reinforce a broader conclusion of this report: that SPM mandates tend to expand in scope while implementation remains constrained, resulting in a persistent gap between ambition and feasibility across mission contexts.

C. United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia (UNVMC)

Summary:

The United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia (UNVMC) illustrates both the durability and fragility of consent based verification. Established in 2017 to verify reincorporation and security guarantees under Colombia's Final Agreement, the Mission initially rested on a narrow, consensual mandate tied to a signed peace agreement. Over time, however, its role expanded into more politically sensitive areas, including restorative justice, rural reform, the Ethnic Chapter, and ceasefire monitoring linked to Colombia's "Total Peace" agenda. These expansions allowed the Mission to track deeper implementation challenges, but they also made it more vulnerable to accusations of overextension, fiscal burden, and interference in domestic governance. The 2025 renewal therefore marks a turning point: the Council extended UNVMC but narrowed its tasks after the first split vote in the Mission's history. Looking ahead, UNVMC is likely to survive as a bounded verification mission, but its broader role in monitoring transitional justice, ethnic inclusion, and structural reform may remain vulnerable unless political consensus and operational resources are rebuilt.

1. Background and Context

The case of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia (UNVMC) is one whose core legitimacy came from a bilateral peace agreement and whose mandates then expanded into politically and operationally more sensitive ground. The 2025 renewal illustrates an inflection point at which the Council renewed the mission but narrowed tasks, marked by the first split vote since the initiation of the mission. To put this in context, Colombia's post 2016 "peace environment" is most accurately described as a post-demobilization era, in which an insurgency entered civilian politics, while armed competition persisted though non-signatory guerrillas and dissident factions. The UNVMC began operations on 26 September 2017 as a successor to the first UN mission, tasked with accompanying and verifying the agreement between the Colombian state and the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia People's Army (FARC-EP).[206]

The distribution of coercive power in rural Colombia helps explain why a verification mission can excel at verifying compliance and still struggle to diminish underlying violence. Rather than engaging primarily in conventional battle, armed groups often pursued territorial influence through control over populations, trafficking corridors, and movement restrictions that generated revenue. [207] That logic appears clearly in independent reporting on "Total Peace," the security initiative launched by current Colombian President Gustavo Petro, which emphasizes that ceasefires can reduce certain types of lethal violence while leaving coercive control intact unless those practices are explicitly constrained and monitored. [208] A concrete illustration of this structural problem occurred on 15th January 2025, when the "Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)"[209], launched an offensive in the Catatumbo region against the Estado Mayor de los Bloques y Frentes[210], a faction linked to the broader Estado Mayor Central FARC-EP[211] umbrella

engaged in dialogue with the government. Within a week, more than 60 people were reported killed (including children, social leaders, and former combatants) and more than 50,000 forcibly displaced. The government response included suspension of peace talks with the ELN, a 90-day state of exception, and a "Pact for Catatumbo" expected to cost roughly $660 million and to include (among other measures) voluntary compensated eradication of 25,000 hectares of coca crops. [212]

Analytically, the Mission's "verification object" is not a static peace text; it is a set of commitments being implemented in a dynamic environment where armed competition and illicit economies can rapidly overwhelm state presence. Additionally, the Catatumbo crisis demonstrates why the Security Council repeatedly returns rhetorically to "full implementation" while simultaneously facing pressure to narrow the mandate: when violence spikes, domestic actors demand attention to rural security and state presence, but some Council members view verification of deeper structural chapters as edging into domestic governance or "excessive political priorities."[213]

The humanitarian context further underscores the gap between mission design and field conditions. A February 2026 UN humanitarian brief projected that nearly seven million people, roughly one in eight Colombians, would require assistance and noted that non-state armed groups were present in 60 percent of municipalities, driving displacement, confinement, and violations affecting children. Separately, the UN human rights office documented 972 killings of rights defenders between 2016 and 2025, linking the violence to fragmentation. [214] At the same time, the peace process has produced measurable outputs directly relevant to the Mission's verification role. The Secretary-General's March 2025 report notes that nearly 9,000 weapons were handed over for destruction and that close to 12,000 former combatants, 27 percent of them women, were linked to reintegration support through the reintegration agency. It also records the 2024 adoption of a Comprehensive Reintegration Programme after prolonged negotiations in the National Reincorporation Council. Together, these indicators show that, despite persistent insecurity, the Final Agreement continues to generate verifiable commitments. [215]

2. Mandate Evolution

The mandate began with a deliberately narrow verification core. Security Council Resolution 2366 (2017) established the Mission to verify implementation of the Final Agreement provisions related to reincorporation and personal and collective security guarantees.[216] This design choice matters analytically: it tied the mission to party consent and to existing domestic institutional architecture rather than creating a parallel international implementation authority. [217] Even early in the mission's life, the Council demonstrated that "verification" could be temporarily extended to ceasefire monitoring under the right conditions. In October 2017 the Council authorized the Mission to participate in a Monitoring and Verification Mechanism that included the government, ELN, the UN, and the Catholic Church for a temporary ceasefire; the Mission completed this task in January 2018. This illustrates an established precedent: adding ceasefire monitoring did not require transforming the mission into an armed peacekeeping

operation, but it did require clear protocols to ensure that verification remained bounded. [218]

The first major post-2017 expansion was transitional justice verification. Security Council resolution 2574 (11 May 2021) added a task to verify compliance with and implementation of the restorative sentences of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, including whether sentenced persons fulfill their terms and whether state authorities establish the necessary conditions. The Advisory Committee's budget analysis of this mandate expansion is a useful operational proxy for what "layering" entails: it describes both the substantive content of the new verification task and the resulting additional resource requirements for 2022.[219]

The second major expansion shifted verification toward the structural drivers of rural conflict. Security Council Resolution 2673 (2023), mandated the Mission to monitor implementation of the comprehensive rural reform and Ethnic Chapter of the Final Agreement. [220] This move signaled that the Council was prepared, at the request of Colombian parties, to treat structural reforms as part of a peace and security verification agenda rather than as purely domestic development policy.

A third expansion, adopted on 2 August 2023, illustrates the Council's alignment with the government's "Total Peace" policy while also foreshadowing the later retrenchment. Resolution 2694 expanded the mandate to monitor and verify arrangements connected to a bilateral ceasefire between the government and the ELN, and UN reporting at the time highlighted that the Council authorized "up to 68 additional international observers" for this task.[221] This suggests an operational logic where ceasefire verification expands incident monitoring demands, which in turn requires more observers.

Mandate renewals for 2023 and 2024 mostly resembled the exemplar's "smooth renewal" pattern: the UK, as penholder, circulated drafts, held limited negotiation rounds, and negotiated through the silence procedure, with disputes concentrated in introductory language rather than core tasks. [222] The 2023 and 2024 "What's in Blue" writeups document this pattern, including recurring objections by China and Russia related to women, peace and security language.

The 2025 renewal altered the mission's trajectory and thus the broader mandate evolution of the case. On 31 October 2025, the Council adopted Resolution 2798 renewing the mandate until 31 October 2026 with 13 votes in favor and two abstentions (Russia and the United States). Negotiations were the most difficult since 2017 and resulted in the removal of two verification tasks: restorative sentences under the Special Jurisdiction for Peace and monitoring implementation of the Ethnic Chapter.[223]

3. Political Dynamics in the Security Council

For most of its life, the Colombia file behaved as a "consensus portfolio": renewals were broadly treated as a reaffirmation of the parties' peace agreement and of a mission seen as consent-based and non-coercive. The UK served as penholder and typically convened

limited negotiations with drafts moving quickly to blue. When a portfolio is usually non-contentious, procedural disturbances (silence breaks, abstentions) become stronger signals of shifting political constraints than they would be in highly polarized files. (2023 and 2024 What's in Blue)[224]

Even under consensus, the drafting record shows recurring thematic faultlines. In 2023, China and Russia broke silence twice over women, peace and security and youth language, as they have done in negotiations on other mandates, pushing the penholder to circulate revised drafts before adoption. The 2024 renewal similarly saw China and Russia break silence over WPS language, although consensus was restored through edits without altering the mission's core task set. These episodes suggest that political dynamics in ostensibly stable portfolios can still revolve around normative language often as a proxy for broader skepticism about thematic expansion. (2023 What's in Blue; 2024 What's in Blue).[225]

The 2025 renewal marked a substantive break from the file's earlier consensus logic. The 2025 "What's in Blue" account describes the US push to remove three tasks, Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP) sentence verification, ethnic chapter monitoring, and rural reform monitoring, while most other members argued for retaining them. It also reveals unusually detailed bargaining. The UK circulated a draft on 13 October, held negotiations on 16 and 22 October, and then put the text under silence. Twelve members broke silence, among them Algeria, China, Denmark, France, and Greece. The fact that silence was broken by such a large group is itself an institutional signal; elected members and some permanent members treated the removal of specific verification tasks as a substantive regression rather than a routine streamlining.[226]

The same document ties the US position to a broader deterioration in relations between Gustavo Petro[227] and Donald Trump [228] after Trump returned to office, and it notes that bilateral disagreements were publicly aired across issues including drug control and migration. Whether every detail of the bilateral relationship is decisive is less important than what it enabled rhetorically inside the Council. Essentially, the US framed mandate expansion as reflecting "excessive political priorities" and signaled a reassessment of whether the mission "merits continued" Council support.[229]

Bilateral friction mattered because it was translated into Council arguments about mandate legitimacy and institutional scope. The vote meeting record reinforced this dynamic by showing how those arguments were further tied to budget politics and to competing understandings of mandate purpose. In the meeting adopting resolution 2798, the Council president recorded the 13-0-2 vote and then gave the floor for post vote explanations.[230] The US statement explicitly invoked an executive order driven emphasis on refocusing multilateral institutions on core peace and security roles and on reducing financial burdens. This illustrates how political dynamics can carry forward beyond the vote, as abstentions and strong post-vote rhetorical framing can signal which mandates are more likely to face contestation in future renewals.

At a broader level, the Colombia case shows that even “consensus” portfolios can experience sharp reversals when mandate tasks become tied to contested domestic governance issues, such as transitional justice and ethnic provisions, and when a P5 member politicizes budgetary or mandate expansion.[231] Furthermore, the 2025 episode illustrates how elected members can still meaningfully resist by using Council procedure, such as through silence breaks, to register collective objection, even if they cannot prevent eventual narrowing of the mandate when the penholder must assemble a viable text and avoid a veto from a P5 member.

4. Implementation and Constraints

Implementation of verification in Colombia is built around connection to domestic mechanisms rather than executive authority. To elaborate, resolution 2366 explicitly directs close cooperation with Colombian verification bodies, including the Commission for the Follow-up, Promotion and Verification of the Implementation of the Final Agreement (CSIVI), the National Reincorporation Council, and the National Commission for Security Guarantees. Operationally, ACABQ reporting shows that the Mission adapted its field footprint over time by consolidating local offices into a smaller number of hubs and using mobile teams to reach territorial training and reintegration areas.[232] This matters because “verification” is not a single activity; it is a logistical system that must reach dispersed sites where former combatants live and where communities face threats.

The reintegration file provides the clearest evidence base where the mission’s verification model can be directly tied to measurable outputs. The Secretary-General reported in March 2025 that close to 12,000 former combatants (27% women) remained linked to reintegration support and that 97% were enrolled in the Comprehensive Reintegration Programme. Land access, while not originally included in the Final Agreement for reintegration purposes, became a key implementation constraint. For instance, land had been secured for 14 of 24 territorial training and reintegration areas (housing roughly 1,800 former combatants) and for 47 productive cooperatives, with almost 15,000 hectares purchased. As of February 2025, 6,003 productive projects had been approved benefiting over 11,000 former combatants, including 2,850 women.[233] The implication for mandate design is that verification missions can document progress and bottlenecks in a way that makes “implementation” legible to both the state and the Council but only where implementers collect robust administrative data and maintain field reach.

Security guarantees are the binding constraint that repeatedly converts progress in reintegration into fragility. The March 2025 report lists departments where violence and armed presence remain acute (including Antioquia, Arauca, Bolívar, Cauca, Caquetá, Chocó, Guaviare, La Guajira, Meta, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Putumayo, and Valle del Cauca). It also provides a stark indicator: 460 former combatants have been killed since the signing of the Final Agreement, with 161 attempted homicides survived and 54 still missing.[234] These figures are rarely integrated into mandate analysis with sufficient

weight; they should be, because they demonstrate that the core “reincorporation” verification task is inseparable from a protection environment the mission cannot control.

Rural reform points to a different type of constraint, one driven less by direct targeting than by weak implementation capacity and institutional limits. The March 2025 report states that 181,519 hectares had been adjudicated, 6% of the 3-million-hectare goal and that 3,216,709 hectares had been formalized, 45.9% of the 7-million-hectare target. It also notes legislative movement, including a June 2024 bill incorporating the Agrarian Jurisdiction into the judicial framework while a second bill regulating it remained pending.[235] The analytic implication is that adding rural reform to a verification mandate creates a monitoring function whose success depends on state administrative capacity and legal throughput; verification can expose these gaps but cannot substitute for institutional execution.

The Mission’s interaction with “Total Peace” dialogue processes adds a further operational dimension that is easy to miss if the case is told only as peace agreement verification. In the December 2025 report, the Secretary-General notes that during the reporting period, 49 people were released after being held by different groups, and that in 2025 the Mission supported releases totaling 169 people, working alongside entities such as the Ombudsperson’s Office and the Catholic Church.[236] The same report describes dialogue tracks with multiple groups, including a commitment by the EMBF, a splinter group of the FARC, to cease recruitment of anyone under 18 and dialogues with the group self-identifying as the “Ejército Gaitanista de Colombia,” also known as the “Clan del Golfo,” reportedly hosted in Qatar, including commitments related to elections and plans for temporary assembly zones in municipalities in Chocó and Córdoba starting in March 2026. This is operationally significant as it shows the Mission becoming a logistical facilitator and confidence building actor across dialogues, even when those dialogues are not part of the original 2016 agreement.

Budget and staffing constraints translate these mandates into feasibility. ACABQ resource tables show that the 2024 appropriation for the Mission was $78.3367 million, with a 2025 appropriation of $86.5823 million; for 2026, the original proposed programme budget was $86.9531 million but revised estimates reduced this to $74.5343 million.[237] This inflection coincides with the mandate narrowing and the observer ceiling reduction. In practical terms, after 31 October 2025, the Mission discontinued verification of the ethnic chapter and restorative sentences, and the authorized international observer ceiling was reset from 188 to 120. These were not just minor administrative details, but factors that shaped what the Mission could credibly verify and prioritize.

5. Data Visualization

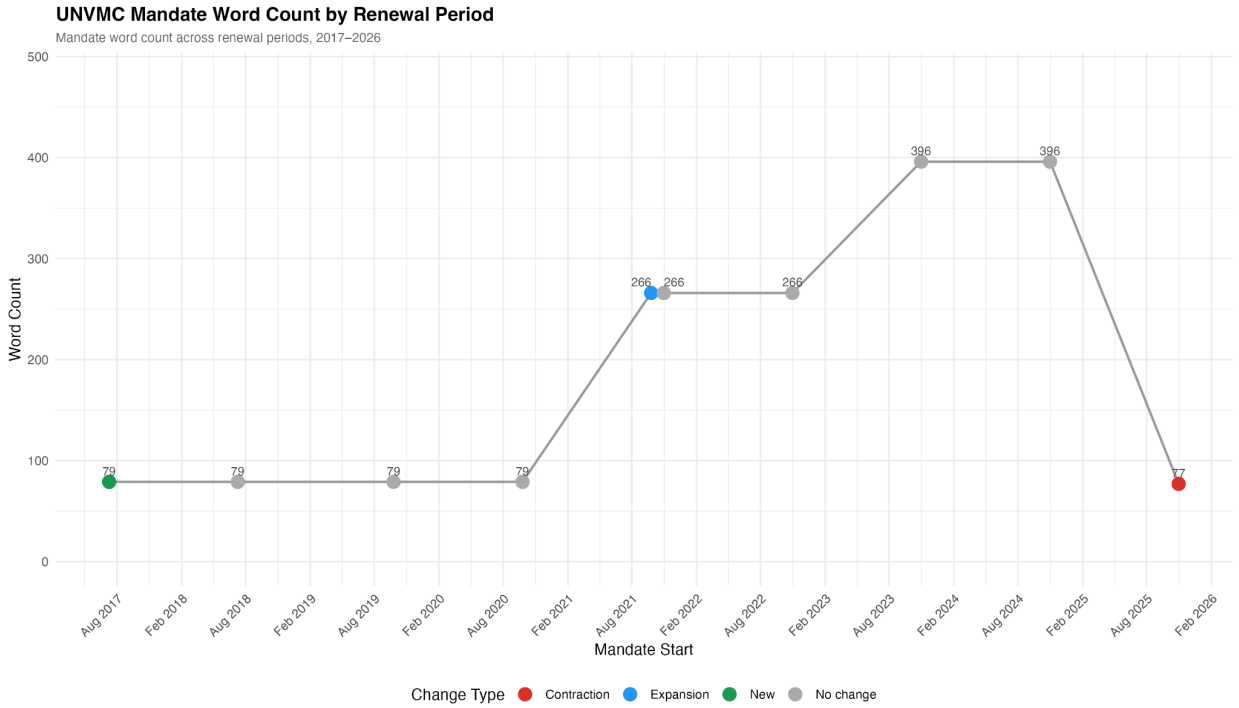


Figure 50. UNVMC Mandate Word Count by Renewal Period: *UNVMC's mandate remained narrow and stable across its first four renewals, with mandate word counts holding at 79 words from 2017 through 2020. The first clear expansion came in 2021, when resolution 2574 increased the mandate to 266 words by adding verification of restorative sentences. The mandate then expanded again in 2023, reaching 396 words after the addition of rural reform and Ethnic Chapter tasks, before dropping sharply to 77 words in 2025. This sharp decline captures in textual form the Mission's contraction under resolution 2798: the Mission was renewed, but with a significantly narrower task set than in the preceding two years.*

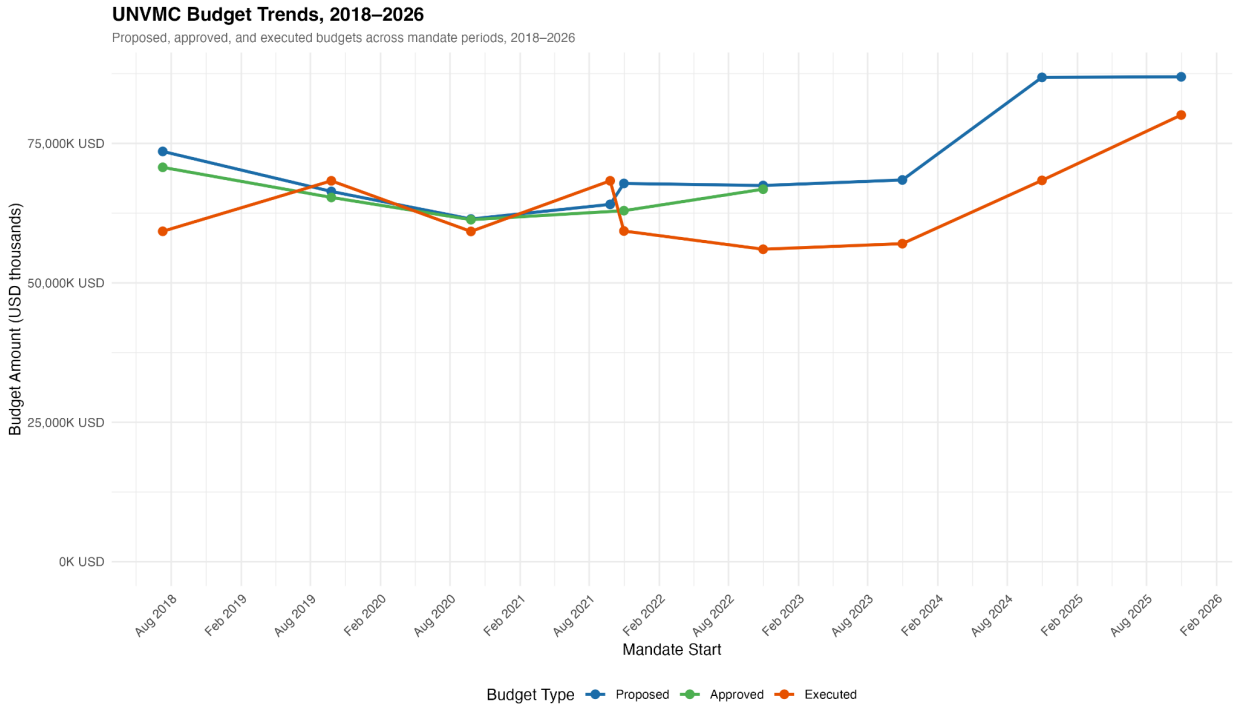


Figure 51. UNVMC Budget Trends, 2018-2026: *Once corrected against ACABQ budget tables, the budget series should show whether resources rose alongside mandate expansion and then fell with mandate contraction. The figures already used in this draft indicate an increase from 67,244.3 in 2023 to 78,336.7 in 2024 and 86,582.3 in 2025. Read alongside the 2025 narrowing of the mandate, that decline suggests that the Council's redefinition of the Mission's role was accompanied by a material reduction in resources rather than being a purely textual adjustment.*

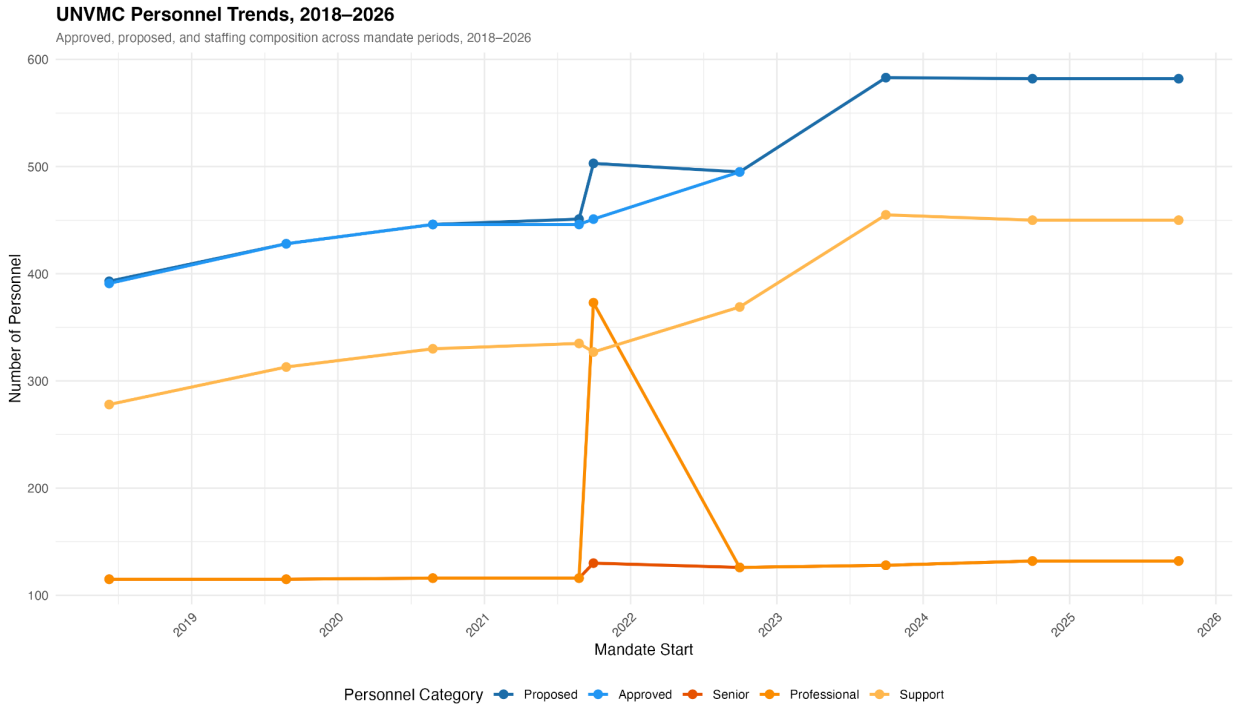


Figure 52. UNVMC Personnel Trends 2018-2026: *A personnel chart comparing approved posts and filled posts would help show whether UNVMC's operational reach kept pace with its expanding mandate. The comments on the case-level dataset indicate that these figures still need to be corrected against ACABQ Cluster III reports, including vacancies and the breakdown across senior, professional, and support posts. Once cleaned, this figure should show whether staffing expanded sufficiently during the 2021–2025 period of mandate growth, and whether the 2025 narrowing was also accompanied by a thinner personnel footprint.*

6. Assessment of Effectiveness

Effectiveness here should be judged primarily against mandate outputs, credible verification, sustained implementation tracking, and the Mission's ability to keep parties engaged with institutional mechanisms. It should not be judged against maximalist outcomes such as nationwide violence reduction. Under that standard, UNVMC has been effective in producing an empirically rich implementation record that both domestic actors and the Council repeatedly use as a reference point, visible in the Secretary-General's reporting detail on reintegration, land access, rural reform indicators, and security trends.[238]

On reintegration, the Mission's verification function aligns with measurable progress: the majority of demobilized former combatants remain linked to reintegration support, and thousands of productive projects have been approved. The Mission also documents institutional development, such as the 2024 formal adoption of a Comprehensive Reintegration Programme after prolonged negotiation. This adoption suggests that verification can help stabilize expectations and produce routine accountability even when deeper structural reforms lag.[239]

On rural reform, effectiveness is more mixed but still analytically useful. Verification does not implement reform, but the reporting helps assess whether state promises are translating into outputs, including hectares adjudicated and formalized, legislative

progress on agrarian jurisdiction, and progress on land restitution. The gap between targets and achieved progress is not merely a failure metric; it is part of the causal story explaining why armed competition persists in rural areas and why local communities experience peace as uneven.[240]

The most serious effectiveness limitation is the security environment, both for civilians and for peace signatories as it constrains implementation in exactly the areas the Final Agreement sought to transform. The reported total of 460 former combatants killed since 2016 underscores that reincorporation is not only a socioeconomic process but also a protection problem.[241] Parallel UN human rights documentation of deadly violence against rights defenders reinforces that Colombia remains among the most dangerous environments for civic actors, which in turn undermines trust in state capacity and complicates any verification-based peace model dependent on local participation.

Finally, political sustainability in the Council emerged as part of "effectiveness" rather than a purely external context. The 2025 renewal demonstrates that a verification mission can remain valued enough to survive but still be narrowed when a permanent member frames peripheral tasks as overextension of the mandate and fiscal burden. In practical terms, the mandate reduction and observer ceiling reset can be read as the Council reasserting a narrower definition of what it views as verifiable "peace and security" obligations. In other words, this is an outcome that may preserve the mission's continuity while limiting its ability to provide international accountability on transitional justice and ethnic inclusion.[242]

7. Key Takeaways

The Colombia case therefore shows how consent-based verification missions can generate unusually durable legitimacy when they are tied to a signed agreement, a joint request by the parties, and a bounded set of verifiable commitments, while also revealing how vulnerable mandate layering becomes once political consensus narrows. As illustrated by this case study, this argument can be made for the following key reasons:

a. **Consent based verification missions can generate unusually durable legitimacy when they are explicitly tied to a signed agreement and a bounded set of verifiable commitments.** Colombia's mission began with that narrow core and that design helps explain why renewals were widely consensual for years.[243]

b. **Mandate layering is politically productive but not politically free.** The additions of SJP restorative-sentence verification (2021) and rural reform/ethnic monitoring (2023) reflected a Council willing to underwrite implementation by expanding international accountability mechanisms; the 2025 removal of two of those tasks shows that such layering is reversible when framed as exceeding peace and security remit or as imposing fiscal burden.[244]

c. **Operational design should be treated as part of mandate design, not as implementation "plumbing."** In Colombia, the reset of international observers from 188 to 120 and the 2026 revised estimate cut align with the post-2798 task

reductions, implying a direct link between politics, money, and what can plausibly be verified.[245]

d. **Verification is most effective when it makes implementation legible.** The Secretary-General's reporting on reintegration and rural reform provides quantified indicators that domestic actors can contest, validate, or use to target policy. That does not end violence, but it can prevent "implementation" from becoming purely rhetorical by forcing a shared factual baseline.[246]

e. **Security guarantees are the pivot on which the entire verification model turns.** High levels of violence against former combatants and rights defenders reduce the feasibility of reintegration and undermine the credibility of state capacity. In design terms, expanding verification into structural chapters without better rural security and protection can leave the Mission documenting both progress and the barriers to consolidating it.

Taken together, the Colombia case shows that verification missions are most durable when legitimacy, operational design, and political support remain aligned. Once that alignment weakens, the mission may survive, but the breadth of what it is permitted to verify becomes far more vulnerable to retrenchment.

D. The United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH)

Summary:

The evolution of the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) illustrates how special political mission mandates expand in response to deteriorating conditions, yet this adaptation does not necessarily translate into meaningful implementation on the ground. As Haiti's crisis deepened following the 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, the Security Council progressively broadened BINUH's mandate to include stronger roles in policing support, human rights monitoring, justice reform, and coordination with external security actors. These adjustments took place in a context of collapsing state institutions, expanding gang control, and limited territorial authority, which significantly constrained what could be carried out in practice. At the same time, Council dynamics shaped both the content of the mandate and the pace of its evolution. While there was broad support for maintaining and adapting BINUH, differing priorities among members influenced how the mandate developed. Some members emphasized expanding the mission's role across political, humanitarian, and human rights dimensions, while others stressed national ownership, tighter mandate limits, and caution toward external security involvement. These differences resulted in shorter renewal cycles at key moments and in contested mandate elements, including justice safeguards, arms flows, and Women, Peace and Security language, which were often negotiated, limited, or delayed. The Haiti case therefore demonstrates that mandate adaptation alone cannot compensate for weak national counterparts or an adverse security environment. BINUH's role remained concentrated in areas aligned with the core functions of special political missions, including political facilitation, coordination, and human rights monitoring, while areas requiring territorial control, enforcement capacity, and functioning governance structures remained largely beyond reach. Ultimately, the case underscores a central finding of this report: the trajectory of special political missions depends on whether the institutional and security conditions on the ground allow mandates to be carried out, as well as on how political dynamics shape which priorities are included or constrained.

1. Background and Context

Haiti's conflict environment is shaped by a long history in which weak institutions, political competition, and illicit economies have become deeply intertwined. Across repeated moments of state breakdown, armed groups, traffickers, and political patrons have often operated through mutually reinforcing relationships, in which violence served criminal interests while simultaneously shaping struggles over power, protection, and access to resources. Periods of weak law enforcement repeatedly created openings for gangs and trafficking networks to embed themselves within local systems of authority, often with the backing or tolerance of political and business elites.[247] This overlap between coercion, patronage, and illicit markets remains central to understanding Haiti's present crisis.

These patterns are deeply rooted. Under the Duvalier regime, violence was built directly into state authority through paramilitary structures such as the Tonton Macoute.[248] Rather than disappearing after 1986, this logic persisted through successive coups, contested presidencies, and fragile transitions, which repeatedly left security vacuums. The 1991-1994 military period deepened the links between armed actors, smuggling, and political violence. The restoration of constitutional order in 1994, and the creation of the Haitian National Police (HNP), did not fundamentally resolve the underlying drivers of corruption, impunity, and coercive patronage.[249] As a result, the following decade remained marked by varying levels of lawlessness despite sustained international support, including extended UN peacekeeping operations.

A particularly important feature of this trajectory has been the fragility of the HNP and the justice system. At certain moments, efforts to professionalize the police helped reduce overt gang violence, yet these gains were rarely sustained. Corruption, limited territorial reach, porous borders, and weak judicial follow-through repeatedly allowed criminal networks to adapt and return.[250] In practice, lower levels of visible violence often reflected temporary accommodations between traffickers, local elites, and state-linked actors rather than genuine improvements in governance or public security. This helps explain why periods that appeared more stable on the surface often concealed the continued consolidation of illicit authority beneath the surface.

Several turning points reinforced these structural dynamics. Haiti's emergence in the 1980s as a major cocaine transshipment route tied domestic instability more closely to transnational criminal economies.[251] The 2004 crisis and renewed international engagement unfolded in a context where gangs had become de facto authorities in parts of Port-au-Prince, sustained through reciprocal relationships with political and business elites.[252] After the 2010 earthquake, gang violence did not return as sharply as many expected, but trafficking in drugs, persons, and weapons continued, facilitated by porous borders and weak state presence.[253] Concerns during the Martelly presidency about politically protected figures linked to trafficking networks further reinforced fears that criminal influence was once again becoming embedded within state institutions.

The most severe recent turning point came with the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moise, which accelerated institutional fragmentation and deepened insecurity. Since then, armed groups have expanded their territorial control dramatically with recent estimates suggesting that gangs control roughly 90 percent of Port-au-Prince, while children under the age of eighteen are believed to comprise around half of all gang members.[254] As violence has increased, displacement has reached record levels, with more than 1.4 million people, over 10 percent of Haiti's population, driven from their homes.[255] At the same time, more than half of Haitians require humanitarian assistance. Haiti's long-running governance crisis has therefore evolved into a multidimensional emergency marked by political paralysis, mass displacement, economic disruption, and widespread violence.

The United Nations has maintained a substantial presence in Haiti for much of the past two decades, reflecting repeated efforts to stabilize the country and strengthen state institutions. The largest mission was United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (2004-2017), a peacekeeping operation established after the 2004 crisis. MINUSTAH contributed to periods of improved security and institutional support, but many of its gains proved fragile or unsustainable after withdrawal. It was followed by United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (2017-2019), a lighter Chapter VII mission focused on policing, justice reform, and rule-of-law support. In 2019, the Security Council replaced MINUJUSTH with United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti, a special political mission mandated to advise the Government of Haiti on political stability, good governance, rule of law, and human rights, while supporting inclusive national dialogue, electoral reforms, police professionalization, justice reform, and strategies to reduce gang and community violence.

What makes this history especially important is that Haiti's crisis cannot be understood simply as a story of gangs or episodic violence. It reflects a deeper pattern of institutional fragility, elite fragmentation, and a political economy in which illicit networks have repeatedly adapted to, and at times become part of, the state itself. This context is particularly relevant for understanding how United Nations missions, including BINUH, have operated under challenging circumstances on the ground as well as structural constraints set in New York.

2. Mandate Evolution

The United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) was established through Security Council Resolution 2476 (2019) following the drawdown of the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH).[256] Its creation reflected the Council's judgment at the time that Haiti had moved into a phase requiring a lighter special political mission centered on political accompaniment, institutional strengthening, and advisory support rather than coercive stabilization. The initial mandate was structured around three core objectives: the use of the Special Representative's good offices to support an inclusive political process; assistance to the Haitian authorities in strengthening governance, the rule of law, and human rights; and strategic advisory support to the Haitian National Police, judicial institutions, and corrections systems. From the outset, the mandate was therefore designed to support a transition in which political facilitation and technical institutional support would consolidate gains made during the previous peacekeeping phase.

The first renewal cycle, under Resolution 2547 (2020), largely preserved the initial mandate architecture.[257] The mission was renewed for a twelve-month period with no substantive revision to its core operative tasks, maintaining the existing emphasis on political facilitation, governance support, and advisory assistance to police and justice institutions. This continuity is significant within the broader mandate cycle because it marked a period in which the mission's foundational design remained stable, even as later renewals would introduce more substantive adjustments in response to Haiti's evolving political and security context.

A more significant turning point emerged with Resolution 2600 (2021), which shortened the renewal period to nine months and requested a strategic assessment of the mission.[258] The renewal followed contentious Council negotiations over BINUH's future direction, with some members favoring a shorter cycle and possible drawdown, while others argued that Haiti's worsening crisis after the assassination of President Jovenel Moise required the mission to be strengthened and adapted. Although the operative structure of the mandate remained broadly consistent, the reduced duration signaled that the original mission design was no longer viewed as fully adequate to the evolving context. The mandated review further indicated that BINUH's future trajectory was under active reassessment.

That reassessment translated into substantive expansion in Resolution 2645 (2022).[259] While the core framework established in resolution 2476 remained intact, the mission's police and corrections role was more clearly institutionalized through a defined ceiling of up to 42 civilian and seconded police and corrections advisers, led by a UN Police Commissioner. The human rights component was also strengthened through dedicated capacity on sexual and gender-based violence, including women's protection expertise where applicable. More significantly, the resolution introduced new operational language on illicit arms trafficking, financial flows, border and port management, and formalized cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). It also requested consultations on possible enhanced security support for the Haitian National Police and signaled the Council's readiness to consider targeted measures against actors supporting gang violence.

Resolution 2692 (2023) deepened the mission's expansion by linking BINUH more explicitly to the wider security and stabilization architecture emerging around Haiti's crisis.[260] The police and corrections component was increased to up to 70 civilian and seconded personnel, while the mandate also scaled up BINUH's strategic and advisory support to the training and investigative capacities of the Haitian National Police. The resolution further introduced child protection as a cross-cutting issue throughout the mandate, requiring dedicated advisory support to Haitian authorities. Reporting on gang violence, human rights abuses, illicit arms routes, and financial flows was also made more systematic through regular annexes and UNODC updates. Equally significant, the Council requested that the mission strengthen its own support and security capacities to ensure the safe mobility of civilian and police personnel. Additional language addressed humanitarian access, protection of medical personnel, and the reopening of supply routes and local markets blocked by armed groups. The most consequential adjustment, however, was the Secretary-General's mandate in 2023 to present the full range of UN support options to improve Haiti's security environment, including support to a non-UN multinational force and strengthening BINUH, while effectively dismissing the possibility of a peacekeeping operation.

Following the deployment of the Multinational Security Support mission (MSS), Resolution 2743 (2024) maintained BINUH's existing police and corrections ceiling while

refining its role within Haiti's broader stabilization framework.[261] The resolution reaffirmed child protection as a cross-cutting responsibility, supported through dedicated capacity and continued reporting on grave violations against children. It also strengthened the integration of gender equality, women's political participation, sexual and gender-based violence, and implementation of Haiti's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security across mission activities. It further sharpened the mission's support to serious crimes, accountability, human-rights monitoring, illicit arms and financial flows, and non-military approaches to gang dismantlement and reintegration. Most importantly, the cycle more clearly positioned BINUH as the primary UN coordination focal point with MSS, Haitian authorities, and regional partners, emphasizing complementarity across political, justice, and community-level stabilization efforts.

The 2025 renewal under Resolution 2785 marked another turning point through a short technical rollover to January 2026.[262] While the operative content of the mandate remained unchanged, the six-and-a-half-month duration reflected the Council's decision, led in part by the co-penholders, to preserve flexibility pending changes in Haiti's wider security architecture. In particular, the shortened cycle anticipated the planned transition of the Multinational Security Support Mission into what became the Gang Suppression Force on 30 September 2025, giving the Council roughly four months to begin establishing the new arrangement before revisiting how BINUH's mandate should be adjusted to better complement it. The shortened renewal therefore signaled uncertainty over how it would fit into the next phase of international engagement in Haiti.

Resolution 2814 (2026) marked a clear revision of BINUH's mandate by reorganizing it around a more defined set of political, electoral, justice, and violence-reduction tasks, including coordination with the UN Security Council-authorized Gang Suppression Force (GSF), the UN Support Office in Haiti, and the Council's Sanctions Committee.[263] Alongside its continued good-offices role, the mission was explicitly tasked to support the organization of municipal, parliamentary, and presidential elections and coordinate international electoral assistance with partners including CARICOM. The mandate also introduced a more structured role in community violence reduction and the design of a Haitian-led disarmament, dismantlement, and reintegration programme, including referral pathways for children formerly associated with gangs. In close coordination with the GSF, BINUH was further tasked to support Haitian institutions in addressing prolonged pretrial detention, court functionality, and the handling of high-risk individuals, while maintaining dedicated protection and human-rights capacity to monitor gang violence and sexual violence. This cycle therefore more clearly aligned the mission with Haiti's electoral transition, justice-sector bottlenecks, and the institutional consequences of anti-gang operations.

3. Political Dynamics in the Security Council

The politics surrounding BINUH's mandate reveal a Council that was usually more divided over the design, scope, and adaptation of UN engagement in Haiti. While most members broadly supported maintaining a UN political presence given Haiti's persistent instability

and repeated requests for assistance, disagreements emerged over whether BINUH should be preserved, strengthened, or gradually wound down, as well as how closely it should be linked to wider security arrangements. Negotiations more often placed a broad majority of Council members in favor of maintaining and adapting the mission, while China, often supported by Russia, more frequently emphasized sovereignty, shorter renewal cycles, and limits on mandate expansion. Haiti was also unusual in having shared penholdership between the United States and a Latin American Council member. Elected members, especially the A3 and later the A3 Plus, nonetheless played an important role in pressing for reassessment and stronger responsiveness to conditions on the ground.

These dynamics were visible from the mission's establishment. Resolution 2476 (2019) passed with thirteen votes in favor and abstentions from China and the Dominican Republic.[264] The United States, as penholder, framed the transition from MINUJUSTH to BINUH as a model shift from a Chapter VII peacekeeping presence to a lighter special political mission centered on strategic advice, national ownership, and a smooth transfer of responsibility to Haitian institutions. Within parts of the UN system, there were concerns that the transition may have come before conditions on the ground had sufficiently stabilized, and that wider pressures to reduce the size and cost of peacekeeping operations also shaped the timing and design of the move. China's abstention reflected its position that the new office's mandate should remain "clear and concise" and tightly focused on peace and security issues, and that its proposed amendments on scope were not sufficiently reflected in the final text. The Dominican Republic's abstention reflected a different concern: it argued for a more robust, multidimensional, and adequately funded framework that would address public security alongside political institutions, electoral support, inequality, climate vulnerability, and the wider social drivers of instability. This first vote therefore established a recurring political pattern in the Haiti file: penholders generally favored a lighter advisory mission, China consistently emphasized clarity of scope and Haitian sovereignty, while regional and elected members often pressed for a broader mandate more closely aligned with Haiti's multidimensional crisis.

The first major turning point emerged in the 2021-2022 renewals, when Council divisions shifted from questions of mandate continuity to debates over adaptation and security architecture. In 2021, the United States and Mexico initially sought a straightforward twelve-month renewal, while China, supported by Russia, pushed for a shorter six-month cycle linked to a strategic reassessment of BINUH's future role.[265] The A3 plus one, Kenya, Niger, Tunisia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, did not share China's preference for a shorter cycle and instead supported a review process aimed at strengthening the mission's ability to respond to Haiti's political, socio-economic, humanitarian, and human-rights crisis following the assassination of President Jovenel Moise. Among some Council members and UN observers, China appeared to view Haiti through a broader geopolitical lens linked to its continued recognition of Taiwan, whereas most other members were primarily focused on BINUH's operational needs on the ground. Multiple silence breaks, repeated vote postponements, and China's decision to place a competing draft in blue underscored the depth of disagreement before a compromise emerged

around a nine-month renewal and a six-month strategic assessment. That assessment directly shaped the 2022 renewal, when the Council moved from reviewing BINUH's role to debating whether the mission should become a platform for wider coercive measures in response to escalating gang violence.[266] Western and elected members broadly supported stronger language on gang violence, illicit arms and financial flows, and support to the Haitian National Police. China, in a notable departure from its earlier position, went further by proposing arms embargo provisions, targeted sanctions, and the authorization of a multinational police force, while Russia and several A3 members supported parts of this approach. The eventual compromise incorporated stronger language on illicit arms transfers, gang violence, and options for enhanced security support to the Haitian National Police, while deferring formal decisions on sanctions or multinational force arrangements to later Council consideration.

A second and more consequential phase unfolded across the 2023-2024 cycles, when Council negotiations shifted from mandate strengthening to the design of a wider security architecture around Haiti. By 2023, gang violence had reached levels the Secretary-General described as comparable to armed conflict, while Haitian authorities had renewed their request for an international specialized force.[267] The United States and Ecuador, as co-penholders, together with several Western and elected members, favored scaling up BINUH's police and corrections capacity, strengthening reporting on gang violence and illicit arms flows, and preserving pathways for both a non-UN specialized force and possible future UN engagement. China and Russia resisted endorsing either option before a lead country had defined concrete terms and Haitian actors had reached firmer political agreement, leading to repeated silence breaks across successive drafts. The compromise text ultimately increased the police and corrections ceiling from 42 to 70, strengthened HNP support and systematic reporting on gang violence and criminal networks, and retained both security pathways within a broader menu of future options rather than endorsing a single model.

The 2024 renewal carried this debate into the MSS phase, though in a less contentious form. While Resolution 2743 was adopted unanimously, the main negotiation issue centered on how explicitly BINUH's coordination with the MSS should be formalized.[268] The co-penholders initially proposed the creation of a designated coordination mechanism to optimize international support for the Haitian National Police, but China and Russia opposed language that might pre-empt separate Council discussions on the renewal of the MSS authorization. The compromise retained coordination language, emphasizing BINUH as the primary UN focal point alongside MSS and other stakeholders, while dropping any reference to a formal mechanism. At the same time, elected members shaped several thematic additions: Switzerland secured stronger child-protection and climate-resilience language, while the A3 plus one, supported by China, added provisions on strategic communications and awareness of the arms embargo regime. These debates became more consequential later in 2024, when China and Russia blocked a U.S.-led initiative to begin planning the transformation of the MSS into a UN peacekeeping operation.[269] Washington and supporters argued that such a shift would provide predictable financing and access to established UN logistical structures, while

China and Russia contended that conditions in Haiti were unsuitable for peacekeeping and that the immediate priority should be strengthening the existing force. Notably, the proposal had support from Haiti, Kenya, and regional actors, highlighting the widening gap between most Council members seeking a more sustainable security framework and those resisting deeper UN operational involvement.

The 2025 technical rollover shifted Council politics toward financing and the unresolved architecture of wider UN support for Haiti.[270] Panama and the United States deliberately proposed only a six-and-a-half-month extension, maintaining BINUH's existing mandate while allowing the Council to revisit the mission once there was greater clarity on several unresolved issues: the Secretary-General's recommendations on a possible UN Support Office for the MSS, the upcoming reauthorization of the MSS itself, and the internal review of BINUH's mission concept. The most politically revealing dispute concerned how strongly the text should commit the Council to acting on the Secretary-General's February 2025 recommendations. The A3 Plus, backed by several elected and European members, pushed to strengthen the language from a general willingness to act toward an explicit commitment to consider the proposals "without further delay," ultimately breaking silence on the issue. The compromise phrase "without delay" was retained in blue, while China simultaneously secured language reaffirming support for a Haitian-owned and Haitian-led solution, consistent with its longer-standing preference for tightly bounded international involvement centered on state ownership, limited external mandates, and regulatory measures such as arms controls, while remaining cautious toward more open-ended externally driven security architectures.

The 2026 renewal brought Council negotiations back to the mission's internal priorities, with the most significant friction centered on whether BINUH adequately reflected the justice and protection pressures expected from the full deployment of the Gang Suppression Force (GSF).[271] European members broke silence to strengthen language on prolonged pretrial detention, advisory support for the handling of high-risk individuals, human-rights monitoring, and the maintenance of dedicated protection-adviser capacity, arguing that Haitian courts and detention facilities were not prepared for potential high-profile gang arrests. Women, peace and security (WPS) also emerged as another key point of disagreement. Unlike previous renewals, the initial draft omitted references to women and gender entirely, prompting proposals from Colombia, Denmark, and Greece to restore language on gender-based violence and women's participation in electoral and political processes. Despite broad support, the United States remained reluctant to reincorporate substantive WPS language. While later drafts introduced more general references to the participation of "all Haitians" and to sexual violence against "women, men and children," the continued exclusion of explicit WPS provisions became another key reason for the silence break by the five European members and Colombia. China's silence break, by contrast, secured the restoration of stronger language on the continued flow of illicit arms and ammunition to non-state actors. The final text therefore reflected a focused compromise around the institutional pressures most likely to shape the mission's next phase: the Haitian justice system's capacity to manage gang-related

arrests, the protection of vulnerable populations, and nationally led pathways to reduce gang violence.

4. Implementation and Constraints

The implementation of BINUH's mandate increasingly revealed a widening gap between the mission's political design and operational realities. While its core priorities remained political facilitation, support to the Haitian National Police (HNP), promotion of rule of law and human rights, and assistance toward elections, the conditions required to translate these objectives into meaningful progress steadily deteriorated between 2021 and early 2025.

At the operational level, BINUH's environment became progressively more restrictive. By 2021, rising gang violence, attacks on police stations, and the failure of major HNP anti-gang operations had already reduced the mission's ability to advance support to national security institutions.[272] As a special political mission without an enforcement component, BINUH depended heavily on the absorptive capacity and territorial reach of Haitian counterparts. As the HNP's ability to establish order weakened, the mission's advisory and coordination functions faced increasingly narrow avenues for practical implementation. By 2022, this challenge had deepened as gang blockades of critical infrastructure, most notably the Varreux fuel terminal, brought basic services and humanitarian access close to paralysis.[273] In practice, insecurity began to shape the feasibility of every mandate task, including electoral support, political dialogue, and institutional coordination.

These constraints intensified as gang control over Port-au-Prince expanded. By 2023, BINUH was expected to support a political transition and help prepare conditions for elections while operating in a context where gangs controlled approximately 80 percent of Port-au-Prince.[274] This sharply reduced the mission's ability to facilitate inclusive political dialogue, extend support for state presence, or sustain rule-of-law initiatives beyond limited institutional centers. The security environment also became more socially complex, with children increasingly drawn into armed violence. Recent evidence, based on UNICEF estimates, suggests that children now account for roughly 50 percent of Haiti's armed groups, while the recruitment of boys and girls rose by an estimated 200 percent in 2025.[275] This trend is highly relevant to BINUH's implementation mandate, as it complicates the mission's human rights and child-protection objectives, increases the need for due diligence and handover safeguards, and further narrows the space for rights-sensitive stabilization efforts. Even where BINUH helped establish coordination mechanisms with the HNP and later with the Multinational Security Support mission, implementation remained constrained because Haitian authorities were unable to transform temporary security gains into sustained control. By late 2024, the creation of police coordination mechanisms and human rights due diligence procedures improved the mission's technical interface with security actors.[276] Yet these remained largely procedural improvements in the absence of sufficient personnel and territorial hold capacity.

A second major implementation constraint concerned BINUH's engagement with Haitian political counterparts. The mission's political facilitation role required a minimum degree of institutional legitimacy and continuity among national actors. Instead, BINUH operated through repeated phases of contested authority, from disputes surrounding constitutional reform and governance by decree in 2021[277] to prolonged fragmentation within the Transitional Presidential Council in 2024 and 2025.[278] Corruption allegations against council members, disputes over cabinet appointments, and the dismissal of Prime Minister Garry Conille weakened the consistency of BINUH's interlocutors.[279] Although the eventual completion of the Provisional Electoral Council represented progress toward the February 2026 transition timeline, these gains remained fragile because the broader transitional architecture lacked cohesion and public legitimacy.[280] For BINUH, this meant that its comparative advantage in political accompaniment and consensus-building was repeatedly undermined by the instability of the institutions it was mandated to support.

Resource and structural constraints further shaped BINUH's implementation trajectory. As the security environment worsened, the mission's mandate remained politically ambitious but operationally indirect, relying on national enforcement institutions and later external security partners to create the conditions for political progress. The delayed and under-resourced deployment of the Multinational Security Support mission therefore became a direct constraint on BINUH's own effectiveness, as insecurity continued to limit the restoration of mobility, institutional access, and state presence.[281] The broader deterioration was equally stark. According to the Secretary-General's reporting cycle, BINUH recorded 1,881 homicides between September and November 2024, while the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights subsequently reported that more than 5,600 people were killed in gang violence in 2024 alone, an increase of over 1,000 from the previous year.[282] Particularly severe atrocities, including the Pont-Sondé attack that killed 115 civilians, as well as continued widespread sexual violence, the forcible recruitment of children, and retaliatory extrajudicial killings by vigilante self-defence groups, further narrowed the space in which BINUH could support justice institutions, human rights safeguards, and transition benchmarks in a stable environment.

The result was a persistent mission-level implementation gap. Over time, BINUH adapted through greater emphasis on political transition, coordination with security actors, human rights safeguards, and support to anti-corruption and illicit financial flow efforts. These adjustments, however, could not compensate for the erosion of Haitian institutional capacity, fragmented transitional governance, and the shrinking territorial space in which state authority could function. By early 2025, BINUH retained a coherent political strategy centered on supporting the transition toward elections by February 2026. However, the mission remained constrained by the absence of reliable national partners, the limited reach of security counterparts, and the inability to consolidate short-term stabilization gains into durable governance outcomes.[283] Haiti therefore illustrates a broader comparative lesson of this report: the effectiveness of special

political missions is often determined less by formal mandate design alone than by the interaction between mandate responsibilities, counterpart capacity, and surrounding security environment in which implementation must occur. Where state institutions lack territorial reach, political legitimacy, or minimum coercive capacity, even well-adapted mandates face severe limits. In such settings, mandate expansion may preserve UN relevance and provide important political, technical, and human rights functions, but it cannot by itself be a substitute for collapsing domestic institutions.

5. Data Visualization

The case dataset provides a useful empirical lens for assessing how BINUH evolved over time. Rather than undergoing a single major redesign, the mission changed through gradual mandate expansion, rising resource commitments, and intermittent periods of political caution within the Security Council.

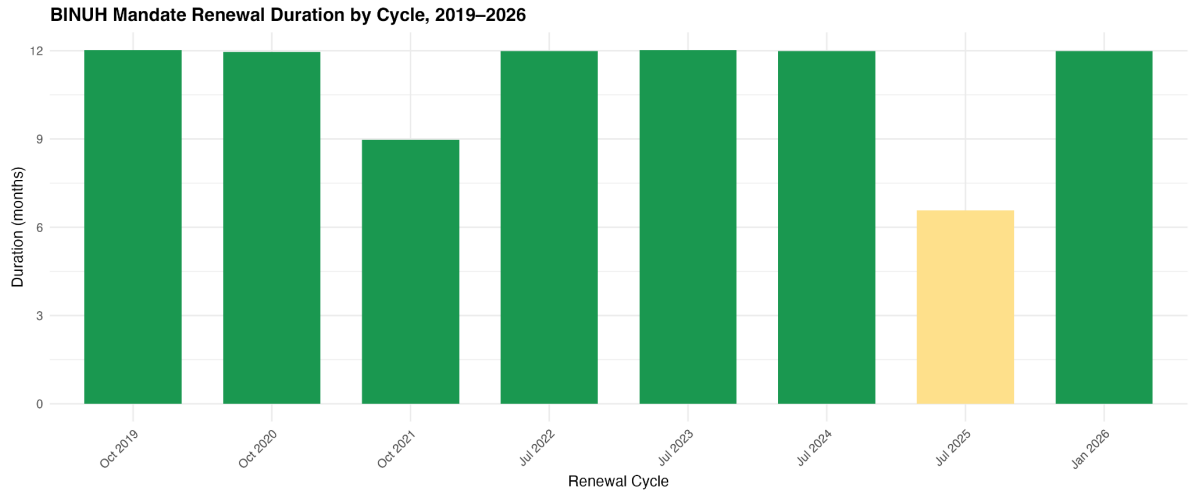


Figure 53. BINUH Mandate Renewal Duration by Cycle, 2019–2026*: Mandate renewal patterns presented in Figure 1 indicate that BINUH was generally renewed for twelve-month periods, with two notable exceptions in 2021 and 2025. The nine-month renewal in 2021 followed the reflected uncertainty within the Security Council over whether the original mission model remained sufficient. The shorter 2025 technical rollover points to a similar moment of caution, as Council members were still debating the wider international support framework for Haiti and BINUH's place within it. Renewal length therefore offers a useful indicator of political confidence: standard annual renewals reflected continuity, while shorter cycles suggested hesitation and a preference for reassessment.*

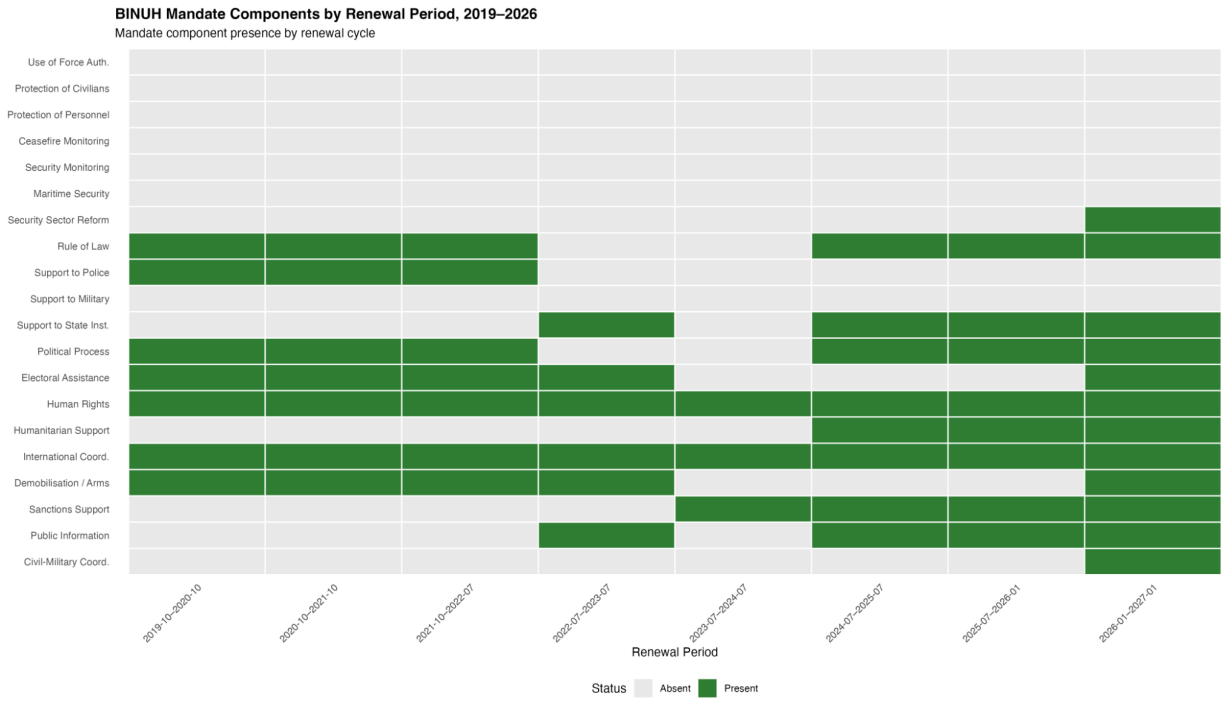


Figure 54. BINUH Mandate Components by Renewal Period, 2019–2026: *Mandate coding data in Figure 2 show a clear pattern of gradual expansion. In its earlier years, BINUH focused primarily on political process support, electoral assistance, human rights, international coordination, and advisory functions linked to policing and rule of law. From 2022 onward, additional responsibilities became more visible, including sanctions-related support, public information, humanitarian linkages, demobilization-related tasks, and stronger support to state institutions. By the 2026 cycle, the mandate had become considerably broader than at inception. This reflects the Council's effort to adapt a political mission to a crisis increasingly shaped by gang violence, institutional weakness, child protection concerns, and the need to restore an electoral pathway.*

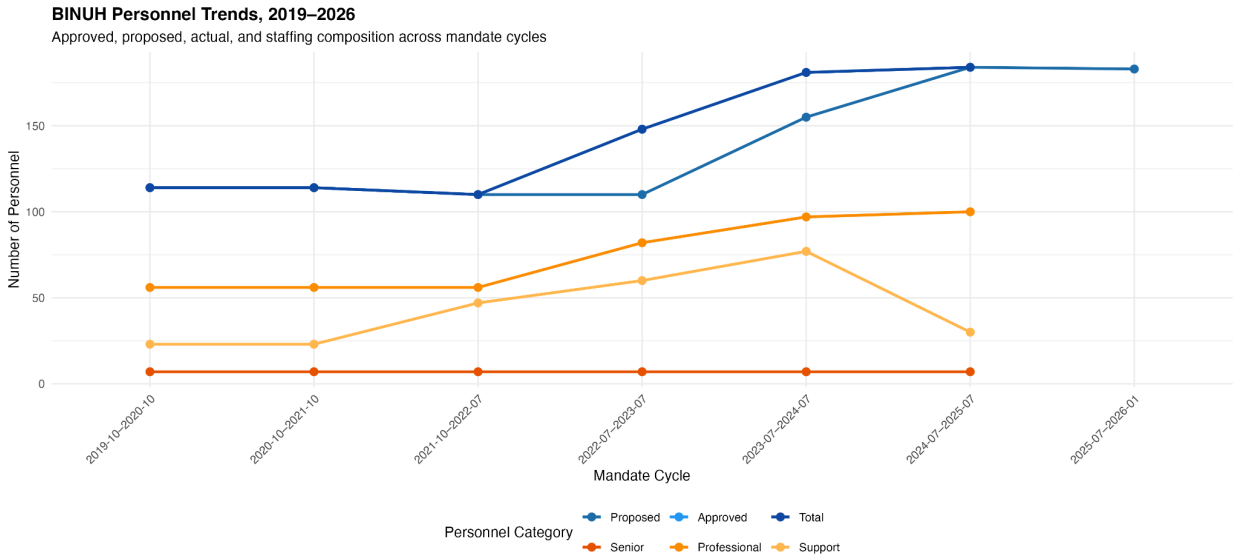


Figure 55. BINUH Budget Trends, 2019–2026: *Budget trends presented in Figure 3 reinforce this trajectory. Approved resources rose from roughly $200 million at the mission's establishment to more than $350 million by 2023-2024. The largest increases coincided with the period in which the Council expanded BINUH's police advisory role, human rights functions, and coordination responsibilities in response to worsening insecurity. It is also notable that the executed budgets remained below approved levels in several years, pointing to delays, operational constraints, or difficulties implementing planned activities in a highly insecure environment.*

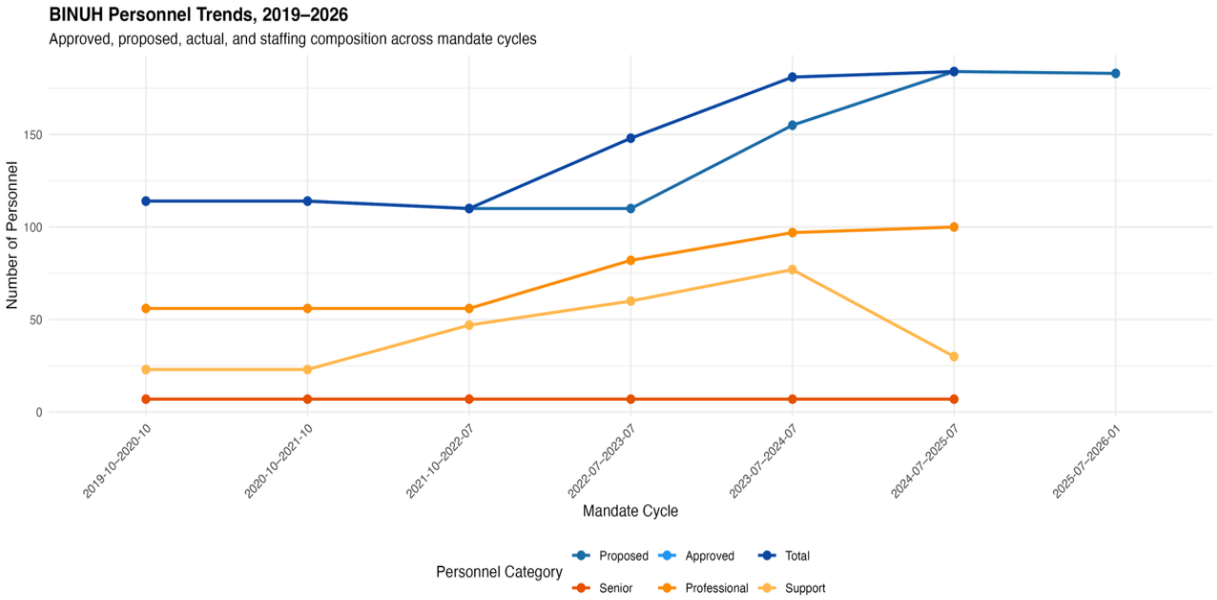


Figure 56. BINUH Personnel Trends, 2019–2026: *Personnel patterns shown in Figure 4 reflect a similar expansion. Overall approved staffing increased significantly after 2022, driven mainly by professional posts rather than senior leadership positions. This is important because it suggests that BINUH's growth relied less on adding high-level positions and more on technical personnel able to support governance coordination, police reform, human rights monitoring, and day-to-day mission functions. Support staff also rose during the middle years before declining later, which may reflect internal restructuring and practical limits of operating in Haiti's deteriorating security context.*

6. Assessment of Effectiveness

BINUH's effectiveness is best understood by looking at how well its mandate aligned with what the mission could realistically do in Haiti's rapidly worsening political and security environment, rather than judging it only through violence figures. Over time, the mission remained most effective in areas where a special political mission is naturally strongest, namely political facilitation, coordination among national and international actors, technical advice, and sustained human rights monitoring. Its limitations became most visible in areas that depended on functioning state institutions, territorial access, and security conditions that were far beyond the mission's direct control.

One of BINUH's clearest strengths was its continued political accompaniment role. Even as Haiti's transitional institutions became increasingly fragile, the mission remained a steady UN interlocutor with Haitian authorities, CARICOM, and other international partners, helping keep the transition process moving forward. The eventual establishment of the Provisional Electoral Council, while still fragile and politically contested, suggests that BINUH was able to help preserve at least a minimum institutional pathway toward elections. In this sense, the mission remained closely aligned with one of its core objectives: preventing political fragmentation from turning into total institutional paralysis.

The mission also retained meaningful relevance in its human rights, child protection, and justice advisory work, particularly as later renewals gave greater attention to child protection, due diligence, and safeguards around anti-gang operations. A particularly important example was the joint documentation by BINUH and OHCHR of the scale of

child trafficking by gangs in Haiti.[284] Their findings showed that children were being used for extortion, surveillance, kidnappings, targeted killings, and sexual violence, while also warning that current responses remained fragmented and deeply under resourced. This is significant because it shows that BINUH was helping reframe how these children should be understood, not simply as perpetrators, but as victims of coercion, exclusion, and structural neglect. The joint call for stronger schools, social protection, rehabilitation pathways, and accountability mechanisms reflects the mission's continued ability to shape the policy conversation toward a more rights-centered response.

At the same time, this is also where the mission's limits become most visible. BINUH was often able to identify emerging risks with clarity, but much less able to influence whether national systems had the capacity to respond. The child trafficking findings are a powerful example of this gap. The mission could document patterns, support rights based standards, and push for prevention focused strategies, yet it had far less influence over the deeper economic hardship, school disruption, displacement, and weak law enforcement systems that continue to make children vulnerable to gang exploitation. In other words, BINUH's contribution was strongest in diagnosis, advocacy, and institutional guidance. Implementation, however, depended on state and international capacities that remained severely constrained.

A similar pattern shaped the mission's rule of law and governance objectives more broadly. Many of the mandate's goals, including support to justice institutions, strengthening state authority, and preparing conditions for elections, presumed national counterparts that could extend authority beyond a narrow institutional center. As gang control expanded and political leadership became more fragmented, those assumptions became increasingly difficult to sustain. BINUH could continue advising on pretrial detention, court bottlenecks, and safeguards linked to gang related arrests, but it could not itself rebuild judicial capacity, restore secure territorial access, or create the political cohesion needed for durable reform.

Haiti shows that BINUH was most effective where its objectives matched the actual strengths of a special political mission: keeping political channels open, sustaining coordination, documenting abuses, and embedding human rights safeguards into wider responses. Its greatest gaps emerged where the mandate depended on capacities the Haitian state no longer consistently possessed, especially territorial control, justice delivery, and social protection. More broadly, the case demonstrates that the effectiveness of special political missions rests on two linked factors: mandate design and the political, institutional, and security conditions required for implementation.

7. Key Takeaways

The Haiti case offers broader lessons on how special political mission mandates evolve under pressure. BINUH's trajectory shows that mandate design is shaped as much by political negotiation within the Security Council as by realities in the field. It also

highlights the growing tension between lighter UN political missions and crises that continue to deepen institutionally and socially. Three key takeaways emerge.

a. **Mandate change unfolded gradually over time.**
A central lesson from Haiti is that special political mission mandates tend to evolve gradually rather than through wholesale restructuring. BINUH's original political facilitation and good offices role remained the foundation of the mission across all renewal cycles, even as the Council introduced additional layers in response to worsening conditions. Over time, these additions included stronger provisions on illicit arms flows, police and corrections expertise, child protection, justice safeguards, and electoral support. This pattern of gradual accumulation reflects a broader trend across SPMs, where the Council often seeks to preserve institutional continuity while incrementally adapting the mandate to new realities. In Haiti, however, this process also meant that the mission's scope expanded more rapidly than the absorptive capacity of national institutions, making implementation progressively more difficult.

b. **Security Council politics shape not just what changes, but when and how quickly.**
The Haiti case clearly shows that mandate evolution is closely tied to political dynamics inside the Council. Shorter renewal cycles in 2021 and 2025 reflected moments of hesitation and reassessment among Council members over the future architecture of international support. Likewise, negotiations over coordination with the MSS and later the GSF, along with debates on justice safeguards and women, peace and security language, reveal how penholder choices, elected member interventions, and sovereignty concerns all influenced the final design. What emerges is a broader lesson for the project as a whole: mandate duration, thematic priorities, and institutional linkages often serve as signals of Council consensus, uncertainty, or strategic caution. Haiti makes this especially visible because each redesign phase closely tracked moments of political disagreement over the wider international response.

c. **Even well-adapted mandates remain constrained when institutions on the ground are collapsing.**
Perhaps the most important takeaway is that strong mandate language cannot substitute for the absence of capable national counterparts. BINUH's later mandates became increasingly attentive to Haiti's realities, especially around justice bottlenecks, child trafficking, political transition, and safeguards linked to anti-gang operations. Yet the mission's effectiveness remained strongest in areas that matched the natural strengths of a special political mission: keeping political channels open, supporting coordination, documenting abuses, and embedding human rights standards into wider responses. Progress was far harder in areas that depended on territorial control, functioning courts, or stable executive leadership. In this sense, Haiti reflects a broader comparative pattern in which the success of mandate adaptation is ultimately conditioned by whether state institutions still possess the minimum capacity to carry those tasks forward.

Haiti shows that mandate evolution is best understood as a process of political adaptation under structural constraint. The case strongly supports the broader argument of this project: special political mission mandates evolve as instruments through which

the Security Council tries to preserve UN relevance, signal political priorities, and respond to changing risks, even when the institutional foundations required for implementation are steadily weakening.

E. United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL)

Summary:

The evolution of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) illustrates both the adaptability and structural limitations of UN Special Political Missions operating in fragmented conflict environments. Established following the collapse of the Gaddafi regime, UNSMIL gradually evolved from a light assistance mission into a multidimensional political mission tasked with mediation, ceasefire support, electoral facilitation, institutional coordination, and human rights engagement. Despite maintaining procedural relevance as the principal international convening platform for Libyan dialogue, the Mission has remained constrained by contested sovereignty, fragmented armed actors, external interference, and persistent divisions within the Security Council over mandate design, leadership arrangements, and strategic direction. While UNSMIL has contributed to ceasefire facilitation, political engagement, and the prevention of complete institutional collapse, its effectiveness has been limited by the absence of enforcement mechanisms, reliance on voluntary compliance, and the lack of coherent international consensus. Consequently, the Libyan case demonstrates that although Special Political Missions may sustain political processes and procedural continuity under conditions of fragmentation, their ability to achieve durable institutional transformation remains structurally constrained when mandate ambitions exceed operational and political realities.

1. Background and Context

The trajectory of post-2011 Libya reflects not a failed transition in the conventional sense, but the collapse of centralized authority without the emergence of an alternative sovereign order. Following the fall of Muammar Gaddafi, the dismantling of state institutions produced an acute governance vacuum in which authority became dispersed across competing political and armed actors. The absence of an inclusive political settlement at the moment of regime collapse fundamentally shaped Libya's subsequent instability, embedding fragmentation within the structure of the state itself.[285]

In the immediate aftermath, transitional institutions including the National Transitional Council and later the General National Congress entirely lacked both coercive power capacity and administrative reach. Competing armed groups, initially mobilized during the revolution, rapidly consolidated territorial and economic control, operating as de facto security providers while aggressively resisting any integration plan into a unified national army. This failure to monopolize the means of violence proved decisive: it transformed the political transition into a competitive arena of fragmented sovereignty rather than a linear process of state-building.[286]

The crisis deepened in 2014, when electoral disputes and contested legitimacy produced a bifurcation of governance between rival authorities in the east and west. This institutional dualism marked a structural turning point, entrenching parallel governments and initiating a cycle of political and military escalation.[287] Efforts to resolve this fragmentation through externally mediated agreements—most notably the 2015

Libyan Political Agreement—generated formal institutions, such as the Government of National Accord, but failed to alter underlying power distributions.[288] The persistence of militia autonomy and competing command structures, particularly surrounding the role of General Khalifa Haftar, limited the enforceability of political arrangements and undermined institutional consolidation.

Within this context, the establishment of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) under Security Council Resolution 2009 (2011) represented a shift from military intervention to political stabilization.[289] Initially conceived as a light assistance mission grounded in principles of national ownership, UNSMIL's mandate progressively expanded in response to deteriorating conditions. However, this evolution occurred alongside growing divisions within the Security Council itself.[290] Disagreements among Council members over issues such as recognition of governing authorities, the role of military actors, and the use of sanctions—evident in negotiations surrounding resolution 2259 (2015) and subsequent Council statements—limited the coherence of international engagement and constrained the Mission's operational leverage.[291]

2. Mandate Evolution

Careful tracing of the mandate trajectory of UNSMIL reflects a gradual yet politically constrained evolution shaped by shifting conflict dynamics and bargaining history among Security Council members, in particular the P5. Since its establishment, UNSMIL's mandate has undergone successive recalibrations through multiple Security Council resolutions which reveal a pattern of functional expansion without corresponding transformation of Libyan institutions. UNSMIL was established through UNSC Resolution 2009 (2011), which created a light political mission to support the country's political transition following the collapse of the Gaddafi regime.[292] The mission's mandate specifically emphasized restoring public security, promoting the rule of law, supporting political dialogue, and assisting constitution-making and elections. This foundational framework was extended through series of UNSC Resolutions such as 2022 (2011) and 2040 (2012), reinforcing a model recentered on national ownership and technical assistance.[293]

A more comprehensive articulation emerged with Resolution 2095 (2013), which expanded UNSMIL's mandate to include security sector reform, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), border security, and human rights monitoring.[294] These early mandates reflected a liberal peacebuilding paradigm, assuming a linear transition from conflict to institutional consolidation under a cooperative central authority.[295] However, this assumption proved untenable as political fragmentation deepened and armed groups proliferated. By Resolution 2144 (2014), the Council began shifting toward political facilitation, acknowledging the erosion of centralized governance.[296] The outbreak of civil conflict in 2014 marked a decisive inflection point. Subsequent resolutions, including Resolution 2208 (2015), reoriented UNSMIL toward mediation among rival political actors and support for a negotiated settlement.[297] This culminated in the 2015 Libyan Political Agreement (LPA), which positioned the mission as the central mediator in Libya's fragmented political landscape.

During this phase, UNSMIL's responsibilities expanded significantly to include political dialogue facilitation, ceasefire support, and institutional unification.

Although the UNSC expanded the mandate, the mission's institutional design remained largely unchanged. UNSMIL continued to operate as a special political mission, lacking enforcement, monitoring, or verification mechanisms. As argued in the literature on UN peace operations, such missions depend heavily on host-state consent and voluntary compliance, which are often absent in fragmented conflict environments.[298] In Libya, this structural limitation constrained the Mission's ability to translate negotiated agreements into durable outcomes. A more structured mandate framework emerged with Resolution 2542 (2020), which redefined UNSMIL as an integrated political mission with a strengthened focus on mediation and political facilitation.[299] This was complemented by Resolution 2570 (2021), which mandated support for the 23 October 2020 ceasefire agreement, including provisions for a scalable ceasefire monitoring mechanism and engagement with the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF).[300] These resolutions marked a partial adaptation toward operational relevance by prioritizing ceasefire implementation, electoral processes, and coordination with regional actors.

The 2021 independent strategic review further recommended restructuring the Mission's leadership, including reinstating a Tripoli-based Special Representative supported by two deputies. However, implementation of these reforms was constrained by persistent divisions within the Security Council. Between 2021 and 2022, UNSMIL's mandate was repeatedly extended through short-term technical rollovers—Resolutions 2595 (2021), 2619 (2022), and 2629 (2022)—reflecting disagreements over leadership appointments, mandate duration, and reporting cycles.[301] This period illustrates how mandate design is not solely a function of field realities but is deeply reflective of Council political dynamics.[302]Following the appointment of a Special Representative in 2022, the Council returned to longer mandate renewals, including Resolutions 2656 (2022) and 2702 (2023).[303] These resolutions maintained UNSMIL's core tasks while adapting language to reflect evolving political realities, including the need for electoral consensus, national reconciliation, and the withdrawal of foreign fighters. Most recently, Resolution 2796 (2025) extended the mission's mandate through 2026, reaffirming its role in facilitating a Libyan-led political process and supporting institutional unification.[304]

Despite these renewals, the mandate has exhibited clear signs of stagnation. While its scope has expanded to include mediation, ceasefire support, and electoral facilitation, UNSMIL continues to operate without robust enforcement or verification mechanisms. Parallel Security Council measures such as Resolution 2804 (2025) which addressing the arms embargo, underscore the Council's reliance on external enforcement instruments rather than strengthening the Mission itself.[305] Across its evolution, UNSMIL's mandate has consistently revolved around five core objectives: facilitating political dialogue, supporting constitutional and electoral processes, promoting human rights and rule of law, assisting in security arrangements, and coordinating international assistance. However, the relative prioritization of these objectives has shifted in response to Libya's evolving conflict dynamics.[306]

From an analytical perspective, UNSMIL's trajectory illustrates a broader structural tension within UN political missions: the gap between mandate ambition and operational capacity. As noted by Lise M. Howard, UN missions often expand in scope without corresponding increases in resources or authority, limiting their effectiveness in high-intensity conflict environments. [307] Similarly, Cedric de Coning argues that adaptive peacebuilding remains constrained by institutional inertia and political compromise within the Security Council.[308] In Libya, this dynamic has produced a mandate that is expansive in scope but limited in execution. UNSMIL is tasked with mediating a complex, multi-actor conflict characterized by fragmented sovereignty and external interference, yet remains dependent on voluntary cooperation from local actors.[309] The UNSMIL's mission's evolution, therefore, reflects not a linear process of institutional learning but a politically bounded adaptation shaped by competing interests within the UN Security Council.[310]

3. Political Dynamics in the Security Council

The evolution and implementation of the mandate of UNSMIL have been largely shaped by the political dynamics between the members and within the United Nations Security Council. While the Council has consistently reaffirmed its support for a Libyan-led and Libyan-owned political process, divisions among the members have constrained the coherence, continuity, and strategic direction of the UNSMIL. One of the central features of these council dynamics has been persistent disagreement over mandate duration, leadership arrangements, and institutional restructuring. Following the 2020 strategic review, proposals to transition from a Geneva-based Special Envoy to a Tripoli-based Special Representative, supported by two deputy special representatives, became a point of contention among the council members. In addition, the council members' disagreements over the timing, scope, as well as sequencing of this restructuring reflected broader geopolitical divisions and delayed implementation of institutional reforms for a while. These council deep tensions were most visible in the period between 2021 and 2022, when the Council was unable to reach agreement on the appointment of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) following the resignation of Ján Kubiš. The absence of a clearly mandated and Council-endorsed leadership structure created a vacuum in strategic direction, with the mission operating under an interim arrangement led by a Special Advisor. This ambiguity weakened institutional authority and limited the mission's capacity to coordinate political processes effectively.[311]

In parallel, the Council increasingly relied on short-term technical rollovers of UNSMIL's mandate, often extending it for periods of three months. While these renewals ensured the mission's continuity, they reflected underlying disagreements among UNSC members and undermined long-term strategic planning. The shift from longer mandate cycles to repeated short extensions reduced predictability, constrained programmatic development, and reinforced a reactive rather than strategic operational posture.[312] Furthermore, instances of abstention during mandate renewal votes—particularly in 2022—signaled the absence of Council consensus. Although resolutions continued to be adopted, the erosion of unanimity diminished the political weight and legitimacy of

Council decisions, thereby reducing their influence on parties to the conflict.[313] Negotiations on mandate language also revealed substantive divisions on key issues, including the timing of elections, the withdrawal of foreign forces and mercenaries notably Turkish troops and Wagener, and the scope of reporting requirements by the Secretary-General. These disagreements often resulted in diluted or minimalistic resolutions, limiting the clarity and ambition of the mandate. As a result, UNSMIL has operated within a framework shaped as much by political compromise within the Council as by conditions on the ground.

Taken together, these dynamics demonstrate that UNSMIL's mandate is not a static or purely technical instrument, but rather the product of ongoing geopolitical negotiation. The resulting inconsistencies in mandate design, leadership arrangements, and renewal cycles have imposed significant constraints on the mission's strategic coherence and effectiveness.[314] The evolution of the UNSMIL's mandate reflects broader transformations in political missions operations, where technical assistance missions increasingly operate within contested geopolitical environments. Since its inception, UNSMIL has retained a consistent core objective: supporting a Libyan-led political process, yet its mandate renewals reveal shifting priorities, institutional restructuring, and persistent divisions within the Security Council.

a. **Early Convergence and Technocratic Mandates (2014–2016)**
In its earlier phase, particularly following mandate renewals in 2014, UNSMIL operated within a relatively cohesive Security Council framework. The Council emphasized facilitating democratic transition, constitution-making, and inclusive political dialogue, with the Special Representative's "good offices" role at the center of mediation efforts. Although disagreements arose such as over sanctions enforcement and illicit oil exports, these tensions were managed through pragmatic compromise among permanent members, notably the UK, the United States, Russia, and China. Importantly, the Council maintained a unified commitment to Libya's sovereignty and a UN-facilitated political transition. The signing of the Libyan Political Agreement marked a critical institutional milestone, establishing a transitional governance framework and reinforcing UNSMIL's role in supporting political dialogue and reconciliation. However, the fragility of Libyan institutions and the emergence of competing authorities foreshadowed future fragmentation.

b. **Gradual Fragmentation and Expanding Mandate Sensitivities (2017–2020)**
Between 2017 and 2020, UNSMIL's mandate renewals began to reflect increasing divisions within the Security Council. While resolutions continued to support national reconciliation, elections, and the UN Action Plan, disagreements emerged over timelines, sequencing of political processes, and accountability mechanisms, including references to the International Criminal Court. The endorsement of the Berlin Process in UN Security Council Resolution 2510 represented an attempt to consolidate international support for a comprehensive political solution. Nevertheless, the proliferation of external actors and the persistence of armed factions within Libya complicated UNSMIL's operational environment. A decisive turning point occurred with UN Security Council Resolution 2542, which mandated an independent strategic review of UNSMIL. This review highlighted the

need to enhance mediation efforts, improve regional engagement, and reconfigure mission leadership to ensure closer proximity to Libyan stakeholders.

c. **Institutional Crisis and Technical Rollovers (2021–2022)**
The period between 2021 and 2022 marked the most acute phase of institutional contestation within the Council. UNSMIL's mandate was repeatedly extended through short-term "technical rollovers," underscoring the Council's inability to reach consensus on substantive reforms.Three primary fault lines dominated negotiations: mandate duration, mission leadership, and substantive language. These disagreements culminated in multiple temporary extensions, including Resolutions 2595 and 2599, which maintained UNSMIL's core mandate without introducing substantive changes.

d. **Partial Stabilization and Strategic Reorientation (2022–2023)**
The appointment of Abdoulaye Bathily as Special Representative in 2022 temporarily alleviated tensions, enabling the Council to return to one-year mandate renewals.Subsequent Resolutions, including 2656 (2022) and 2702 (2023), maintained UNSMIL's core tasks while incorporating elements of the strategic review.

e. **Hybrid Compromise and Conditional Mandates (2024–2025)**
Recent mandate renewals illustrate a hybrid model combining compromise with conditionality. In 2024, the Council adopted a short-term extension with an automatic rollover contingent on the appointment of a Special Representative. By 2025, following the appointment of Hanna Serwaa Tetteh, the Council returned to a one-year mandate while integrating key recommendations from the strategic review.

Taken together, the evolution of UNSMIL's mandate reveals three structural patterns: continuity in strategic objectives, constrained institutional adaptability, and persistent geopolitical contestation.

4. Implementation and Constrains

The implementation of the mandate of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya reveals a persistent and widening gap between formal mandate design and operational realities. This gap is not merely the result of operational inefficiencies, but rather reflects structural constraints embedded in both the Libyan conflict environment and the institutional architecture of United Nations special political missions. Over time, the mission's operational context has shifted from an initially permissive environment to one characterized by fragmentation, insecurity, contested sovereignty, and institutional deadlock within the Security Council itself, significantly constraining implementation capacity.

Despite notable achievements in mediation, dialogue facilitation, ceasefire brokerage, and technical electoral support, UNSMIL has been markedly less effective in achieving its core strategic objectives, particularly the consolidation of a unified political order. UN reporting consistently underscores the persistence of parallel governments, competing institutional authorities, and fragmented executive legitimacy, reflecting deeply entrenched political division and unresolved contestation over sovereignty.[311] The

repeated inability to organize and sustain national elections further illustrates this implementation gap. Although UNSMIL has provided extensive technical assistance and sustained political facilitation—particularly in relation to electoral frameworks, constitutional arrangements, and political dialogue processes—these efforts have repeatedly failed to culminate in nationally accepted electoral outcomes. The collapse of the planned 2021 elections demonstrates the limits of procedural facilitation in the absence of binding political consensus among Libyan stakeholders.[312]

A central constraint on mandate implementation lies in the absence of a unified host-state authority. Although the Mission formally engages with internationally recognized institutions, the operational reality is one of fragmented sovereignty, in which multiple rival governments and armed actors assert competing claims to legitimacy across territorial and institutional spaces. This produces a structural contradiction: the mission is designed under assumptions of a single national interlocutor, yet must operate in an environment where authority is dispersed, contested, and frequently militarized. Engagement with one institutional actor risks delegitimization by others, while strict adherence to neutrality reduces the mission's bargaining leverage. As a result, implementation becomes largely facilitative and reactive, rather than directive or enforcement-oriented, constraining UNSMIL's ability to shape political outcomes.[313]

The security environment constitutes an additional and persistent constraint. The proliferation of armed groups, the absence of a unified national security apparatus, and the entrenchment of militia governance across territory and infrastructure significantly restrict UNSMIL's operational mobility and access. Armed actors function as de facto authorities in large parts of the country, controlling movement, resources, and local governance structures. This reality limits field deployment, constrains direct engagement with local actors, and complicates verification of political and security agreements. In practice, UNSMIL is compelled to rely on voluntary compliance, indirect reporting, and negotiated access arrangements.[314]

A further structural limitation emerges from mandate design itself. As a special political mission, UNSMIL lacks enforcement authority, coercive capacity, and independent monitoring mechanisms. While this design reflects normative commitments to national ownership and non-intervention, it is structurally misaligned with conditions of active conflict, fragmented sovereignty, and persistent external interference. The absence of enforcement tools limits the Mission's ability to deter violations or ensure compliance with political agreements, while the absence of independent verification capacity constrains its ability to assess implementation outcomes objectively.[315]

External interference further compounds these structural constraints. Regional and international actors continue to provide political, financial, and military support to rival Libyan factions, reinforcing internal divisions and embedding the conflict within broader geopolitical competition.[316] In addition to field-level constraints, UNSMIL's implementation capacity is significantly affected by institutional ambiguity and leadership discontinuity. The mission has experienced repeated leadership vacuums,

contested appointments, and prolonged interim arrangements. These institutional tensions are further reflected in the repeated renegotiation of UNSMIL's mandate renewal framework. Since 2021, the Security Council has been unable to agree on a stable, long-term mandate, resorting instead to a series of short-term technical rollovers.[33] The politicization of reporting cycles further illustrates the degree to which mandate implementation is constrained by Council dynamics. Synthesis of these constraints indicates that UNSMIL operates within a structurally constrained implementation environment characterized by fragmented sovereignty, persistent insecurity, external interference, institutional ambiguity, and Security Council polarization.[317]

5. Data Visualization

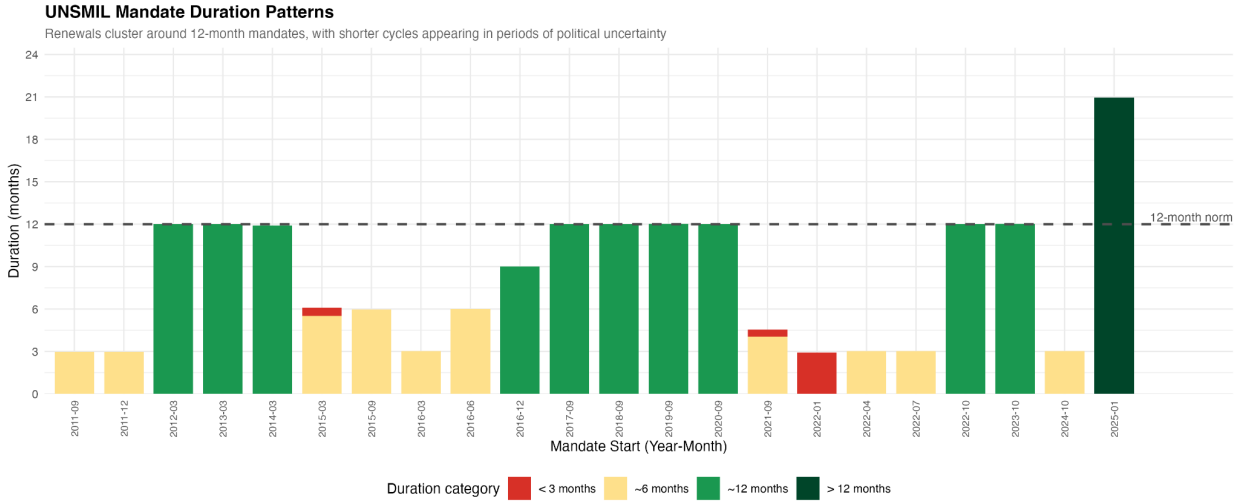


Figure 57. UNSMIL Mandate Duration Patterns: *The chart traces twenty-two UNSMIL mandate renewals from 2011 to 2025, revealing a cyclical pattern of instability and consolidation around the twelve-month norm. After an initial transitional phase (2011–2014) with mixed durations averaging 8.4 months, the mission entered a fragmented period in 2015–2016 marked by shorter mandates (averaging 5.4 months). This was followed by a phase of strong institutional stability from 2017 to 2020, during which four consecutive twelve-month renewals were achieved. However, this stability collapsed in 2021–2022, when mandates shrank dramatically to an average of 3.4 months, reflecting acute Security Council divisions. A partial recovery occurred in 2022–2023 with renewed annual mandates, though this was briefly disrupted in 2024 before culminating in an unprecedented twenty-one-month extension in 2025. Overall, mandate durations exhibit a bimodal distribution—clustered around short crisis-driven renewals or full annual cycles—highlighting the extent to which UNSMIL's operational continuity has been shaped by fluctuating political consensus within the Council rather than a stable institutional framework.*

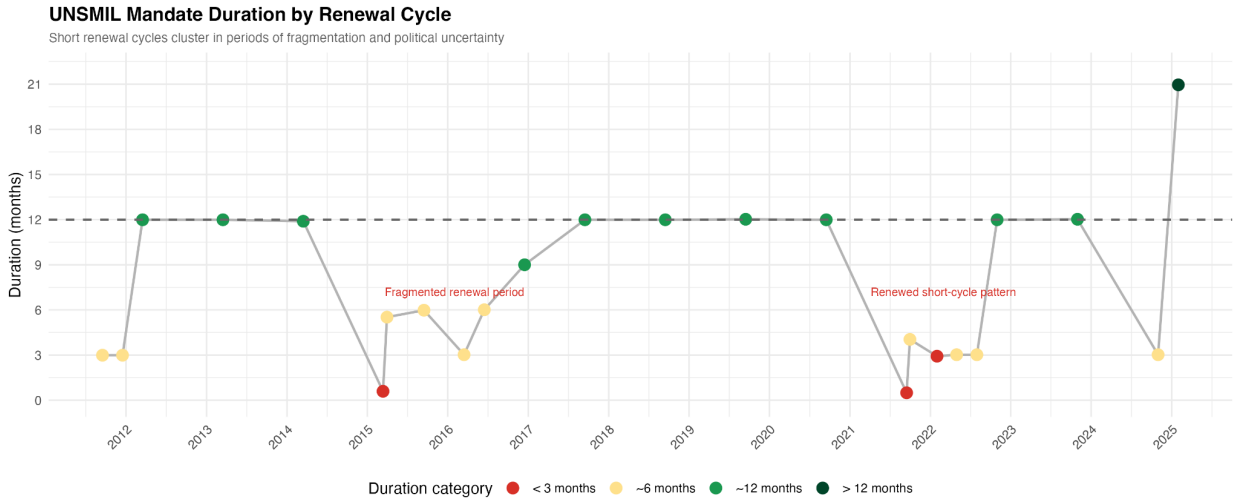


Figure 58. UNSMIL Mandate Duration by Renewal Cycle: *The trend analysis of UNSMIL mandate durations from 2012 to 2025 reveals a cyclical pattern of instability and consolidation around the twelve-month benchmark. After an initial volatile phase in 2012, the mission quickly stabilized into annual renewals through 2014, before entering a prolonged fragmentation period (2015–2017) marked by sharply reduced mandates, including one-month extensions. A sustained phase of full-year stability followed from 2018 to 2021, representing peak institutional coherence. However, this stability collapsed again in 2021–2023, producing the shortest renewal cycles on record, averaging just 2.5 months. While partial recovery emerged in 2024, the unprecedented twenty-one-month mandate in 2025 stands out as a structural outlier, suggesting either a major shift in Security Council strategy or an exceptional consolidation of support. Overall, the data demonstrates a bimodal and cyclical pattern in which periods of consensus and stability are repeatedly disrupted by acute political fragmentation before eventually re-stabilizing.*

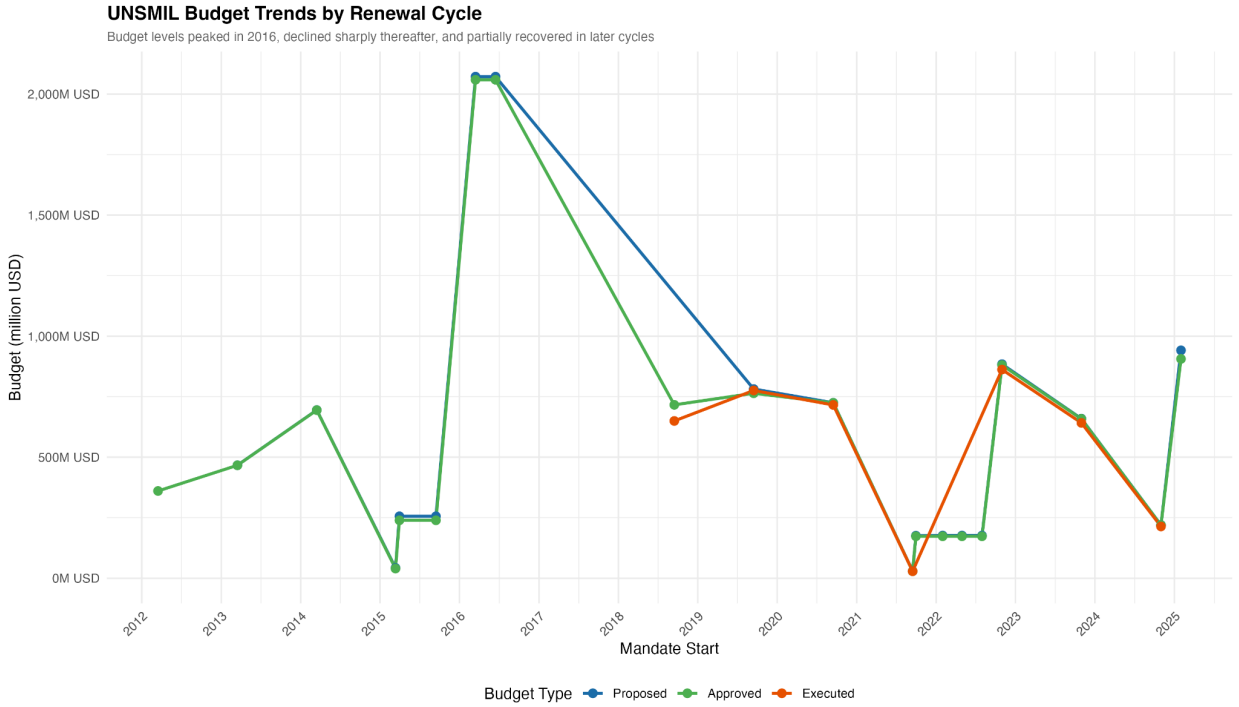


Figure 59. UNSMIL Budget Trends by Renewal Cycle: *The budget trends for UNSMIL from 2012 to 2025 reveal pronounced fiscal volatility shaped by shifting Security Council priorities and operational conditions. Following steady growth from $375 million to $680 million between 2012 and 2014, the mission experienced a sharp collapse in 2015, with budgets falling by 85 percent. This was followed by an unprecedented peak in 2016–2017, when all budget categories aligned at over $2 billion, reflecting maximum political and financial support. The subsequent years saw a rapid contraction and stabilization between 2018 and 2021, with improved execution efficiency. However, 2022 marked a second major downturn, with executed budgets dropping to just $50 million, indicating severe operational constraints. A strong recovery occurred in 2023–2024, with near-perfect alignment between approved and executed budgets, suggesting restored efficiency. Yet, in 2025, a significant gap emerged between proposed and approved budgets—despite a longer mandate—highlighting renewed political caution and constraints on mission expansion.*

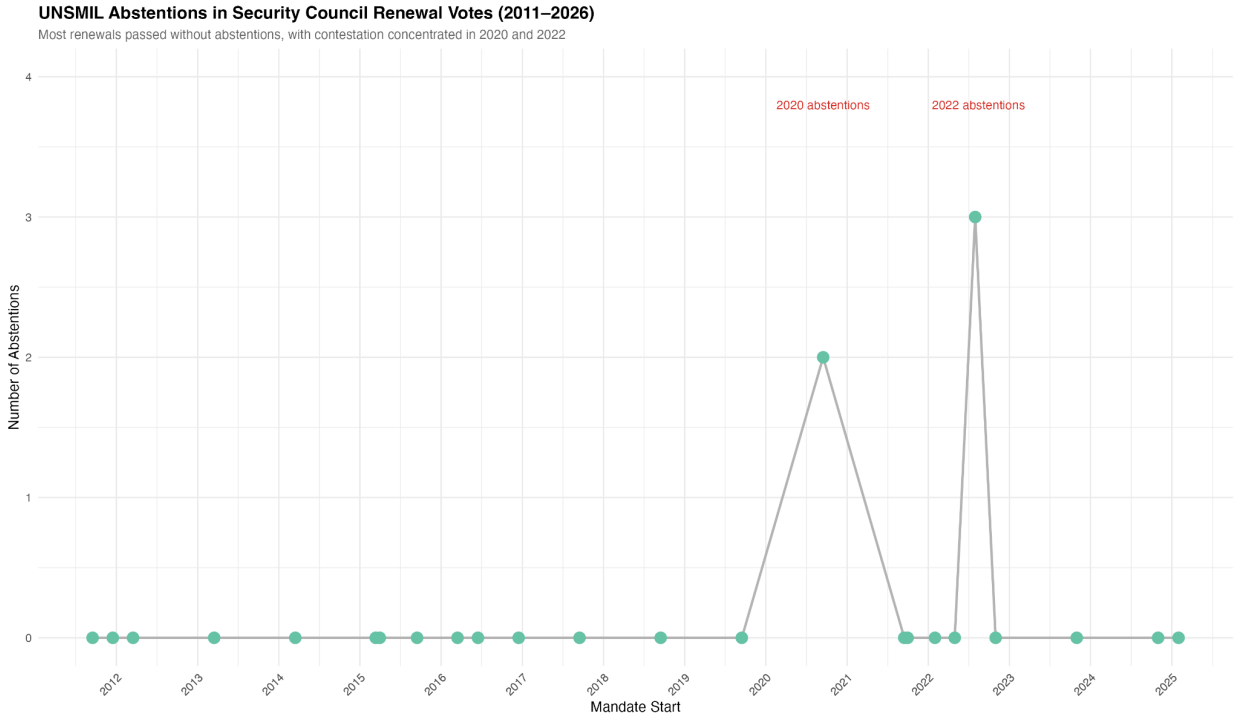


Figure 60. UNSMIL Abstentions in Security Council Renewal Votes (2011-2026) : *UNSMIL voting patterns in the Security Council from 2011 to 2025 show overwhelming and sustained consensus, with nearly 90 percent of renewal votes passing without abstentions. A long period of unanimity persisted until 2020, when the first minor dissent emerged, followed by a brief peak in 2022 with three abstentions—the highest level of contestation, coinciding with mandate fragmentation and budget decline. However, these episodes were short-lived, as unanimity quickly resumed from 2023 onward, indicating that while moments of geopolitical tension did arise, they did not fundamentally undermine overall Council support for the mission.*

6. Assessment of Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya should be assessed through the degree of correspondence between mandate objectives and observable implementation outcomes within a structurally fragmented and contested political environment. In such a context, effectiveness cannot be reduced to binary judgments of success or failure, but must instead be understood as a differentiated pattern of partial achievements, procedural continuity, and structurally constrained outcomes shaped by both domestic fragmentation and external political dynamics.

A primary dimension of effectiveness lies in UNSMIL's sustained role as a mediator and convening platform. Across successive phases of political crisis, the Mission has remained the principal neutral forum through which fragmented Libyan actors are brought into structured political engagement. The facilitation of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum demonstrates this function, particularly during periods of acute institutional breakdown, when no domestic mechanism existed capable of aggregating competing political claims. In this respect, UNSMIL has maintained procedural legitimacy as an indispensable convening actor, even in the absence of a unified national counterpart. This capacity to sustain dialogue under conditions of fragmentation constitutes one of its most consistent and observable achievements.[319]

A second area of relative effectiveness is its contribution to ceasefire facilitation and short-term stabilization. UNSMIL's engagement in supporting the 2020 ceasefire arrangement, including its interaction with the 5+5 Joint Military Commission, reflects its capacity to facilitate negotiated pauses in hostilities and to structure technical frameworks for de-escalation. These efforts contributed to the reduction of large-scale coordinated violence and enabled limited stabilization in key theatres of conflict. However, such stabilization remains contingent and reversible, reflecting what may be analytically described as negative peace rather than substantive conflict resolution, as underlying political and institutional contradictions remain unresolved.[320]

In the normative domain, UNSMIL has maintained a continuous monitoring and reporting function on human rights conditions. Through documentation of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture, and broader violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, the Mission has ensured sustained international visibility of accountability deficits. While lacking enforcement capacity, this reporting function contributes to agenda-setting within the United Nations system and reinforces normative pressure on domestic actors. In this sense, UNSMIL's effectiveness is partially realized through its capacity to generate informational transparency and sustain international scrutiny, rather than through direct corrective action.[321]

Despite these procedural and normative contributions, UNSMIL remains structurally constrained in translating facilitation into durable political outcomes. The persistence of fragmented sovereignty, competing governmental authorities, and autonomous armed actors significantly limits the Mission's ability to ensure implementation of negotiated agreements. In the absence of enforcement mechanisms or independent verification capacity, compliance remains voluntary, selective, and highly sensitive to shifting political and military incentives. This structural dependency on actor willingness fundamentally constrains effectiveness in environments characterized by deep mistrust and fragmented authority.[322]

These constraints are further reinforced by external interference, which embeds Libya's conflict within broader regional and international rivalries. External support to competing domestic actors undermines the neutrality of mediation efforts and weakens the coherence of negotiated settlements. As a result, UNSMIL operates within a dual-layered constraint structure, in which internal fragmentation is amplified by external geopolitical competition, thereby limiting the durability of any political agreement reached under its auspices.[323]

Overall, UNSMIL's effectiveness is best characterized as procedurally robust but structurally limited. It demonstrates sustained capacity in convening actors, facilitating dialogue, and maintaining minimal political process continuity, while remaining weak in enforcement, implementation, and institutional transformation. Effectiveness in the Libyan case is therefore conditional, episodic, and highly dependent on factors beyond the mission's control. The empirical record suggests that UNSMIL's primary contribution lies not in resolving the conflict, but in preventing complete political breakdown and

sustaining an institutional framework for dialogue under conditions of persistent fragmentation.

7. Takeaways

a. **Procedural effectiveness without strategic transformation**
Across 2011–2025, UNSMIL has demonstrated consistent procedural effectiveness in facilitating dialogue, supporting ceasefires, and maintaining international attention on Libya's political and human rights situation. However, these gains have not translated into core strategic outcomes such as national elections, political unification, or consolidated state institutions.

b. **Structural mismatch between mandate design and Libyan realities**
The Mission's mediation-based mandate is fundamentally misaligned with Libya's fragmented sovereignty. Operating in an environment of competing authorities and contested legitimacy, UNSMIL lacks the enforcement and verification tools necessary to ensure compliance, making implementation dependent on voluntary cooperation.

c. **Stabilization without transformation**
UNSMIL has contributed to preventing large-scale relapse into full-scale civil war and sustaining minimal political engagement among fragmented actors. However, these achievements remain reversible and procedural, reflecting "negative peace" rather than durable institutional transformation or resolution of underlying conflicts over power and resources.

d. **External interference and domestic fragmentation as mutually reinforcing constraints**
Sustained regional and international involvement in Libya's conflict reinforces internal divisions and weakens mediation outcomes. Combined with fragmented domestic authority, this external dimension further limits UNSMIL's ability to consolidate agreements into enforceable political settlements.

e. **Institutional and Security Council constraints on mandate effectiveness**
Frequent short-term mandate renewals, disagreements over leadership arrangements, and reporting cycles reflect persistent Security Council divisions. These dynamics reduce strategic continuity and further constrain UNSMIL's ability to plan and implement long-term political processes.

F. United Nations Mission to support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA) & the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (OSESGY)

Summary:

The Security Council's decision to integrate UNMHA into the OSESGY will serve as a blueprint for the future design and deployment of SPMs, if executed successfully. Given that UNMHA's mandate is tied to supporting the Hudaydah Agreement, the Mission's relevance and effectiveness began declining when the Agreement between the conflict parties failed. By contrast, the OSESGY, which is tasked more broadly to support a political transition in Yemen, possesses the inbuilt flexibility to adapt its mandate to evolving developments. Integrating UNMHA into the OSESGY will therefore create a single, streamlined UN presence in Yemen with oversight over all key issues, therefore making the OSESGY an even more nimble and flexible Mission that is crucially required in a fragile and complex operating environment such as Yemen. This enhanced UN presence in Yemen, further strengthened by the OSESGY mandate's inherent adaptability, will also likely serve to retain overarching Security Council unity on Yemen's core political and humanitarian considerations; a consensus that has been evidenced since the onset of the conflict over a decade ago.

1. Background and Context

a. Origins of the Conflict

Yemen has been embroiled in a complex civil war since 2014 between the Iran-backed Houthi rebel group and the internationally-recognized government supported by Saudi Arabia. The Houthis have vied for political legitimacy, drawing in part on their distinct Shiite religious identity within a Sunni-majority country.[324] A key moment that marked the escalation of tensions was the 2011 Arab Spring movement, which catalyzed opposition forces including the Houthis to oust President Ali Abdullah Saleh, leading to his deputy Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi assuming power.[325] However, anti-government protests continued, particularly over rising fuel prices, resulting in increased clashes between the Houthis and Hadi's government. Tensions reached a breaking point when Houthi rebels seized the capital of Sana'a, in 2014, officially marking the start of the civil war.[326]

b. Key Local and Regional Actors

The Houthis have since consolidated their power, controlling Sana'a and north-west Yemen, which together account for the majority of the country's population.[327] The Houthis also control the ports of Hudaydah, Ras Isa, and Salif along the Red Sea coastline, through which Yemen receives approximately 70% of its humanitarian and commercial imports.[328] The Houthis have established themselves as the de-facto authority in opposition to the internationally-recognized Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) established in 2022[329], forming their own cabinet in 2024 and issuing their own currency in areas under their control in 2025.[330] The Houthis receive external backing from Iran, including security and intelligence support.[331] On the other hand, Saudi Arabia has

supported the PLC since its inception, providing the government with $368 million in 2025.[332] The PLC, originally an eight-member body[333], underwent a restructuring in February 2026 and now comprises 35 ministers led by Prime Minister Shaya al-Zindani. This restructure serves as an attempt to unify Yemen's anti-Houthi coalition, which includes the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC) that has also amplified its ambitions to form an independent state.[334]

c. Houthi-Israeli Tensions and Regional Escalation

The situation in Yemen has also been acutely exacerbated by regional tensions, specifically the Israel-Hamas war which began in October 2023. Since its onset, the Houthis have expressed solidarity with Gaza and aligned themselves with Hamas to signal support under the Iran-led "axis of resistance", of which the Houthis, Hamas, Hezbollah are a part. The Houthis began launching attacks against vessels in the Red Sea in November 2023, asserting that they would seize their aggressions if the war reached an end. [335] The Houthis have reportedly reduced their Red Sea attacks since the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas was reached in October 2025.[336] Between March-October 2025, the Houthis also launched multiple drone attacks against Israel, which were met with retaliatory airstrikes from Israel, the U.S., and the UK on Houthi-controlled areas, resulting in casualties including that of former Houthi Prime Minister Ahmed al-Rahawi. [337] Houthi-Israeli tensions remain elevated, notably following the U.S. and Israeli airstrikes that killed Iranian Supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei in February 2026, with the Houthis launching airstrikes targeting Israeli territory as recently as April 2026.[338]

d. Yemen's Challenging Operating Environment

Yemen also faces a devastating humanitarian crisis, with 21.6 million people in need of aid and 4.5 million individuals who are displaced as of February 2026[339]. UNDP further reports that as of 2023, more than 370,000 casualties can be attributed to the war[340]. The situation is further exacerbated by the increase of attacks in the region by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), thus worsening already volatile security dynamics[341]. The Houthis have also launched a grave crackdown on humanitarian actors, as seen from their detention of countless humanitarian personnel across civil society and international organizations, including the UN[342]. The UN has maintained a consistent presence in Yemen since the onset of the civil war and has played a critical role in facilitating key breakthroughs, such as the 2018 Stockholm Agreement between the conflict parties that avoided a major battle in the city of Hudaydah, and the six-month ceasefire from April to October 2022, which has prevented the onset of major hostilities between the Houthis and PLC to date[343]. Despite this progress, the situation remains highly constrained. The UN continues to face significant operational limitations on the ground, acutely experienced by its in-country presences: UNMHA and the OSESGY.

2. Mandate Evolution

a. UNMHA's Mandated Responsibilities

The United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA) was established through UN Security Council Resolution 2452 (2019), to support the conflict parties in implementing the Hudaydah Agreement agreed upon in the 2018 Stockholm Agreement[344], which was brokered by former UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths. [345] The Hudaydah Agreement called for an immediate ceasefire in Hudaydah and across the ports of Hudaydah, Salif, and Ras Isa, the mutual redeployment of both Yemeni Government and Houthi forces from Hudaydah and the ports, guaranteeing the security of the ports by local forces, and establishing a joint Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC) with the participation of the conflict parties and chaired by the UN to oversee the ceasefire, ensure the re-deployment of forces, and support mine action operations. [346] Resolution 2452 therefore mandated UNMHA to lead the RCC assist the conflict parties in achieving its accompanying aims; monitor adherence by the parties to the ceasefire in Hudaydah and across the ports; collaborate with the parties to ensure the mutual redeployment of forces and securitization of the ports by local security forces; and provide UN support to the parties in comprehensively implementing the Hudaydah Agreement. [347]

b. Mandate Scope and Preambular Additions (2019-2025)

Following its establishment in 2019, UNMHA's mandate was unanimously renewed first for two six-month terms in 2019 and 2020, under Resolutions 2452 (2019)[348], 2481 (2019)[349], 2505 (2020)[350], and 2534 (2020)[351], and subsequently for 12-month periods from 2021-2025, under Resolutions 2586 (2021)[352], 2643 (2022)[353], 2691 (2023)[354], and 2742 (2024). [355] While its mandate has remained unchanged, UNMHA's tangential responsibilities expanded in 2022 via Resolution 2643, which included language in its preambular clauses endorsing the Mission-led community engagement, subsequently leading to the creation of UNMHA's Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) in 2023. [356] QIPs aim to improve the quality of life for conflict-affected communities[357], with examples including the provision of furniture across three schools in the Al-Khawkhah and Hays districts in 2023[358] and vocational training to support women and youth in Hudaydah in 2025. [359] The implementation of QIPs is therefore a clear signal of UNMHA's efforts in community and capacity-building alongside its mandated responsibilities.

c. Preambular References to Houthi Hindrances to UNMHA's Operating Environment

It is also important to note that Resolution 2643 (2022) provides the first direct reference to constraints on UNMHA's operations, which is then reiterated in subsequent resolutions, including 2691 (2023), 2742 (2024), and 2786 (2025). Preambular language "[highlights] ongoing Houthi hindrances to [UNMHA's] freedom of movement including patrols, and [stresses] the need to facilitate increased and unhindered UNMHA patrolling".[360] These references suggest that operational constraints, due to the Houthis' lack of willingness to comply with the UN, became more visible from 2022 onwards; which subsequently intensified in 2023 following the start of the Israel-Hamas war that marked a significant uptick in Houthi aggressions including their attacks in the Red Sea and arbitrary detention of countless UN and humanitarian personnel. These developments contributed to a more restrictive and volatile operating environment, which prompted the Security Council to reevaluate UNMHA's mandate in 2025, in

addition to broader efforts to identify efficiencies across peace operations in line with ongoing reform initiatives at the UN, spearheaded by *Pact for the Future*.

d. Secretary-General's Review of UNMHA (2025) & Mission Drawdown (2026)

In 2025, UNMHA's mandate was unanimously renewed for a 6-month period, as outlined in Resolution 2786 (2025). The Council's decision to decrease the mandate renewal length stemmed from the body's request to the Secretary-General (SG) to present by 28 November 2025 a review of UNMHA to identify additional efficiencies and enhanced coordination across the UN missions in Yemen. [361] This request was put forward in the context of the *Pact for the Future* agreement adopted by Member States in 2024, in which the SG was requested to conduct a comprehensive review of the future of UN peace operations, to ensure their appropriate design and deployment to respond to today's challenges.[362] The SG's review of UNMHA returned three options: 1) preserving UNMHA's political presence but eliminating its patrolling capacity as a streamlining measure; 2) retaining a limited presence in Hudaydah to carry out UNMHA's priority tasks; and 3) drawing UNMHA down and transferring existing key responsibilities to the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (OSESGY), which has a presence in Sana'a, Aden, and Amman[363]. In January 2026, the Security Council decided on Option 3, adopting Resolution 2813 (2026) to renew UNMHA's mandate for a final two months until 31 March 2026. The Resolution further noted that UNMHA's pertinent functions would be transferred to the OSESGY and that its liquidation would begin on 01 April 2026. [364]

e. OSESGY: Discharging the SG's 'Good Offices' Role in Yemen

The OSESGY has maintained a critical presence in Yemen since the 2011 Arab Spring movement during which opposition forces overthrew the Saleh government, when the Secretary-General established a 'good offices' role for his Special Adviser Jamal Benomar. The Office of the Special Adviser was established in 2012, led by Benomar until his resignation in 2015, after which it was reconstituted as the Special Envoy post.[365] For continuity, this case study will refer to the role from the 2011-2026 time period synonymously as the OSESGY. Following the instability in 2011, the Security Council adopted Resolution 2014 (2011), requesting the Secretary-General to maintain his good offices role in Yemen, including through his Special Adviser on the ground, to support the Implementation Mechanism for the Transition Process in Yemen in Accordance with the Initiative of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).[366] Resolution 2051 (2012) welcomed the deployment of a small team of experts to assist in the implementation of the transition process and provide support for the National Dialogue process (2013-2014), which brought together key Yemeni stakeholders to develop the way forward for Yemen's political transition.[367] It was on the basis of Resolutions 2014 and 2051 that the OSESGY was formally established by the Secretary-General, with the endorsement of the Security Council.[368]

f. OSESGY's Mandated Scope & Responsibilities

The OSESGY's mandated responsibilities thus entail facilitating the resumption of an inclusive, Yemeni-led and Yemeni-owned political transition process, which includes key

interim steps such as supporting elections and constitutional reform, as well as fostering broader political, economic, and social reform efforts[369]. While its mandate has remained broadly consistent, the OSESGY has expanded its efforts across transitional justice, security sector reform, and gender and human rights[370], adapting effectively to Yemen's evolving circumstances. Unlike UNMHA, the OSESGY is not subject to periodic mandate renewals by the Security Council, but rather operates through continued Council endorsement, as seen from references in resolutions such as 2451 (2018)[371]. The Secretary-General also appoints Special Envoys with Council concurrence reflected through exchange of letters. This process has taken place for the initial establishment of the OSESGY[372], as well as for all three Special Envoys since 2015: Ismail Oud Cheikh Ahmed (2015-18)[373], Martin Griffiths (2018-21)[374], and Hans Grundberg (2021-Present)[375]. Taken together, UNMHA and OSESGY illustrate two distinct governance models, with the former as a time-bound, resolution-renewed technical mission, and the latter as a more flexible, Envoy-led presence operating through sustained Council support.

3. Political Dynamics in the Security Council

a. *Spillover of Israel-Hamas War and Foreign Military Intervention*

Divisions among the Council on the Yemen portfolio have been particularly evident following the spillover of the Gaza conflict into Yemen. While members including Russia, China, and the "A3 Plus One" coalition (which included Algeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Guyana in 2024-2025) have consistently expressed that the situation in Yemen and the Houthis' Red Sea attacks should be considered in the context of the war in Gaza, and have been critical of foreign military intervention in Yemen, arguing that such actions may further exacerbate the humanitarian and security conditions, the UK and U.S. have conducted retaliatory airstrikes alongside Israel in Houthi-controlled territories in response to Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and against Israel. [376] The U.S. has also taken a relatively hardline stance against the Houthis, designating the group as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) in March 2025.[377]

b. *Sanctions*

The Council has also been divided on the issue of sanctions. The P3 (France, the UK, and the U.S.) have expressed the need for heightened pressure on the Houthis through a strengthened sanctions regime, which also includes strengthening the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM), which conducts inspections of vessels traveling to the Hudaydah, Salif, and Ras Isa ports under Houthi control, to ensure compliance with the existing UN arms embargo on the Houthis.[378] Russia and China, by contrast, have cautioned that a more restrictive sanctions regime could complicate progress between the conflict parties in reaching a political settlement, as reflected in their abstentions on Resolution 2801 (2025), which renewed the Yemen sanctions regime until November 2026. Notably, Russia also vetoed a 2018 draft resolution that referenced Iranian non-compliance with the arms embargo on the Houthis[379], highlighting persistent divisions within the Council on this key aspect of the Yemen portfolio.

c. Council Unity on Political, Humanitarian, Leadership Considerations

Despite these divisions, the Security Council has been broadly united on major aspects of the conflict in Yemen, expressing their support for an inclusive Yemeni political transition, as well as the facilitation of mediation efforts between the conflict parties under UN auspices. Council members have also emphasized the importance of addressing the grave economic and humanitarian conditions in Yemen, and have called for increased stability across the Red Sea. [380] Moreover, one of the clearest signals of consensus and a key demonstration of the international community speaking with one voice is the Council's issuing of Presidential Statements on the situation in Yemen, such as the June 2025 statement condemning the Houthis' arbitrary detention of UN and humanitarian personnel and calling for their immediate and unconditional release. [381] This unity has also been reflected in the Council's stance towards the OSESGY, expressing unanimous and unwavering support for both former Special Envoy Martin Griffiths[382] and current Special Envoy Hans Grundberg[383] for their respective efforts in Yemen. Moreover, the unanimous renewal of UNMHA's mandate from 2020-2025 also provides a clear signal of Council consensus on the Mission's on the ground role in Yemen.

d. Non-Consensus Adoption of Resolution 2813 (2026) to Sunset UNMHA

However, Council divisions emerged on UNMHA's most recent renewal cycle, when Resolution 2813 (2026), calling for UNMHA's drawdown, was adopted with 13 votes in favor (P3 and E10) and 2 abstentions (Russia and China)[384]. In the lead up to the adoption of Resolution 2813, the Council decided in July 2025 to renew UNMHA's mandate by 6-months, while awaiting the SG's review and recommendations for the future of the Mission. During the explanations of vote following the 6-month renewal of UNMHA's mandate, the U.S. emphasized that "it is time to sunset UNMHA", given evolving circumstances on the ground in Yemen, especially in light of the fact that the RCC has not functioned as a joint committee since 2020 and rather has evolved into bilateral committees of the PLC and Houthis respectively, as well as the fact that the Mission has faced increasing hindrances to carrying out its mandate as a result of the severe access restrictions the Houthis have imposed in areas under its control. China, noting UNMHA's critical efforts in monitoring the ceasefire and supporting the conflict parties in the implementation of the Hudaydah Agreement, welcomed the SG and Council's efforts to "enhance coordination, improve working methods, and increase the Mission's effectiveness", signaling its endorsement for the continuation of UNMHA's on the ground presence. Other Council Members, such as the UK, adopted a neutral, forward-looking stance, expressing their readiness to consider the full menu of options to be provided by the SG on UNMHA's future.[385]

e. Resolution 2813 (2026): Negotiations

Council members did indeed diverge on their views during the negotiations for Resolution 2813 (2026), with the U.S. strongly supporting the SG's Option 3, ie. to draw the Mission down and transfer pertinent responsibilities to the OSESGY, while Russia and China, expressing the importance of UNMHA as a key stabilizing presence in Yemen, called for a routine 12-month mandate renewal, which was outside the realm of the SG's

options provided to the Council. Some Council members also expressed reservations that a two-month mandate renewal would be too short of a timeframe for the successful drawdown of UNMHA, resulting in key revisions to the final resolution, including the authorization to maintain existing resources "for a period to be determined based on administrative procedures subject to the UN Financial Rules and Regulations", to ensure the effective transition and coordination across the UN presences in Yemen. However, despite this fragmentation on the way forward, reports reveal that the overall negotiation process was brief and relatively uncomplicated.[386]

f. Resolution 2813 (2026): Explanations of Vote

During the explanations of vote following the adoption of Resolution 2813 (2026), the U.S. underscored the importance of the Council needing to adapt SPMs to evolving circumstances on the ground, which includes mandate termination in cases where SPMs are no longer able to carry out their mandated responsibilities due to unprecedentedly challenging operating environments. This view was supported by other Council members, such as Denmark, who expressed that UNMHA's ability to implement its mandate has "become untenable" given the volatile security landscape mired by the Houthis' arbitrary detention of UN personnel. Russia and China, which both abstained on the resolution, voiced their concerns about drawing UNMHA down, with Russia emphasizing that the "liquidation of one of the few UN presences" in Yemen will serve to hinder progress on any attempts to facilitate an inclusive Yemeni dialogue for the way forward, and with China cautioning that a "hasty withdrawal" could escalate tensions further, thus deteriorating an already fragile conflict situation. [387]

g. Key Takeaway: UNMHA's Inherent Limitations Versus OSESGY's Inherent Flexibility

The UNMHA case therefore demonstrates how challenges in the operating environment, rather than Security Council fragmentation alone, undermined its mandate effectiveness. Furthermore, it was these very geopolitical volatilities that contributed to Security Council divisions on a Mission that had historically experienced unanimous and straightforward mandate renewals. Given that UNMHA was established to support a specific agreement in Yemen, ie. the Hudaydah Agreement under the 2018 Stockholm Agreement, its mandate was thus crafted to be focused, narrow, and technical. The case can be made that UNMHA thus enjoyed Security Council consensus from 2019-2025 because of the conservative nature of its mandate. At the same time, however, because UNMHA's mandate was dependent on the Stockholm Agreement, when the Agreement failed due to the conflict parties' lack of willingness to cooperate with each other[388], the Mission's effectiveness began declining. The specificity of its mandate also stymied UNMHA from adapting to evolving circumstances in Yemen in order to remain relevant. The deterioration of the situation in Yemen, which, in turn, hampered UNMHA from being able to effectively implement its mandate, also fueled Security Council fragmentation on its future, ultimately leading to its drawdown. By contrast, the OSESGY possesses inherent flexibility to adapt to evolving developments in Yemen, given that the achievement of a successful political transition, i.e. the basis of its mandate, hinges upon the achievement of success in adjacent issues, including humanitarian and security considerations, given their interrelated nature in the Yemeni context. The transfer of

UNMHA's pertinent responsibilities to the OSESGY will thus serve to consolidate comprehensive UN support under one Mission headed by the Special Envoy, who continues to receive unanimous and unwavering endorsement from the Security Council.

4. Implementation & Constraints

a. *Challenges to UNMHA's Mandate Implementation*

The Yemen case provides a useful illustration of how mandate effectiveness has been undermined by a complex and increasingly restrictive operating environment. As reported by the Secretary-General in his 2025 review, UNMHA's patrols of the Hudaydah, Salif, and Ras Isa ports have been conducted in an "extremely restrictive environment" due to the Houthis' refusal to grant greater access to the Mission to facilitate more frequent patrolling.[389] The operating environment further deteriorated in 2025 amid U.S. and Israeli airstrikes on Houthi-controlled areas, following Houthi drone activity targeting Israeli infrastructure. [390] UNMHA's mandated responsibilities, including chairing the RCC and overseeing the ceasefire, have also been affected by the fact that the RCC has not functioned as a joint mechanism since 2020, due to the conflict parties' inability to break their impasse on the way forward. Instead, it has evolved into parallel bilateral structures involving the PLC and the Houthis respectively,[391] which has limited opportunities for coordinated decision-making between conflict parties on key security issues.

b. *Criticism of UNMHA's Leadership*

UNMHA's leadership has also faced criticism from the internationally-recognized government. For example, a Senior Negotiator to the Yemeni Government's RCC asserted that former Head of Mission Abhijit Guha (2019-2021) "thwarted UNMHA's mission" by being partial towards the Houthis and executing one-sided communications, without providing sufficient updates to the Government in tandem.[392] By contrast, Guha's successor Michael Beary (2021-2025), while possessing a relatively productive relationship with the Houthis, as evidenced by his sustained engagements with Houthi leadership including the Minister of Foreign Affairs[393] and Deputy Chairman in the Hudaydah Governorate[394], was also commended for his equally productive engagements with the PLC, engaging frequently with then-Minister of Foreign Affairs and current Prime Minister al-Zindani.[395] However, despite Beary's aims for balance, UNMHA has continued to face criticism from the PLC for being an "enabler of Houthi dominance". In July 2025, PLC Information Minister Moammar al-Eryani regretted that UNMHA has failed to achieve "tangible results" in Yemen in the six years since its inception and called for its mandate to be terminated,[396] thus reflective of the host-state's perception of the ineffectiveness of UNMHA's on the ground mandate delivery.

c. *UNMHA's Budgetary and Resourcing Limitations*

UNMHA also faces critical operational challenges reflected in its budget and staffing profile. Its proposed programme budget has declined from approximately $56M in 2019[397] to approximately $31M in 2025[398]. UNMHA's proposed budget has further decreased to $11.7M in 2026, following the decision to draw down the Mission[399]. UNMHA also possesses a high vacancy rate, with 51 vacant positions recorded as of 31

August 2025. [400] While the vacancies in part may be attributed to reluctance to join a Mission operating in a volatile security environment, a key challenge in filling existing vacancies also results from the logistical constraints the Houthis have created for UN and humanitarian personnel in Yemen, such as delays in visas and permits, as reported by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS).[401] Taken together, these constraints point to a combination of political, security, and operational challenges largely brought about by the Houthis that have prevented UNMHA from comprehensively implementing its mandate, which is only further compounded by the lack of host-state support the Mission has received.

d. Successes and Shortfalls of OSESGY's Special Envoys

The OSESGY has also faced multiple obstacles to effective mandate implementation. Firstly, Special Adviser Benomar played an important role in the early stages of the conflict, convincing Saleh to resign and thus helping to avoid the start of a civil war in 2011, and facilitating the National Dialogue conference. However, Benomar has been criticized by Yemeni stakeholders for overstepping his mandate as an impartial UN representative and rather becoming an "active political participant" in the conference, preemptively informing the Security Council that participants had reached an agreement to assume a federal system of government, which, in turn, influenced the outcome of a discussion that had not yet reached its natural conclusion.[402] Moreover, while Special Envoy Griffiths coordinated what could have been a key breakthrough by facilitating the Stockholm Agreement between the conflict parties in 2018 and thus preventing the onset of a major battle in Hudaydah, the Agreement and its three sub-components never came to fruition, given the irreconcilable impasse between the Yemeni government and Houthis on the basis of political differences.[403] This deadlock has only worsened since 2018, given the Houthis' heightened aggressions which have further contributed to a volatile operating environment thus making the OSESGY's mandate implementation increasingly challenging. Despite current Special Envoy Grundberg's efforts in brokering a truce between the conflict parties in April 2022[404], which coincided with the establishment of the PLC, engagement between the conflict parties has remained limited. This is largely due to the Houthis' reluctance to enter into dialogue with the PLC, viewing the body as highly fragmented, given that it is comprised of multiple factions including the STC, which amplified its separatist movement in 2025, as well as "a product of external manipulation" that is inadequately positioned to represent Yemeni aspirations, given the strong backing it receives from Saudi Arabia and the UAE[405].

e. Houthi Crackdown on UN & Humanitarian Personnel

One of the most acute challenges to mandate implementation the OSESGY faces today is the Houthis' arbitrary detention of UN personnel, which has led to the UN pausing its humanitarian operations in Houthi-controlled territories such as the Saada governorate[406], following the death of a World Food Programme staff member under Houthi detention in February 2025[407]. The OSESGY's mandate implementation efforts on the ground are thus further undermined by the Houthis' actions in this regard, which create a volatile operating environment, reflect the Houthis' lack of willingness to cooperate with the UN on fundamental, lifesaving assistance and much less reaching a

political settlement, and stymie any opportunity for even limited stability via the provision of humanitarian aid to innocent civilians. However, despite these challenges, given that the OSESGY's mandate is broadly to support a political process in Yemen, the Mission has been able to successfully reprioritize its focus on areas which are both pertinent based on the evolving circumstances in Yemen, as well as interrelated to achieving peace and stability in the country, such as humanitarian considerations and human rights issues, thus allowing it to remain relevant in the Yemeni context. Finally, it is important to note that the OSESGY's proposed programme budget has increased from approximately $16.1M in 2025[408] to approximately $22.0M in 2026[409], given the upcoming transfer of UNMHA's responsibilities that will thus position the OSESGY as a streamlined and comprehensive UN presence in Yemen.

5. Data Visualization

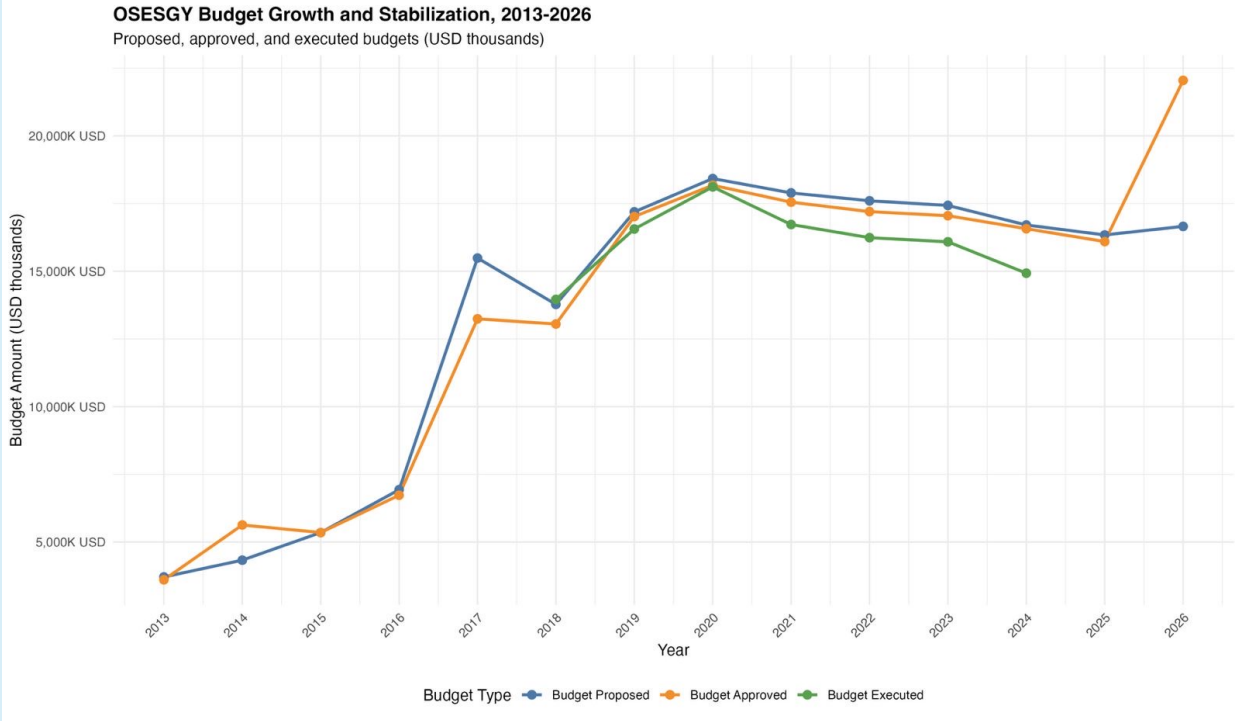


Figure 61. OSESGY Budget Growth and Stabilization 2013-2026: *The OSESGY has seen a relatively steady growth in budget from 2013-2020, with limited discrepancies between proposed and appropriated figures. The decline in both proposed and appropriated figures from 2020 onwards is likely attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2020, OSESGY's annual expenditure has also been consistently lower than the appropriated figure for each year, which likely signals the Mission's efforts in generating efficiencies while also delivering impact. The steep upward trend in 2026 represents the Fifth Committee's decision to provide the OSESGY with approximately $22M for its programme budget, to account for the transfer of UNMHA's responsibilities to the Mission.*

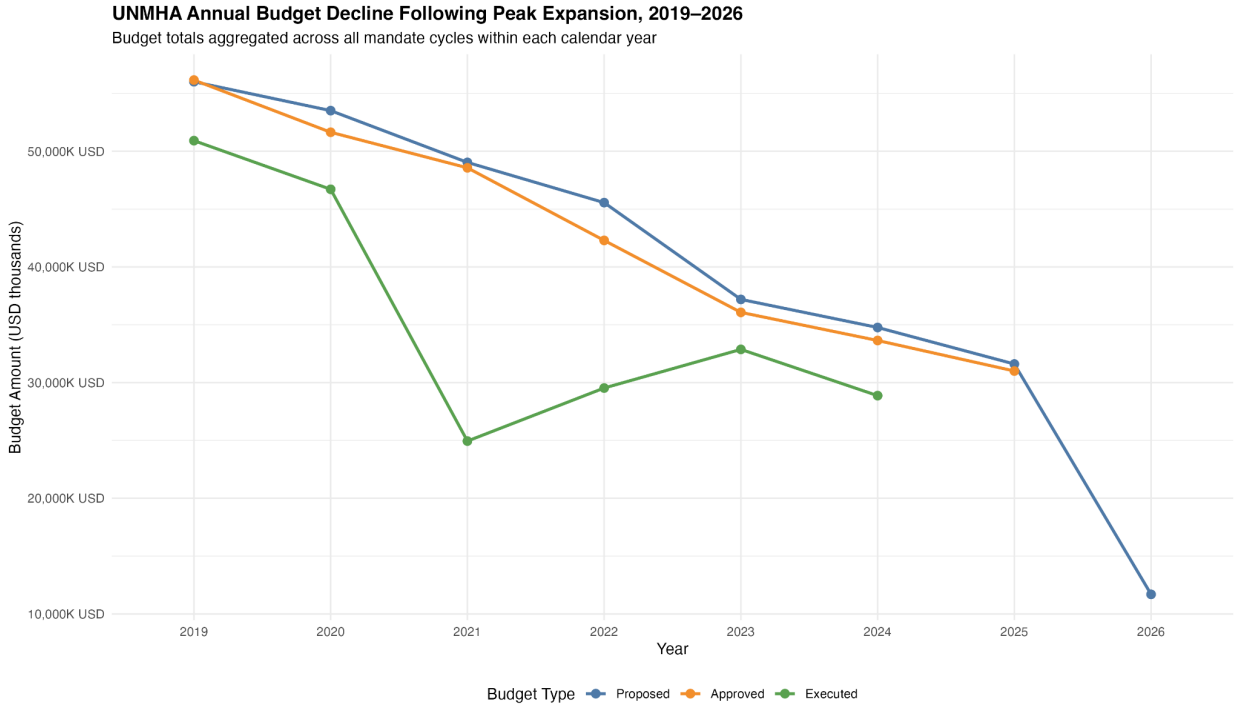


Figure 62. UNMHA Annual Budget Decline Following Peak Expansion, 2019-2026:*While UNMHA's budget experienced an increase from 2019-2021, it steadily declined from 2022-2026. This decline can likely be attributed to the challenging operating environment created by the Houthis that has prevented UNMHA from fully implementing its mandate; the first direct reference of which was made in Resolution 2643 in 2022 and reiterated in resolutions in the years thereafter. UNMHA's annual expenditure has also been considerably less than the appropriated figures each year; which can likely be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the operational constraints it faces. The steep downward trend in 2026 represents the Fifth Committee's decision to provide UNMHA with approximately $11.7M for its programme budget, given the sunset and subsequent liquidation of the Mission from 01 April 2026.*

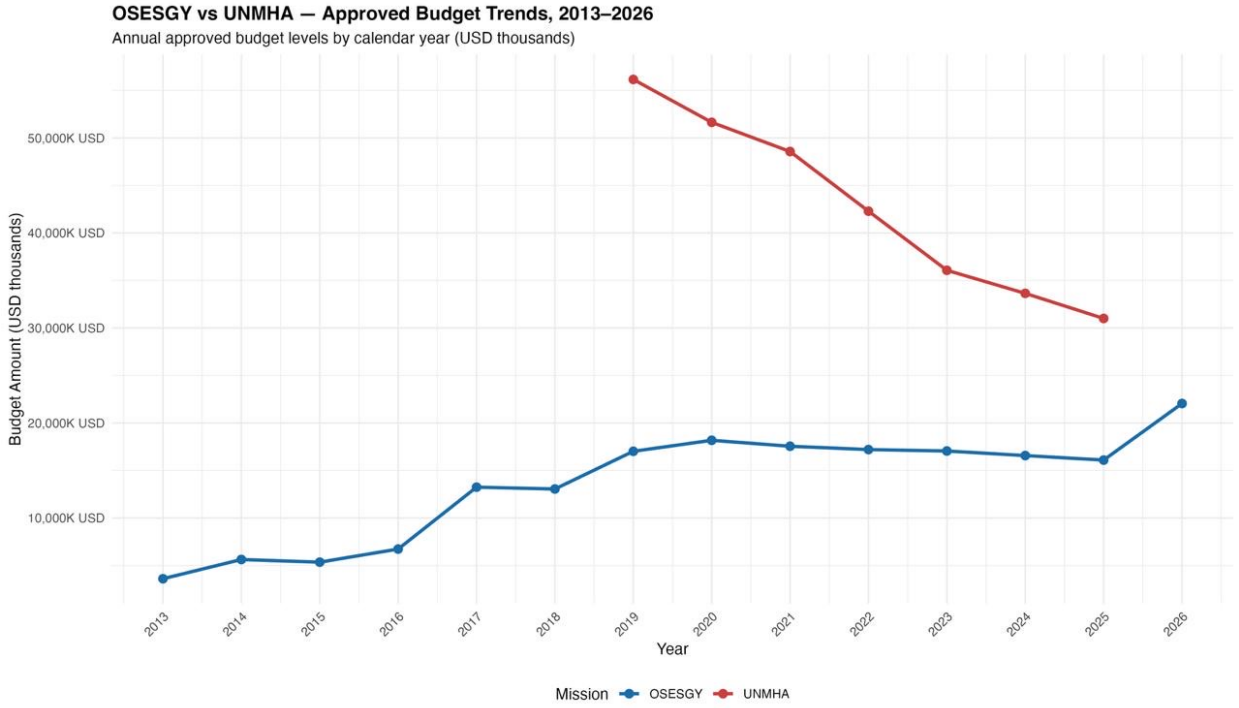


Figure 63. OSESGY vs UNMHA - Approved Budget Trends, 2013-2026: *The consistent downward trend of UNMHA's approved budget versus the consistent upward trend of the OSESGY's budget signals that the draw down of UNMHA and transfer of its pertinent responsibilities to the OSESGY will serve as a resource-efficient measure while also enhancing the adaptability and flexibility of the UN presence in Yemen.*

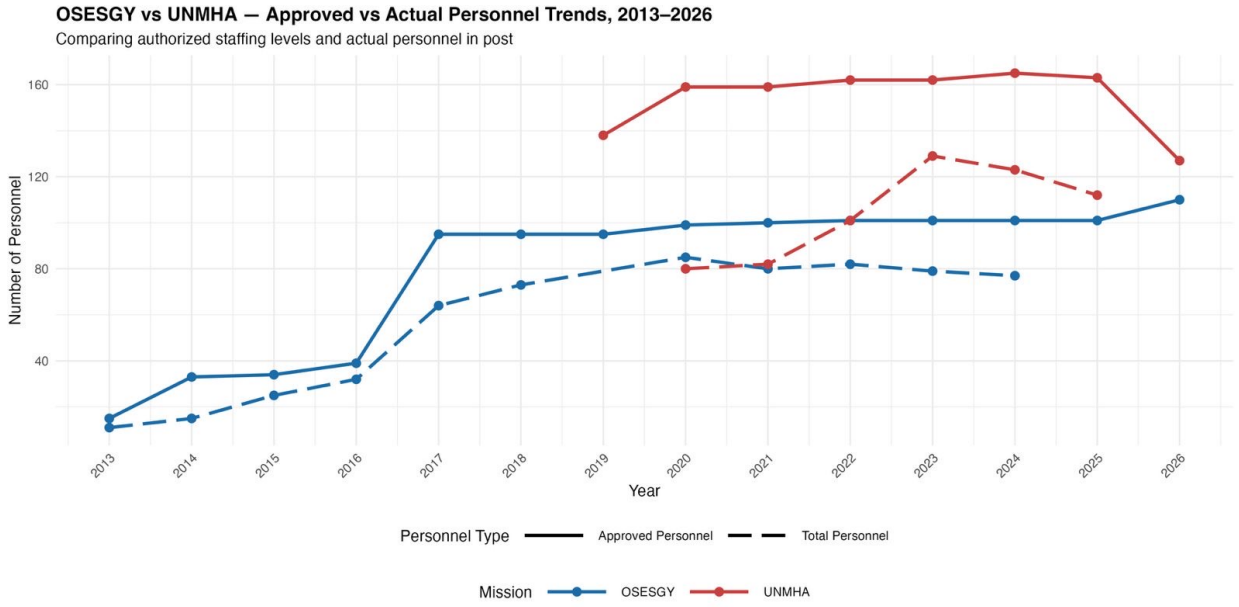


Figure 64. OSESGY vs UNMHA - Approved vs Actual Personnel Trends, 2013-2026: *Both UNMHA and the OSESGY have filled fewer positions than initially approved. However, the gap between approved positions and filled positions is much larger for UNMHA than the OSESGY, representative of UNMHA's high vacancy rate. The steady decline in UNMHA's personnel from 2023-2025 can likely be attributed to the volatile operating environment created by the Houthis, including as a result of Houthi-Israeli tensions: for example, the 2024 Israeli airstrikes on Houthi-controlled territories including along the Hudaydah, Salif, and Ras Isa ports created acute safety risks for UNMHA personnel deployed to those areas.*

6. Assessment of Effectiveness

a. UNMHA's Successes Amidst a Challenging Operating Environment

Despite the respective mandate implementation challenges that UNMHA and the OSESGY have faced, both Missions have indeed made notable progress and generated tangible impact within the UN's contribution to achieving peace and stability in the situation in Yemen. Firstly, despite the severe restrictions to UNMHA's access imposed by the Houthis, the Mission successfully patrolled the Hudaydah, Salif, and Ras Isa ports at a steady cadence of three times a week and conducted over 150 patrols in 2025; a 15% increase from 2024. [410] Moreover, UNMHA's efforts across QIP implementation and mine action operations have also served as critical capacity and resilience-building initiatives for conflict-affected communities across Yemen. For example, UNMHA's 2024 QIPs focused on women's empowerment, including the provision of vocational training for female-led households. [411] Moreover, UNMHA executed 21 mine action coordination activities in 2023, working across UN partners, civil society, local authorities, and the private sector to coordinate the importation of equipment, resources, and risk assessment tools to mitigate the effects of unexploded ordnance. [412] Additionally, the case can be made that UNMHA's presence in Hudaydah maintained the existing military balance and thus provided a degree of stability in the governorate, as seen from the fact that neither conflict party attempted to disrupt the existing status quo since UNMHA's inception.[413] Finally, UNMHA's sustained engagement with the Houthis also facilitated the continued flow of humanitarian aid into Yemen through the Hudaydah port, which thus provided life-saving assistance to countless Yemeni civilians.[414]

b. OSESGY's Successes Amidst a Challenging Operating Environment

Turning to the OSESGY, the Special Envoy has facilitated key breakthroughs for the political process in Yemen. Firstly, the six-month truce brokered by Special Envoy Grundberg in April 2022 was the first nation-wide ceasefire in Yemen in six years.[415] The truce set a critical precedent in Yemen despite lapsing in October of that same year, evidenced by the fact that there have been no major hostilities between the Houthis and PLC to date. [416] Moreover, in 2023, Special Envoy Grundberg successfully facilitated a dialogue between the conflict parties, culminating in their adherence to measures for the way forward, including their commitment towards a nation-wide ceasefire, improved living conditions for Yemeni civilians, and resuming preparations for a Yemeni-led and owned political process supported by the UN.[417] While this roadmap agreement has stalled given ongoing regional tensions and the Houthis' crackdown on the humanitarian community, it provides a clear signal that with sustained UN and regional engagement, the Houthis and the PLC are indeed willing and able to participate in productive dialogue and, to an extent, reach consensus on Yemen's future. Finally, Special Envoy Grundberg, through sustained commitment with the PLC and regional partners such as Oman and Saudi Arabia, has continued his active efforts to revitalize progress on a political solution for Yemen[418], which inherently now includes the release of the UN and humanitarian personnel detained by the Houthis.

c. Key Takeaway: Implementation Challenges Predominantly Arise from Geopolitical Volatilities

It can therefore be concluded that both UNMHA and the OSESGY have indeed achieved critical strides in the situation in Yemen, despite being confronted with one of the most complex conflicts to date. The case can be made that the deficiencies in each Mission's respective mandate implementation have arisen not because of any structural or leadership limitations, but rather due to the complex and challenging geopolitical and security operating environment in which they have been tasked to carry out their responsibilities, which has only been further exacerbated by the Houthis' aggressions, from their lack of willingness to cooperate with the UN and the PLC, to their disruption of regional stability evidenced through their attacks in the Red Sea and against Israel, and to their arbitrary detention of countless humanitarian personnel that thus renders any engagement with the group nearly impossible.

7. Key Takeaways

The UN presence in Yemen must therefore sufficiently adapt to respond effectively in this exceptionally challenging environment, as was acutely expressed by the Security Council, and the decision to draw UNMHA down and transfer its remaining, pertinent functions to the OSESGY thus provides a critical blueprint for the future design and deployment of SPMs. As illustrated by this case study, this argument can be made for the following key reasons:

The OSESGY's mandate remains relevant in current contexts, while UNMHA's does not.

UNMHA's mandate is no longer relevant to the current Yemeni context, given that it was constructed to address a specific initiative, ie. the Stockholm Agreement, that is now defunct. By contrast, because the OSESGY possesses a broader mandate, i.e. to support a political transition to ultimately achieve peace and stability across Yemen, it possesses the necessary flexibility to reprioritize and tailor its responsibilities to effectively respond to evolving developments in Yemen, which each acutely influence whether the environment is primed and conducive to an inclusive Yemeni peace process and consensus between the conflict parties on the way forward.

The adaptability of the OSESGY mandate is likely to preserve UNSC consensus on Yemen.

Given that the Security Council has been largely united on core political and humanitarian issues in Yemen, challenges to UNMHA and the OSESGY's respective mandate implementation are less attributable to Security Council dynamics and rather to Yemen's volatile operating environment. However, in the Yemeni context, SPM mandates that are no longer fit-for-purpose are likely to erode Security Council consensus, while adaptable mandates are likely to preserve it. UNMHA's limited mandate scope stymied its on-the-ground effectiveness once the Hudaydah Agreement it was established to support became defunct, resulting in Security Council fragmentation as evidenced by the non-consensus decision to sunset the Mission. By contrast, the OSESGY has received steadfast Security Council endorsement despite increasingly challenging circumstances in Yemen, given that its mandate is sufficiently adaptable to ensure its continued relevance, and because it is based on a foundational principle that the Security Council has historically and unanimously agreed upon: a lasting political solution for Yemen.

The OSESGY has achieved greater relative progress and unwavering UNSC support.

The OSESGY has also seen greater relative success as a result of its efforts in Yemen, seen most clearly from the six-month truce achieved in 2022 that has since prevented the outbreak of any major hostilities to date, as well as the 2023 roadmap agreement, which serves as a beacon of hope that the conflict parties are indeed able to participate in productive dialogue for Yemen's future. Moreover, the OSESGY mandate has received overarching support from the Security Council, which is instrumental in current realities where the backing of the international community is paramount for the Special Envoy's effectiveness on the ground.

The OSESGY's leadership tenure is more consistent and effective than UNMHA's.

The OSESGY's leadership is also better positioned to sufficiently address the situation in Yemen. Hans Grundberg has served as Special Envoy from 2021-Present[419], thus providing consistent UN representation to key Yemeni stakeholders and also possessing deep institutional knowledge of the conflict setting and dynamics. By contrast, UNMHA's Head of Mission post was not filled following Beary's retirement in January 2025, and instead has seen Deputy Mari Yamashita serve as Officer In-Charge for over a year[420]. Moreover, Special Envoy Grundberg acutely possesses the leadership qualities necessary to lead an SPM in a complex and volatile operating environment such as Yemen, as demonstrated by his unwavering perseverance and his concern, first and foremost, for

the Yemeni civilians on the ground. He has sought to preserve the raison d'être of the UN presence in Yemen, even in moments where progress has seemed nearly impossible.

The integration will generate greater efficiencies amidst the ongoing liquidity crisis.

In light of the ongoing liquidity crisis at the UN, streamlining the UN presence in Yemen by transferring UNMHA's responsibilities to the OSESGY will eliminate the duplication of efforts and in turn generate critical budgetary, staffing, and resource efficiencies.

Core conclusion: By absorbing UNMHA's capabilities, the OSESGY will become the adaptable, nimble, and flexible SPM blueprint that is required in current contexts and is envisioned by the SG's reform initiatives, thus being appropriately re-designed and deployed to respond to today's challenges.

VII. Synthesis

The findings presented across the preceding sections point to a central conclusion: the mandates of Special Political Missions do not evolve as purely rational policy instruments designed to optimize mission outcomes. Rather, they function as politically negotiated institutional artifacts shaped by the intersection of Security Council dynamics, host-state consent, organizational capacity, and the structural constraints of the international environment. Understanding mandate evolution requires attention to all of these dimensions simultaneously, since changes in any one of them can alter the design, scope, and ultimately the relevance of a political mission.

A. Mandate Evolution as Political Negotiation

Perhaps the most consistent finding across both the mandate-level dataset and comparative cases is that mandate content reflects political feasibility at least as much as operational need. The pattern observed in the aggregated data—where most mandate cycles involve no substantive change in scope, and where change occurs incrementally through expansion or reprioritization rather than through contraction or redesign—cannot be explained solely by stable conflict environments. It is, in large part, a product of the political incentives that govern Council decision-making.

As demonstrated by the voting behavior and penholder dynamics analyzed in Section V, patterns of contestation appear to be associated with the interaction between drafting arrangements and broader geopolitical dynamics within the Council. While the distribution of drafting authority helps structure how negotiations unfold, it does not by itself determine which mandates are contested or smoothly renewed. Instead, outcomes reflect the degree of underlying political alignment among Council members, particularly in more sensitive or high-stakes contexts.

The case studies reinforce this conclusion. In Colombia, the initial design of a tightly bounded verification mandate generated durable consensus because it aligned directly with a peace agreement and a clear bilateral request. The gradual expansion of mandate scope into more structurally complex areas of peacebuilding ultimately destabilized this consensus, producing the first contested renewal in the mission's history. In Haiti, contested negotiations persisted despite co-penholdership arrangements, illustrating that drafting structure alone does not insulate mandates from political disagreement. In Libya and Afghanistan, the most consequential mandate changes occurred more from the erosion of conditions on the ground than from political dynamics in the Council.

These patterns suggest a broader principle: mandate design is therefore not simply a technical question about task allocation. It is a political statement about what the international community is willing to authorize and sustain. When the political conditions enabling a mandate to be sustained no longer hold—whether due to shifts in Council alignment, host-state resistance, or changing conflict dynamics—mandates do not

automatically adapt. Instead, they may persist in attenuated form, reflecting the residual value of institutional continuity; contract under pressure, as political support narrows; or, in some cases, terminate altogether. Recent examples—including the termination of the UN-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) in 2017 and the planned drawdown of missions such as UNITAMS and UNTMI(S)—illustrate how the erosion of political support can ultimately lead to mandate closure. These outcomes reflect the limits of political will rather than purely operational considerations.

B. Adaptive Stability and Its Limits

The concept of adaptive stability captures a fundamental feature of the contemporary SPM system. Institutional frameworks governing mandate renewals are highly durable. The twelve-month renewal cycle, the concentration of drafting authority in the P3, and the functional repertoire of mandate components have all remained consistent across the study period, even as geopolitical conditions have become more fragmented and contested. This stability should not be mistaken for inertia; it is an active institutional achievement, sustained through procedural convention and the shared interest of Council members in maintaining a functional, if contested, multilateral instrument.

Yet adaptive stability also has clear limits, which the case studies bring into focus. The system is well suited to absorbing incremental political pressure within existing procedural frameworks. It is less well suited to managing conditions of fundamental discontinuity—whether in the form of state collapse, comprehensive political rupture, or the withdrawal of a key regional actor. Afghanistan illustrates this limit most acutely: the fall of the Ghani government in August 2021 produced a governance environment that bore no resemblance to the conditions under which UNAMA's mandate had been designed and repeatedly renewed. The formal mandate framework survived, but its operational logic was fundamentally disrupted, compelling the mission to redefine its comparative advantage in real time, without the benefit of a Council-mandated strategic review.

Libya and Yemen offer complementary illustrations. In Libya, the persistence of the mandate during periods of heightened political contestation—particularly in the later years of the mission—reflects the Council's preference for institutional continuity over strategic redesign, but also its difficulty in authorizing a more substantive response in the absence of sustained political consensus. In Yemen, by contrast, the decision to sunset UNMHA and absorb its functions into OSESGY represents a rare instance of deliberate institutional reconfiguration, driven by the pragmatic recognition that a narrowly defined technical mandate had become operationally incoherent after the collapse of the agreement that had generated it.

C. The Structural Gap Between Mandate and Implementation

A recurring theme across the case studies is the structural gap between what mandates authorize and what missions can realistically accomplish. This gap operates at multiple levels. At the most visible level, it reflects resource constraints. SPMs are funded through the UN regular budget under conditions of chronic fiscal austerity. In practice, self-censoring budget proposals, the delay of assessed contributions from major financial contributors, and the absence of mission-level budget autonomy systematically constrain implementation capacity in ways that formal mandate language does not reflect. Expert interlocutors consulted for this study identified a longstanding pattern in which the Secretariat submits preemptively reduced budget proposals designed to anticipate member state preferences—a form of institutional self-censorship that weakens the link between mandate ambition and resource allocation.

At a deeper level, the implementation gap reflects the limits of what civilian political missions can accomplish in severely degraded governance environments. The case of Haiti is instructive: BINUH's mandate evolved toward greater specificity and operational relevance across successive renewal cycles, yet these shifts in mandate focus coincided with a period of accelerating political and security deterioration on the ground. The mission could shape Council priorities and sustain coordination among international actors, but it could not directly address the conditions undermining the viability of the political transitions it was mandated to support.

This pattern generalizes across the case studies. SPMs are most effective when they can leverage host-state political will, maintain access to key conflict parties, and operate within an environment of at least minimal Security Council backing. When one or more of these conditions is absent, missions tend to persist in reduced form—sustaining coordination and dialogue functions, monitoring conditions, and preserving institutional presence—rather than advancing substantive political outcomes.

D. Geopolitical Fragmentation and the Contraction of Political Space

A central contextual finding of this report is that the geopolitical environment shaping SPM mandates has become significantly more challenging over the period under study. The increase in contested mandate renewals since 2017, the emergence of more frequent co-penholdership arrangements, and the documented cases of mandate contraction in Colombia and Afghanistan all reflect a broader shift in Security Council dynamics. Great power competition has not produced systematic institutional paralysis, but it has contributed to narrowing the political space within which ambitious mandates can be negotiated and sustained.

Expert interviews conducted for this study offered nuanced perspectives on this trend. Several interlocutors cautioned against an overly Council-centric interpretation of SPM

limitations, noting that the Secretary-General's own disengagement from active mediation and peacemaking has contributed to the marginalization of DPPA-led political engagement. Others emphasized the role of bureaucratic fragmentation within the Secretariat—particularly the persistent tension between DPPA and DPO—as a source of institutional inefficiency that geopolitical explanation alone cannot account for. These observations add important nuance to the picture: the constraints on SPM effectiveness are not reducible to P5 rivalry, even if they are shaped by it.

E. Implications for the Future of SPMs

Taken together, the findings of this report point to several important implications for the future of Special Political Missions. First, the system's resilience should not be confused with its effectiveness. The durability of institutional forms ensures that SPMs continue to be maintained even under conditions of severe political constraint, but formal continuity is not a substitute for substantive impact.

Second, the relationship between mandate design and implementation capacity deserves more systematic attention. The current system privileges negotiated mandate text as the primary unit of analysis. The case studies suggest that mandate design should be grounded in a rigorous assessment of what the mission can realistically accomplish given the political environment, resource constraints, and local counterpart capacity.

Third, the analysis highlights the growing importance of hybrid institutional arrangements—combining accumulative political mandates with targeted, periodically renewed operational mechanisms. . The Yemen model illustrates how such configurations can emerge as a form of institutional adaptation rather than as a direct response to contestation. In this context, the absorption of UNMHA's functions into OSESGY reflects a pragmatic reconfiguration of UN presence. This layered model offers a potential template for contexts where specialized mandates have outlived their original purpose but where continued UN engagement remains necessary.

Finally, the findings reinforce the importance of leadership, adaptability, and political judgement. Several expert interlocutors identified the quality and diplomatic credibility of SRSGs and special envoys as the single most important determinant of mission effectiveness in contested environments. Institutional design matters, but it cannot substitute for the situated judgment of experienced practitioners navigating complex political terrains.

VIII. Policy Considerations

The findings of this report have direct operational and institutional implications for DPPA, the Security Council, and the broader UN system. The following considerations are organized across three levels: mandate design and renewal practices, organizational and resource governance, and the longer-term adaptation of SPMs to emerging institutional challenges. They are grounded in both the empirical findings of this study and insights from expert interviews.

A. Mandate Design and Renewal Practices

1. **Calibrate the mandate scope to realistic implementation capacity**

   A persistent finding across cases is the gap between mandate ambition and operational feasibility. In designing and renewing mandates, the Security Council, in consultation with the Secretariat (particularly DPPA) and with input from mission leadership, should incorporate more rigorous ex ante assessments of implementation capacity, counterpart availability, and access conditions. Rather than allowing politically driven thematic priorities to accumulate over time, these actors should prioritize mandate components according to what missions can realistically deliver. This approach does not imply artificially narrowing mandates, but rather ensuring that mandates are grounded in an honest accounting of what is achievable under prevailing conditions.

2. **Use mandate duration as a strategic signal**

   Evidence suggests that shorter renewal cycles often cluster around periods of political uncertainty, though they do not always reflect Council disagreement. In some cases, shorter mandates may also respond to evolving conditions on the ground or a preference for closer oversight. Within this context, mandate duration can serve as a meaningful signal of political commitment and Council confidence. While the final duration reflects negotiated outcomes among Council members, penholder states and the Secretariat (particularly DPPA) can shape how duration is framed and interpreted within the negotiation process. Where shorter cycles are used to signal caution, they should, where possible, be paired with clear benchmarks that would allow a return to longer authorization periods.

3. **Strengthen context-specific exit and transition provisions**

   Mandates rarely include explicit provisions governing transition, consolidation, or exit pathways as the political environment evolves. The sunsetting of UNMHA and its absorption into OSESGY illustrates the value of deliberate institutional consolidation. Future mandates should systematically include provisions for coordination, functional handover, and eventual consolidation across parallel UN presences, anticipating transition dynamics rather than reacting to them, including a clearer articulation of transition benchmarks and institutional end-states.

4. **Engage more systematically with non-Security Council authorization pathways**

   As Security Council dynamics become more contested, alternative authorization and engagement pathways—including the General Assembly and Secretary-General-led initiatives—remain underutilized. In contexts of Council deadlock, DPPA should more actively develop operational modalities for leveraging these pathways, consistent with Charter provisions. Existing precedents should be systematically documented and operationalized.

5. **Integrate political risk analysis more directly into mandate drafting**

   Mandate negotiations often underweigh forward-looking political risk assessments, particularly regarding host-state fragility, elite fragmentation, and regional spillover effects. DPPA should develop structured political risk inputs into the mandate drafting process, ensuring that the Security Council's mandate design anticipates likely points of breakdown rather than reacting to them post hoc.

B. Organizational and Resource Governance

1. **Reform the budget process to reduce anticipatory self-censorship**

   A recurring concern identified in interviews is that the UN Secretariat often pre-emptively adjusts budget proposals to anticipated member state constraints. This practice weakens the relationship between mandate scope and resource allocation. DPPA should more systematically defend budget proposals that reflect actual mandate requirements, even when this leads to negotiated reductions.

2. **Address structural liquidity constraints facing SPMs**

   Because SPMs are financed through the UN regular budget, they remain vulnerable to liquidity disruptions. DPPA should continue to actively explore the establishment of special budgetary arrangements for complex field-based SPMs, providing greater financial flexibility. Although such proposals have faced institutional resistance, the operational case for budget flexibility remains strong.

3. **Clarify and rationalize the functional division between DPPA and DPO**

   Interviews consistently highlighted structural inefficiencies in the relationship between DPPA and DPO. The current institutional bifurcation between SPMs and PKOs creates inefficiencies, planning gaps, and suboptimal mission design. At a minimum, the UN Secretariat should expand DPPA's capacity for internal planning and operational design while strengthening coordination mechanisms with DPO.

4. **Invest in mission leadership selection and support**

   Interviews consistently identified the quality of SRSGs and envoys as the most critical determinant of effectiveness. The current selection process remains

insufficiently structured to ensure consistently high-quality appointments. To strengthen leadership quality, greater transparency in selection criteria, clearer articulation of required competencies, and more structured consultation processes could help align these actors around stronger candidates. DPPA should also invest more in leadership preparation and strengthen ongoing support and accountability mechanisms.

5. **Strengthen data integration and analytical infrastructure for SPM decision-making**

Current data on Special Political Missions remains fragmented across multiple institutional sources, with significant gaps in historical leadership records, budget allocations, personnel deployment, and mandate components. This fragmentation limits the ability of DPPA and member states to conduct systematic, evidence-based assessments of mission performance over time.

Beyond issues of completeness, existing datasets are not sufficiently integrated to support cross-domain analysis. In particular, the lack of linkage between mandate data, geographic information, and conflict dynamics constrains the ability to identify patterns in how mandates interact with evolving political and security conditions.

DPPA should invest in the development of an integrated data architecture that consolidates mission-level, mandate-level, and operational data, while enabling interoperability with external datasets, including conflict event data and geospatial information systems. Such an approach would allow for more systematic identification of patterns in mandate effectiveness, facilitate comparative analysis across missions, and support more evidence-based mandate design and renewal processes.

Over time, strengthening data integration would not only enhance internal planning capacity but also position DPPA to play a leading role in shaping the analytical foundations of UN political engagement in conflict settings.

C. Adapting to Emerging Institutional Challenges

1. **Build greater flexibility into mission architectures**

The Afghanistan experience illustrates that rigid mandate frameworks are poorly suited to rapid political transformations. DPPA should explore, with UN Security Council penholders and other member states, the inclusion of more flexible mandate design features for missions deployed in highly volatile environments. These could take the form of adaptation clauses that authorize limited adjustments in mission priorities, geographic focus, or operational modalities in response to changing conditions, within parameters defined by the Council. While

such provisions would need to be carefully negotiated and may face political resistance, they could reduce the need for repeated full mandate renegotiation at each inflection point, allowing missions to respond more effectively to evolving realities on the ground.

2. **Develop a more systematic approach to hybrid governance configurations**

   As the SPM system continues to evolve, hybrid configurations—in which accumulative political mandates operate alongside periodically renewed operational mechanisms—are likely to become more common. DPPA should develop clearer guidance on how such configurations should be designed, coordinated, and eventually consolidated, drawing on the lessons of the Yemen, Libya, and Haiti cases.

3. **Strengthen engagement with regional organizations and parallel mediation tracks**

   UN political missions increasingly operate alongside regional organizations, contact groups, and bilateral diplomatic tracks. Expert interlocutors emphasized that these relationships cannot be managed through ad hoc coordination alone. DPPA should invest in more formal coordination frameworks, particularly in regions with overlapping mediation processes.

4. **Treat mandate renewal as a policy learning process**

   A key systemic weakness identified is the limited incorporation of implementation lessons into renewal processes. While mandate drafting is often shaped by penholder dynamics among Security Council members, particularly the P3, there remains scope for strengthening the integration of field-level learning into these processes. In coordination with UN Security Council members, DPPA should develop and offer to the Council more structured renewal learning protocols that translate field-level evidence and mission leadership assessments into concrete input for mandate negotiations. Such efforts would benefit from greater engagement with penholders and other Council members to ensureing that renewal cycles function as genuine policy reviews rather than administrative formalities.

IX. Conclusion

This report examines how Special Political Missions (SPMs) evolve under conditions of geopolitical fragmentation, institutional constraint, and shifting conflict environments. The central question—how changing geopolitical circumstances have shaped SPM mandates and affected the political and operational space within which these missions function—has been addressed through three complementary levels of analysis: a historical survey of the SPM system from 1948 to 2026, a systematic cross-mission analysis of mandate cycles from 2010 to 2026, and comparative case studies of five selected mission settings.

The historical analysis identifies a clear trajectory from small-scale mediation efforts to a diverse, institutionally heterogeneous system of political missions operating across the full spectrum of conflict management functions. The expansion of the SPM portfolio in the post-Cold War period reflected an exceptional moment of Security Council convergence; the contraction and reconfiguration of the contemporary period reflect the reversal of those conditions. SPMs have not significantly declined in number or aggregate scope, but have adapted to a more constrained political environment by becoming narrower, more politically focused, and less structurally ambitious.

The cross-mission analysis reveals a system characterized by what this report terms adaptive stability: highly durable institutional forms—annual renewal cycles, P3-dominated penholdership, and a standardized repertoire of mandate components—coexist with rising political contestation and increasing functional complexity. The system continues to generate mandates, but those mandates are produced through more visibly contested processes and must be sustained against a backdrop of deepening geopolitical divisions.

The case studies demonstrate how these aggregate patterns play out in specific operational environments. Afghanistan, Haiti, Libya, Colombia, and Yemen each illustrate, in distinct ways, the conditions under which SPM mandates sustain political relevance and the constraints that emerge as operating environments evolve—sometimes limiting the extent to which mandates can keep pace with realities on the ground.

Taken together, these findings carry a central implication. The durability of SPMs as an institutional form should not be read as evidence of their effectiveness. The system's capacity for adaptive continuity ensures that political missions are maintained even under conditions of significant political strain, but formal persistence is not a substitute for substantive impact. As the operating environment continues to deteriorate across several key dimensions—geopolitical fragmentation, resource constraints, host-state resistance, and the proliferation of parallel political processes—the risk of a widening gap between mandate persistence and operational relevance requires sustained attention from member states, the Secretariat, and scholarly communities alike.

At the same time, these findings do not point to systemic failure or irreversible decline. The Colombia case demonstrates that consent-based verification mandates can generate meaningful

implementation progress under favorable political conditions. The Yemen hybrid model illustrates the system's capacity for deliberate institutional reconfiguration when conditions justify changes to an existing mandate. The BINUH case shows how a mission operating under conditions of severe governance fragmentation, along with tensions within the Security Council, can still contribute to defending human rights principles, coordination, and the preservation of political channels.

These examples reinforce a conclusion that runs throughout the report: SPMs are instruments of political engagement, not solely mechanisms of conflict resolution. Their ultimate value may lie less in producing durable settlements directly, but in sustaining the conditions—channels of communication, frameworks for political dialogue, and international presence and legitimacy—that make such settlements possible. Whether that value is realized depends heavily on the political conditions shaping mandate authorization, the quality of leadership entrusted with implementation, and the willingness of the broader international community to invest in political missions as a serious instrument of conflict management rather than a low-cost substitute for more demanding forms of engagement.

This report provides an empirically grounded framework—supported by an original, multi-layered dataset and systematic visualization of mandate dynamics—for understanding these dynamics and informing more effective decision-making on how the SPM system can be sustained, adapted, and strengthened in the years ahead.

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Annex A—Dataset Description

1. **Overview**

   This project developed a structured dataset to analyze the evolution of United Nations Special Political Missions (SPMs). The dataset is designed to capture patterns of mandate design, institutional change, and operational characteristics over time, with the aim of supporting both descriptive and comparative analysis of how SPMs adapt under changing political and operational conditions.

2. **Dataset Structure**

   The dataset is organized into three interconnected components, each corresponding to a different level of analysis. The mission-level dataset provides a structural overview of SPMs across their full historical evolution, capturing relatively stable institutional characteristics. The mandate-cycle dataset records changes at the level of individual mandate cycles, focusing on mandate scope, voting behavior, and institutional dynamics. The case-level dataset provides more detailed, context-specific variables for selected missions, incorporating political, operational, and environmental factors.

   These three components are relational and linked through shared identifiers, including ***mission_id*** and ***mandate_id***, allowing for integration across levels of analysis. The dataset is structured to be expandable and can be updated as new mandate cycles and mission developments occur.

3. **Units of Observation**

   Each dataset is defined by a distinct unit of observation. The mission-level dataset treats each mission as a single observation over its lifecycle. The mandate-cycle dataset defines each observation as a specific mandate period associated with a Security Council decision. The case-level dataset further refines this structure by capturing mandate-cycle observations within selected missions, enriched with additional contextual variables.

4. **Temporal Coverage**

   The three datasets in this project operate on distinct but complementary temporal logics.

   The mission-level dataset covers the full historical evolution of UN political missions from 1948 to 2026, enabling analysis of long-term institutional trends across the entire lifespan of UN field presences.

   The mandate-cycle dataset focuses analytically on the period from 2010 to 2026, capturing changes at the level of individual mandate cycles. While the dataset is constructed using the full historical sequence of mandate cycles to ensure consistency in

mandate identification and sequencing, the analytical scope is restricted to the contemporary period.

The case-level dataset does not follow a fixed global timeframe. Instead, it captures observations from the establishment of each selected mission through the present. This design allows for a more context-sensitive analysis of mandate evolution, operational dynamics, and political conditions within each case. As such, the temporal scope of the case-level dataset varies across missions, depending on their respective dates of establishment and operational histories.

5. **Variable Structure**
   The dataset includes multiple groups of variables capturing different dimensions of mandate design and institutional context. These include political and institutional dynamics, operational and institutional features, mandate characteristics, and host-state and operational environment. Together, these variables enable multi-dimensional analysis of mandate evolution across missions and over time.

6. **Data Sources**
   The dataset is constructed primarily from United Nations documentation, including Security Council resolutions, Secretary-General reports, and the DPPA *Compendium* of Special Political Missions. It also draws on structured UN data tools, such as Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) reports, UN Peace and Security Data Hub and the Security Council Field Missions Dashboard, as well as selected supplementary sources where necessary to support interpretation and verification.

7. **Analytical Use**
   The dataset is designed to support a range of analytical approaches. It enables descriptive analysis of long-term trends in SPM development, comparative analysis of mandate evolution across missions, and in-depth case-based analysis of political and operational dynamics. By linking institutional structure, mandate design, and operational context, the dataset provides a flexible framework for analyzing how SPMs evolve as instruments of UN conflict management.

Annex B

UN Special Political Missions Institutional Dataset

Master Codebook

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I. Project Overview

1. Research Motivation

UN Special Political Missions (SPMs) have become a central instrument of contemporary UN engagement in conflict prevention, mediation, and political stabilization. Despite their growing importance, there is limited systematic data that captures how SPM mandates are designed, negotiated, and evolve over time.

This project seeks to address this gap by constructing a structured dataset that enables comparative and longitudinal analysis of SPM mandate design, institutional dynamics, and operational characteristics.

2. Research Questions

The dataset is designed to support analysis of the following core questions:

- How do SPM mandates evolve over time across different missions?
- What factors shape changes in mandate scope?
- How do Security Council dynamics influence mandate design and renewal?
- To what extent do mandate scope and operational resources align?
- How do different governance models (cycle-based vs. accumulative) shape UN engagement in conflict settings?

II. Dataset Architecture

1. Mission-Level Dataset

The mission-level dataset provides a structural overview of all SPMs across the full historical period.

It captures relatively stable characteristics of each mission, including:

- Institutional type
- Geographic scope and operational region
- Legal basis and mandating authority
- Institutional transformations

This dataset serves as the foundation for understanding the broader landscape of SPMs.

2. Mandate-Cycle Dataset

The mandate-cycle dataset captures changes at the level of individual mandate cycles.

Each observation corresponds to a specific mandate period associated with a Security Council decision. This dataset enables systematic comparison of:

- Mandate duration and renewal patterns
- Voting behavior and political dynamics
- Changes in mandate scope (e.g. expansion, contraction)
- Functional components of mandates

The use of ***mandate_id*** as a unique identifier allows the dataset to track mandate evolution over time in a consistent and extensible manner.

3. **Case-Level Dataset**

The case-level dataset provides in-depth, context-rich analysis for selected missions.

It includes variables that are more difficult to standardize across all missions, such as:

- Political dynamics and negotiation context
- Operational constraints and implementation conditions
- Host-state relationships
- Detailed mandate interpretation

This dataset complements the mandate-cycle dataset by providing explanatory depth and case-specific insights.

4. **Dataset Relationships and Merge Keys**

The three datasets are designed to be relational and interoperable.

- ***mission_name***/***mission_id*** links the mission-level dataset to both the mandate-cycle and case-level datasets
- ***mandate_id*** links mandate-cycle observations to case-level observations
- Temporal variables enable time-based alignment across datasets

In addition, a subset of variables is consistently defined and reused across datasets to ensure comparability and facilitate merging. These shared variables provide a common framework for integrating information across levels of analysis.

Together, these merge keys allow for flexible integration across datasets and support multi-level analysis.

III. Units of Observation

1. Mission-Level Unit of Observation

The unit of observation is the **individual mission**.

Each observation corresponds to one distinct SPM, as defined in the DPPA *Compendium*, treated as a single institutional entity over its lifecycle regardless of internal mandate changes.

2. Mandate-Cycle Unit of Observation

The unit of observation is the **mandate cycle**.

Each observation corresponds to a specific period of authorization defined by a Security Council decision, identified by a unique ***mandate_id***.

This unit allows for systematic tracking of how mandates evolve over time within and across missions.

Although the mandate-cycle dataset focuses analytically on the period from 2010 to 2026, the construction of mandate_id is based on the full historical sequence of mandate cycles for each mission.

A historical parent table is first established to identify and order all mandate cycles across the full lifespan of each mission. The analytical dataset is then derived as a subset of this complete sequence.

This approach ensures that ***mandate_id*** reflects the correct chronological position of each mandate cycle and preserves temporal consistency in tracking mandate evolution.

3. Case-Level Unit of Observation

The unit of observation is the **mission-mandate cycle combination within selected cases**.

Each observation captures a specific mandate cycle within a given mission, enriched with contextual and qualitative variables.

This structure enables detailed within-case analysis while remaining linked to the broader dataset architecture.

IV. Data Sources

1. Primary Sources

This dataset is primarily constructed using official United Nations documentation, which provides the authoritative basis for mandate design, institutional structure, and operational parameters.

Primary sources include:

- Security Council resolutions
- Secretary-General reports to the Security Council
- Official UN mission webpages and documentation
- The DPPA *Compendium* of Special Political Missions

These sources are used to extract core variables related to mandate scope, institutional characteristics, and temporal structure.

2. Supplementary Sources

Where primary sources are incomplete or insufficient, supplementary sources are used to provide additional context and support coding decisions.

These may include:

- UN press releases and meeting records
- Reports from international organizations and think tanks
- Academic publications and policy analyses
- Verified secondary datasets (e.g. UN data portals)

The dataset also draws on structured data tools provided by the United Nations, which compile and standardize information from official sources.

These include:

- UN Peace and Security Data Hub
- Security Council Field Missions Dashboard

These sources are used to:

- Facilitate data collection and verification
- Identify mandate components and resources
- Supplement manual coding from primary documents

While derived from official UN materials, these tools present aggregated and interpreted data, and are therefore used in conjunction with primary sources.

3. **Source Hierarchy**
   When multiple sources are available, the dataset follows a hierarchical approach to ensure consistency:
   - Security Council resolutions (highest authority)
   - Official UN reports and mission documentation
   - DPPA Compendium
   - Supplementary sources

   In cases of discrepancy, higher-ranked sources take precedence over lower-ranked sources.

4. **Treatment of Conflicting Information**
   In instances where sources provide conflicting or inconsistent information:
   - Priority is given to the highest-ranking source in the hierarchy
   - If discrepancies cannot be resolved, the most authoritative interpretation is adopted based on available evidence
   - Ambiguities may be documented through notes or supporting references where relevant

   Contributors are encouraged to flag unresolved inconsistencies rather than make unsupported assumptions.

V. General Coding Principles

1. **Date Standardization**
   All date variables should follow a consistent format to ensure comparability and enable time-based analysis.
   - Use the format YYYY-MM whenever possible
   - If exact dates are available, use YYYY-MM-DD
   - All dates should be recorded as text in a consistent format across the dataset.

2. **Missing Data Conventions**
   To ensure consistency in data handling:
   - Use NA (in capital letters) for all missing or unavailable data.
   - Do not leave cells blank
   - Do not use alternative placeholders such as “N/A”, “-”, or “unknown”
   - Missing data should reflect unavailability, not uncertainty or lack of coding effort

3. **Ongoing Mission Coding**

   For missions that are currently active or have no clearly defined end date:

   - Use a standardized data cutoff date (e.g. 2026-02) for calculating durations
   - ***mandate_end*** reflects formal termination only and should not be replaced by a cutoff date
   - Record ***mandate_end*** = NA if the mission has not formally terminated

   For analytical purposes:

   - If ***mandate_end*** is NA, set ***effective_end_date=mandate_data_cutoff_date***
   - If mandate_end is available, set ***effective_end_date=mandate_end***

4. **Multi-Entry Conventions**

   For variables that contain multiple values:

   - Separate entries using semicolons (;)
   - Do not use commas, slashes, or line breaks
   - Maintain consistent formatting (e.g. spacing and order) across entries

   Examples:

   - Multiple countries: Sudan; South Sudan
   - Multiple resolutions: S/RES/2673; S/RES/2694

5. **Citation and Hyperlink Conventions**

   To ensure traceability and transparency:

   - Use official UN document symbols whenever possible (e.g. S/RES/2704)
   - Hyperlinks will be included where required
   - When referencing external sources, ensure consistency in format

6. **Version Control**

   To ensure consistency, transparency, and traceability across contributors, the dataset follows a structured version control system:

   A. Versioning

   - Major versions (e.g. v1.0, v2.0) reflect substantial changes in dataset structure or variable definitions
   - Minor versions (e.g. v1.1, v1.2) reflect data corrections or incremental updates

   All major changes should be documented and communicated before implementation.

   B. Collaboration Rules

- All edits should be made in the designated shared files
- Avoid creating duplicate versions of datasets
- Major structural changes (e.g. adding or modifying variables) should be communicated to the dataset lead before implementation
- Periodic internal reviews will be conducted to ensure consistency across cases

VI. Mission-Level Dataset Variables

1. Identification Variables

A. Section Introduction

The Identification Variables establish the structural identity of each Special Political Mission (SPM) and document its institutional evolution over time. Each observation in the mission-level dataset corresponds to one mission as defined in the DPPA *Compendium*.

Mission identity is recorded based on officially recognized designations rather than informal references. Where missions underwent formal renaming, historical names are preserved to capture institutional transformation. Renaming is treated as a substantive organizational change rather than a cosmetic adjustment, and is therefore coded systematically.

The variable ***mission_id*** reflects the order in which missions appear in the DPPA *Compendium*. As the *Compendium* organizes missions alphabetically by host country (English name), ***mission_id*** does not reflect chronological order.

In addition to the institutional naming conventions, this section also records the functional classification of missions. SPMs have historically performed diverse operational roles, ranging from political mediation and good offices to sanctions monitoring and technical verification functions. To capture this diversity while maintaining analytical clarity, missions are assigned a **primary functional type** together with a set of **secondary functional attributes** that reflect additional mandate characteristics.

This **two-tier approach** allows the dataset to capture both the dominant institutional role of a mission and specific operational features such as peace agreement implementation, sanctions monitoring, or technical verification responsibilities.

B. Variable Table

Variable Name	Description	Type
mission_id	Unique numeric identifier assigned to each Special Political Mission. Missions are numbered according to their order of appearance in the DPPA *Compendium*, which follows the alphabetical order of host countries (in English).	Integer
mission_name_0	Final official mission name as of termination or dataset cutoff. For missions that never changed name, this variable contains the sole official designation.	String
mission_name_1	Earliest recorded official name used prior to the final designation. Recorded only if the mission underwent renaming.	String
mission_name_2	Subsequent historical official name following mission_name_1, if applicable.	String
mission_name_3	Additional historical official name, if applicable.	String
mission_name_4	Additional historical official name, if applicable.	String
rename_binary	Indicates whether the mission underwent at least one official name change (1=Yes, 0=No)	Integer (0/1)
rename_count	Total number of official name changes recorded during mission lifespan	Integer
rename_direction	Qualitative coding of institutional transformation trajectory	Categorical
acronym_0	Official acronym corresponding to the final mission designation, as shown in the variable mission_name_0	String
acronym_1	Previous official acronym, if applicable	String
has_acronym_official	Indicates whether the mission has an officially recognized acronym (1=Yes, 0=No)	Binary (0/1)
functional_type	Primary categorical classification of the mission's dominant operational role as defined	Categorical (Coded

	by its mandate. Please refer to the coding rules.	Integer)
supports_peace_agreement	Indicates whether the mission mandate explicitly includes support for implementation, monitoring, or facilitation of a peace agreement or political settlement.	Binary(0/1)
sanctions_related	Indicates whether the mission is institutionally linked to a Security Council sanctions regime or sanctions monitoring mechanism.	Binary(0/1)
verification_function	Indicates whether the mission performs verification or monitoring functions related to ceasefires, compliance mechanisms, disarmament processes, or agreement implementation.	Binary(0/1)
verification_type	Identifies whether a mission is mandated to verify, observe, or monitor compliance with a specific political process, agreement, or institutional procedure.	Categorical (Coded Integer)
regional_scope	Indicates whether the mission mandate covers a regional or multi-country scope rather than a single host state.	Binary (0/1)
technical_mandate	Indicates whether the mission includes specialized responsibilities such as investigative tasks, chemical weapons verification, or other compliance-related monitoring functions.	Binary (0/1)
decolonization_context	Indicates whether the mission operates in the context of a formal decolonization process involving self-determination or transition to independence from colonial rule.	Binary (0/1)
Chapter_VII_basis	Indicates whether the establishing resolution explicitly invokes Chapter VII of the UN Charter.	Binary (0/1)

C. Coding Rules

a. mission_id

- ***mission_id*** follows the exact ordering of missions as listed in the DPPA *Compendium*.

- Since the *Compendium* is alphabetically organized by host country (English), ***mission_id*** does not imply temporal sequencing.
- ***mission_id*** remains constant regardless of mandate renewals or renaming.

b. Mission Naming Structure

- The dataset records the final official designation in ***mission_name_0***. Historical names, where applicable, are recorded sequentially in ***mission_name_1*** through ***mission_name_4***.
- Rules:
  - ***mission_name_0*** must always contain the final official mission name.
  - ***mission_name_1*** records the earliest official designation if a renaming occurred.
  - Subsequent renamings are recorded sequentially.
  - Missions without renaming contain values only in ***mission_name_0***.
  - Minor stylistic edits, punctuation changes, or formatting updates are not treated as renaming events.

c. rename_binary

- Definition:
  - ***rename_binary***=1 if ***rename_count*** ≥ 1
  - ***rename_binary***=0 if ***rename_count*** $= 0$
- This variable captures whether the mission experienced institutional redesignation at least once during its lifespan.

d. rename_count

- Definition: Number of transitions between officially recognized mission names.
- Counting rule:
  - A transition is counted only when an official institutional redesignation occurred.
  - Changes must be documented in official UN sources.
  - Minor wording changes that do not alter institutional identity are excluded.
  - ***rename_count*** equals the number of transitions, not the number of names.
- Example:

    - If a mission evolved:
      Name A→Name B→Name C(final)
      rename_count=2

e. rename_direction

- This variable captures the direction of institutional transformation associated with mission renaming. It records whether a change in official designation reflects an expansion, contraction, or reconfiguration of the mission's institutional role.
- Mission renaming within the UN system often signals broader organizational adjustments such as mandate restructuring, institutional consolidation, or transition toward drawdown mechanisms.
- Coding:
    - Expansion: Mission designation indicates an expansion or upgrading of institutional scope
    - Contraction: Mission designation reflects institutional downsizing or transition toward a lighter political presence.
    - Reconfiguration: Mission designation changes without clear expansion or contraction but reflects a structural reorganization.
    - None: No substantive directional change identifiable.
- When mission titles shift from Envoy/Mediator roles toward Adviser or liaison functions, the change is coded as Contraction because it reflects a reduced operational political presence.

f. Acronym Variables

- acronym_0 corresponds to the final official designation
- acronym_1 captures earlier acronym, if applicable
- ***has_acronym_official*** is coded:
    - 1 = mission has an officially recognized acronym
    - 0 = mission does not have an official acronym
- Informal shorthand references are excluded.

g. Functional Type Variables

- Special Political Missions perform diverse operational functions within the UN peace and security architecture. To capture these differences systematically, the dataset employs a two-tier functional classification.

- Each mission is assigned a primary functional type, representing its dominant institutional role in ***functional_type***:

  1=Good Offices/Special Envoy

  Missions centered on mediation, diplomatic engagement, or political facilitation led by a Special Envoy or Representative of the Secretary-General.

  2=Country-Based Political Field Mission

  Political missions deployed in a specific country to support political transition, governance, peace processes, or post-conflict stabilization.

  3=Regional Political Office

  Regional diplomatic offices addressing cross-border political dynamics, preventive diplomacy, or regional security cooperation.

  4=Sanctions Monitoring Mechanism

  Expert panels or monitoring groups tasked with assessing compliance with Security Council sanctions regimes.

  5=Verification or Monitoring Mission

  Missions mandated to verify or observe compliance with specific agreements or institutional procedures (e.g. ceasefires, peace agreements, elections, referendums).

  6=Investigative Mechanism

  Missions tasked with conducting formal investigations or collecting evidence related to violations of international law or Security Council mandates.

  7=Specialized Technical Mission

  Missions performing technical compliance or disarmament tasks requiring specialized expertise (e.g. weapons monitoring, technical verification)

  8=Thematic/Global Advisory Mandate

  Global advisory mechanisms providing analytical, reporting, or policy support on thematic issues such as terrorism, sanctions implementation, or conflict prevention.

- A set of binary functional attributes records specific operational characteristics that may coexist with the primary function:
    - ***supports_peace_agreement***
        - Code 1 when the mission mandate explicitly refers to supporting the implementation, monitoring, verification, or facilitation of a peace agreement, ceasefire arrangement, or negotiated political settlement between parties to a conflict.
        - Code 0 when the mission mandate:
            - focuses on general mediation or political dialogue without reference to a specific agreement
            - provides good offices or diplomatic engagement without supporting an existing agreement
            - addresses post-conflict governance, elections, or institution-building not directly linked to implementing a peace agreement.
    - ***sanctions_related***
        - Code 1 when the mission is explicitly mandated by the Security Council to support the implementation of a sanctions regime, including tasks such as:
            - monitoring compliance with sanctions measures
            - reporting on sanctions implementation
            - serving as a Panel of Experts, Monitoring Group, or sanctions monitoring team
            - providing expert or analytical support to a Security Council sanctions committee.
        - Code 0 when the mission:
            - operates in a country subject to sanctions but does not implement or monitor the sanctions regime

- addresses conflict, governance, or political mediation unrelated to sanctions enforcement
- references sanctions in background context without having an institutional role in the sanctions regime.

- ***verification_function***
  - A verification function requires an explicit mandate to assess or observe whether parties comply with agreed commitments or procedures.
  - Code 1 when the mission mandate explicitly includes responsibilities to verify, observe, monitor, or assess compliance with a specific agreement, process, or institutional procedure.
  - Code 0 when the mission:
    - provides good offices, mediation, or political facilitation without a monitoring or verification function
    - supports general political processes or governance without assessing compliance with a specific agreement or procedure
    - performs analytical, advisory, or coordination roles without verification or monitoring responsibilities.
- ***verification_type***
  - This variable should be coded only when ***verification_function=1***. If the mission does not perform a verification, observation, or monitoring role, code 0 (not applicable).
  - Code the category that best represents the primary object of verification specified in the mandate.
    - **1=Peace agreement/ceasefire verification**

Code when the mission verifies or monitors compliance with a ceasefire, peace agreement, or related implementation agreements between conflict parties. This includes monitoring disengagement of forces, ceasefire lines, or other compliance provisions in negotiated agreements.

- **2=Election Observation**
  Code when the mission supervises, observes, or verifies the conduct of electoral processes, including national elections, transitional elections, or constitutionally mandated electoral procedures.
- **3=Self-determination referendum**
  Code when the mission supervises or verifies a referendum or plebiscite concerning self-determination, independence, or territorial status.
- **4=Other monitoring mandate**
  Code when the mission performs verification or monitoring functions that do not fall into the categories above, including monitoring of institutional arrangements, implementation mechanisms, or other procedural commitments defined in the mandate.
  This category may include sanctions monitoring, investigative mechanisms, arms embargo monitoring, and other compliance monitoring mandates.

- ***regional_scope***
  - Code 1 when the mission mandate explicitly covers multiple countries or an entire region, rather than focusing on a single host state.
  - Code 0 when the mission:

- is primarily deployed in one host country
- addresses domestic political processes, peace agreements, or institutional developments within a single state
- operates in a single country even if the conflict has regional implications.

- ***technical_mandate***
  - Code 1 when the mission mandate includes specialized technical responsibilities that require scientific, investigative, or technical expertise beyond diplomatic or political engagement.
  - Code 0 when the mission:
    - monitors political agreements, elections, or ceasefires without specialized technical verification
    - provides coordination, advisory, or reporting roles that do not involve technical inspection or investigative expertise.
- ***decolonization_context***
  - A mission should be coded as 1 only when its mandate is explicitly connected to a self-determination or independence process from colonial rule, including:
    - supervision or verification of independence referendums or plebiscites
    - supervision of elections or constitutional processes preparing independence
    - implementation or termination of Trusteeship arrangements
    - transitional UN administration of a colonial territory prior to independence

- Missions deployed after independence to address:
  - bilateral disputes
  - internal political crises
  - security incidents

  should be coded as 0, even if they occur shortly after independence.
- For example: The Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to Equatorial Guinea (1969) was deployed to mediate a diplomatic crisis between Equatorial Guinea and Spain following independence. Although the mission occurred shortly after the territory gained independence in 1968, its mandate concerned crisis mediation rather than the supervision of the decolonization process. Therefore, it is coded as ***decolonization_context***=0

- ***Chapter_VII_basis***
  - Code 1 when the founding resolution explicitly invokes Chapter VII enforcement authority as the legal basis for the mandate. This includes:
    - explicit language such as "Acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations"
    - references to specific Chapter VII provisions that provide enforcement authority (e.g. Article 41), even if Chapter VII is not invoked in the operative introduction.
    - Example: Resolution 2231(2015) references Article 41, which constitutes a direct Chapter VII legal basis → code 1
  - Code 0 when the resolution does not explicitly invoke Chapter VII authority for the mission mandate. This includes cases where:

- Chapter VII is mentioned only hypothetically or conditionally, such as statements that the Council may impose measures under Chapter VII in the event of non-compliance.
- Chapter VII language appears outside the mandate's legal basis, for example in conditional enforcement provisions directed at future actions.
- Example: Resolution 2235 (2015)

2. Geographic Variables

A. Section Introduction

The Geographic Variables capture the territorial scope and regional classification of each Special Political Mission (SPM). Geographic coding serves three purposes:

a. To situate missions within global and regional structures.
b. To enable spatial visualization and mapping.
c. To support regional comparative analysis.

Geographic coding follows a hierarchical structure:

- Operational region (as defined in the DPPA *Compendium*)
- Host country or territorial entity
- Continental-level region
- Sub-regional classification

This structure ensures consistency across sovereign states, historical entities, disputed territories, and regional mandates.

Geographic classification is based on standardized continental groupings rather than political terminology. ***operational_region*** reflects UN administrative and political structuring rather than purely geographic classification. It is preserved verbatim to maintain institutional fidelity.

Where missions operate across multiple countries or in regional/thematic capacities, geographic classification reflects the primary area of mandate relevance rather than administrative headquarters.

B. Variable Table

Variable Name	Description	Type
operational_region	Operational classification as defined verbatim in the DPPA *Compendium*, preserving original terminology	Categorical
host_country	Territorial entity in which the mission is primarily deployed or to which its mandate is territorially linked	String
host_country_iso3	ISO 3166-1 alpha-3 code corresponding to host_country, if available	String
region	Standardized continental-level classification	Categorical
sub_region	Standardized geographic sub-region	Categorical
primary_conflict_area	Specific conflict zone, sub-state territory or thematic geographic focus of the mission	String
latitude	Latitude coordinate representing the approximate geographic center of the mission's primary operational or conflict area.	Numeric
longitude	Longitude coordinate representing the approximate geographic center of the mission's primary operational or conflict area.	Numeric
geometry_type	Spatial representation type used in mapping	Categorical (Point/Multi-country point/Global)
geometry_notes	Short explanatory note describing the geographic reference used to determine the latitude and longitude coordinates for the mission.	String

C. Coding Rules

a. Territorial Coding Principle

- ***host_country*** records the territorial entity explicitly referenced in the mission mandate or *Compendium* entry. It

reflects the geographic scope of the mission rather than questions of sovereignty recognition.

- Sovereignty recognition does not determine coding.
- ***host_country*** captures territorial mandate scope, not diplomatic recognition.
- Historical states are recorded using their mandate-time designation.
- ***host_country*** coding categories:
    - Sovereign UN Member States:
        - Record the official English state name.
        - Example:
            - Liberia
            - Mali
            - Lebanon
    - Non-Member or Partially Recognized Entities:
        - Record the entity name as referenced in the mandate.
        - Example:
            - Palestine
            - Kosovo
        - Rule: The dataset does not take a position on sovereignty. Territorial reference reflects mandate scope only.
    - Historical States:
        - Record the official designation used during the mandate period.
        - Do not retroactively replace it with successor states.
        - Examples:
            - Yugoslavia
            - Togoland
        - Rule: Historical territorial entities are coded using their mandate-time official designation.
    - Multi-Country Missions:
        - Separate multiple countries using semicolons (;).
        - Maintain the same order as listed in the *Compendium*.
        - Examples:

- Cameroon; Nigeria
- Iran; Iraq
- Sudan; South Sudan
- India; Pakistan

- Regional or Non-Territorial Mandates:
  - If no specific territory is referenced in the mandate, code as NA.
  - Examples:
    - Geneva International Discussions→NA
    - Global thematic missions→NA

- If ISO3 exists, record it.
- If no ISO3 exists, code NA.
  - Examples:
    - Palestine→PSE
    - Kosovo→XKX
    - Yugoslavia→YUG
    - Togoland→TGO
    - Cook Islands→COK

b. operational_region

- Definition: Regional categorization as provided verbatim by the DPPA *Compendium*.
- Rules:
  - Do not modify original *Compendium* Wording.
  - Do not merge or standardize categories.
  - Examples include but are not limited to:
    - Africa
    - Central Africa
    - West Africa and the Sahel
    - Middle East
    - Balkans
    - Central Asia
    - Geneva International Discussions
    - Horn of Africa
    - Great Lakes
    - Global
  - ***operational_region*** may represent:
    - A geographic region
    - A sub-regional political configuration
    - A conflict system cluster

        - A thematic grouping
    - ***operational_region*** is analytically distinct from ***region*** and ***sub_region***.

c. region

- ***region*** follows standardized continental groupings:
    - Africa
    - Asia
    - Europe
    - Americas
    - Oceania
    - Global

d. sub_region

- ***sub_region*** captures geographically coherent sub-continental areas.
- Examples include but are not limited to:
    - West Africa
    - Sahel
    - North Africa
    - East Africa
    - South Asia
    - Southeast Asia
    - Central Asia
    - Balkans
    - Middle East
    - Pacific
    - Caribbean
    - Central America

e. primary_conflict_area

- Definition: Specific conflict territory or dispute area addressed by the mission.
- Rules:
    - Use for missions with sub-state or disputed territories (e.g. Gaza, Darfur).
    - For global thematic missions and single-country missions without sub-state focus, code NA.

f. Spatial Representation

- General Principle:
    - Spatial coordinates represent the geographic focus of the mission mandate, not the location of UN offices, headquarters, or diplomatic facilities.

    - Coordinates should reflect the primary conflict area, territorial mandate, or operational scope addressed by the mission.
- Single-Country Missions
    - For missions operating within a single country, coordinates represent the approximate geographic center of the primary conflict area or operational theater.
    - If the mission addresses the entire country without a clearly defined conflict zone, use the geographic centroid of the host country. For example:
        - UNAMA → centroid of Afghanistan
        - BINUH → centroid of Haiti
        - geometry_type=Point
    - For country-level missions, the geometric centroid of national boundaries derives from the Natural Earth global administrative boundaries dataset. Centroids are calculated in R using the sf spatial package.
    - Because centroids are computed algorithmically from country polygons, the resulting coordinates may differ slightly from coordinates reported by online mapping services (e.g. Google Maps). These differences reflect variations in how geographic centers are defined (e.g. geometric centroid, visual map center, or population-weighted center).
    - For the purposes of this dataset, the geometric centroid of the territorial polygon is used consistently across all country-level missions to ensure methodological transparency and reproducibility.
- Sub-State Conflict Areas
    - If the mission focuses on a specific sub-state region, coordinates should represent the approximate center of the conflict area. For example:
        - Gaza missions→centroid of Gaza Strip
        - geometry_type=Point
    - For territorial or sub-state areas not represented as polygons in Natural Earth (e.g.West New Guinea,

Bougainville), coordinates were obtained by geocoding the location name using “tidygeocoder”.
    - All coordinates are recorded in decimal degrees with:
        - latitude = Y
        - longitude = X
- Multi-Country Missions
    - For missions covering multiple countries, coordinates represent the approximate geographic midpoint of the mission’s operational area. Host countries should remain recorded in *host_country* using semicolon separation. For example:
        - Cameroon; Nigeria
        - Sudan; South Sudan
        - geometry_type=Multi-country point
- Regional Missions
    - For regional political offices covering multiple states within a defined region, coordinates represent the approximate geographic center of the region covered by the mandate. For example:
        - UNOWAS→center of West Africa
        - geometry_type=Point
    - The centroid of the **Great Lakes** region is calculated using the merged polygons of Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, and Tanzania based on Natural Earth country boundaries.
    - The centroid of the **Horn of Africa** region is calculated using the merged polygons of Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti based on Natural Earth country boundaries.
    - The centroid of the **Central Asia** region is calculated using the merged polygons of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan based on Natural Earth country boundaries.
    - The centroid of the **Balkans** region is calculated using the merged polygons of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro,

Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Albania based on Natural Earth country boundaries.
    - The centroid of the **Middle East** region is calculated using the merged polygons of Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia based on Natural Earth country boundaries.
    - The centroid of the **West Africa and the Sahel** region is calculated using the merged polygons of Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal based on Natural Earth country boundaries.
- Global or Thematic Missions
    - For missions with global thematic mandates that are not tied to a specific geographic area, coordinates should be coded as NA.
    - geometry_type=Global
- Coordinate Format
    - Coordinates must be recorded in decimal degrees (WGS84) to ensure compatibility with GIS software. For example:
        - latitude=34.5553
        - longitude=69.2075
- ***geometry_notes*** should briefly describe the geographic reference point used to generate the coordinates. For example:
    - centroid of Afghanistan
    - centroid of Haiti
    - global mandate

3. Mandate Structure Variables

A. Section Introduction

The Mandate Structure Variables capture the temporal boundaries, status, and duration of each Special Political Mission (SPM). These variables define when a mission formally began, when it ended (if applicable), and how mission lifespan is calculated.

Because missions may terminate without renewal, may evolve into successor mechanisms, or may remain ongoing at the time of dataset construction, standardized coding rules are applied to ensure temporal consistency.

All dates are recorded at monthly resolution (YYYY-MM). This level of precision reflects the availability of mandate documentation and ensures cross-mission comparability.

B. Variable Table

Variable Name	Description	Type
mandate_start	Month and year of formal mission establishment	Date (YYYY-MM)
mandate_end	Month and year of formal termination; NA if ongoing	Date (YYYY-MM)
mandate_data_cutoff_date	Dataset reference date used for ongoing missions	Date (YYYY-MM)
effective_end_date	Operational end date used for duration calculation	Date (YYYY-MM)
mandate_status	Mission status at cutoff date	Categorical
duration_months	Total mission duration calculated in months	Integer
duration_years	Total mission duration calculated in years	Numeric
current_implementation_status	Operational condition of mission at cutoff date	Categorical
legal_contestation_status	Indicates whether the legal validity, continuation, or enforceability of a mission's mandate has been formally contested by relevant actors at any point during the mission's lifetime. This includes contestation occurring during the mandate period, regardless of whether the mission remains active at the dataset cutoff date.	Binary (0/1)

C. Coding Rules

a. Date Format Standard

- All mandate dates are recorded in YYYY-MM format.
- Justification:
    - Daily resolution is inconsistently available across historical cases.

        - Annual-only coding reduces analytical precision.
        - Monthly resolution balances accuracy and comparability.
    - If only a year is provided in the *Compendium*, code as YYYY-12.
        - Example:
            - Mandate end: 2003 → 2003-12
    - If text states "mid-year" in the *Compendium*, code as YYYY-06.
        - Example:
            - Extended until mid-2001 → 2001-06
    - These conventions must be applied consistently.

b. mandate_start

- Definition: Month and year of formal mission establishment.
- Use the date of formal establishment as shown in the *Compendium.*

c. mandate_end

- Definition: Month and year of formal mission termination.
- Rules:
    - Record the date of formal termination if specified.
    - If the mandate expired due to lack of renewal and no specific month is provided, use YYYY-12.
    - If termination month is specified in the *Compendium*, use documented month.
    - If the mission remains active at dataset construction, code NA.
- ***mandate_end*** reflects formal termination, not operational degradation.

d. mandate_data_cutoff_date

- Definition: Reference date for dataset construction.
- Rules:
    - ***mandate_data_cutoff_date*** is constant across all observations.
    - For the current release of the dataset, the cutoff date is coded as 2026-02.
    - This variable is used exclusively for calculating duration of ongoing missions.

        - For terminated missions, mandate_end remains the formal termination date and is not replaced by the cutoff date.
    - Methodological Note: The inclusion of ***mandate_data_cutoff_date*** ensures transparency in temporal truncation and allows replication of duration calculations for ongoing missions.
    - Future dataset releases may update ***mandate_data_cutoff_date*** to reflect revised extraction timelines.

e. effective_end_date

- Definition: Operational end date used for duration calculation.
- Coding rules:
    - If ***mandate_status***=Ended:
      → ***effective_end_date=mandate_end***
    - If mandate_status=Ongoing:
      → ***effective_end_date=mandate_data_cutoff_date***
- ***effective_end_date*** is not an independent historical variable. It is a constructed variable used exclusively for duration computation.
- Methodological Note: The use of ***effective_end_date*** ensures comparability between ongoing and terminated missions by standardizing the temporal endpoint for duration calculations.

f. mandate_status

- Definition: Indicates whether the mission mandate formally ended.
- Categories:
    - Ended
    - Ongoing
- Coding Rules:
    - Ended: A formal termination instrument exists prior to the cutoff date, or the mandate expired and was not renewed.
    - Ongoing: No formal termination instrument exists as of the cutoff date.
- Legal dispute over mandate validity does not change ***mandate_status*** unless formal termination has occurred.

g. duration_months

- Definition: Total mission duration calculated in months.
- Coding Rules:
    - ***duration_months*** is calculated using: DATEDIF (mandate_start, effective_end_date, "m")
    - Calculation uses ***effective_end_date***, not ***mandate_end.***
    - Requires valid date format (YYYY-MM).
    - For ongoing missions, duration is calculated up to ***mandate_data_cutoff_date***.

h. duration_years

- Definition: Total mission duration expressed in years.
- Coding Rules:
    - ***duration_years***=***duration_months***/12
    - Not rounded unless specified.
    - Represents continuous duration.

i. current_implementation_status

- Definition: Indicates the operational condition of the mission at the dataset cutoff date.
- Categories:
    - Active
    - Constrained
    - Stalled
    - NA (for Ended missions)
- Coding Rules:
    - Applies only to missions coded as Ongoing.
    - Ended missions → NA.
    - Active: Mandate is being implemented without major operational disruption.
    - Constrained: Mandate remains formally active, but implementation is significantly limited by political, legal, security, financial, or diplomatic constraints.
    - Stalled: Implementation is effectively suspended or non-functional despite formal continuation.

j. legal_contestation_status

- Definition: Indicates whether the legal validity, continuation, or enforceability of a mission's mandate is formally contested at the dataset cutoff date.
- Coding:
    - 0= Not contested
    - 1= Contested

- Coding Rules:
    - Code 1 when the legal validity, continuation, or enforceability of the mission mandate has been formally challenged by relevant actors at any point during the mission's existence.
        - Formal Contestation may include:
            - official statements by UN Member States disputing the legality of the mandate
            - disputes raised in Security Council debates or official meeting records
            - formal diplomatic communications questioning the legal authority of the mission
            - explicit disagreement among Security Council members regarding the legal basis of the mandate
    - Code 0 when:
        - disagreements concern mandate scope or implementation, but not the legal authority of the mission
        - the mission faces operational constraints or political opposition
        - criticism is directed at performance or effectiveness rather than legality

4. Institutional and Legal Variables

A. Section Introduction

This section documents the formal legal and institutional basis of each Special Political Mission (SPM).

These variables capture the mandating authority, legal instruments, Chapter basis, and the extent to which missions are embedded within broader institutional arrangements such as subsidiary bodies or sanction regimes. In addition, the dataset records whether missions are preceded by earlier UN mechanisms or succeeded by new institutional arrangements, allowing the dataset to trace institutional continuity and transformation over time.

The dataset also records Security Council penholdership, identifying the member state(s) responsible for drafting and negotiating the resolutions

associated with each mission. Penholdership reflects an important informal institutional practice within the Security Council and provides insight into agenda-setting authority and negotiation dynamics.

The purpose of this section is to enable systematic comparison of:

a. Legal authority across missions
b. Institutional anchoring (Security Council vs General Assembly)
c. Chapter VII reliance
d. Episodes of legal or procedural contestation
e. Institutional continuity and structural transformation (e.g. transition from one mission or mechanism to another)
f. Distribution of drafting authority within the Security Council through penholdership

Together, these variables allow the dataset to examine how the institutional design of SPMs evolves in response to geopolitical, operational, and fiscal pressures.

B. Variable Table

Variable Name	Description	Type
preceding_mechanism_exists	Indicates whether the mission was preceded by a prior UN political, peacekeeping, or monitoring mechanism addressing the same conflict or mandate area.	Binary
preceding_mechanism_name	Name of the preceding UN mechanism, if applicable.	String
preceding_mechanism_type	Identifies the institutional type of the United Nations mechanism that preceded the establishment of the current mission. The variable captures the functional category of prior UN engagement in the same conflict setting or institutional sequence.	Categorical (Coded Integer)
successor_mechanism_exists	Indicates whether the mission was followed by or transformed into a successor UN mechanism.	Binary
successor_mechanism_name	Name of the successor UN mechanism, if applicable.	String

successor_mechanism_type	Identifies the institutional type of the United Nations mechanism that replaced or succeeded the mission after its termination or transformation.	Categorical (Coded Integer)
mandating_body	The UN organ formally authorizing the mission (e.g. Security Council, General Assembly)	String
mandate_decision	The primary legal instrument establishing the mission (e.g. resolution number, exchange of letters)	String
penholder_country	Security Council member state(s) serving as penholder(s) responsible for drafting and negotiating the resolution establishing the mission.	String
penholder_country_iso3	ISO-3 country code corresponding to the penholder country or countries.	String
penholder_count	Number of Security Council member states serving as penholders for the mission mandate.	Integer
penholder_group	Institutional classification of the Security Council member state(s) serving as penholder(s) for the mission mandate. If multiple penholders belong to different institutional groups, the variable is coded as Mixed.	Categorical
chapter_basis	Indicates whether the mandate explicitly invokes a specific Chapter of the UN Charter.	categorical string

C. Coding Rules

a. preceding_mechanism_exists

- Definition: Indicates whether a UN mission or mechanism existed immediately prior to the current mission and addressed substantially the same conflict, political process, or institutional mandate.
- Coding rules:
  - 0=No identifiable preceding mechanism
  - 1=Mission preceded by a UN mechanism

- Notes: This variable excludes:
    - loosely related historical UN activities
    - Humanitarian or development programs not formally tied to the mission mandate.

b. preceding_mechanism_name

- Definition: Records the official name of the preceding UN mechanism when preceding_mechanism_exists=1.
- Coding rules:
    - Text field containing the official UN designation of the preceding mission or mechanism.
    - If preceding_mechanism_exists=0, record: NA.

c. successor_mechanism_exists

- Definition: Indicates whether the mission was followed by or formally replaced by another UN mechanism addressing the same mandate area.
- Coding rules:
    - 0=No identifiable successor mechanism
    - 1=Mission replaced or followed by another UN mechanism
- Notes: This variable includes:
    - mission reconfiguration
    - institutional replacement
    - transition to a different type of UN presence

d. successor_mechanism_name

- Definition: Records the official name of the successor UN mechanism when successor_mechanism_exists=1.
- Coding: Text filed containing the official UN designation of the successor mission or mechanism.
- If successor_mechanism_exists=0, record: NA.

e. ***preceding_mechanism_type*** **and** ***successor_mechanism_type***

- Definition: Code the functional type of the UN mechanism immediately preceding or succeeding the mission within the same country, region, or institutional sequence.
    - ***preceding_mechanism_type:*** refers to the most immediate UN mechanism prior to the establishment of the mission.
    - ***successor_mechanism_type***: refers to the first UN mechanism that replaces, transforms from, or continues the mission after its termination.

- A mechanism should be coded only when there is clear institutional continuity, such as:
    - formal transition, replacement, or absorption
    - continuation or transfer of mandate functions
    - explicit linkage in the DPPA *Compendium*
- Code 10=None/First Mechanism when:
    - no prior (preceding) or subsequent (successor) mechanism exists
    - the mission represents the first UN presence in that context (preceding)
    - the mission ends without institutional continuation (successor)
- Functional Type Coding Scheme:
    - 1 = Good Offices / Special Envoy
    - 2 = Country-Based Political Field Mission
    - 3 = Regional Political Office
    - 4 = Sanctions Monitoring Mechanism
    - 5 = Verification or Monitoring Mission
    - 6 = Investigative Mechanism
    - 7 = Specialized Technical Mission
    - 8 = Thematic / Global Advisory Mandate
    - 9 = Peacekeeping Operation
    - 10 = None / First Mechanism

f. mandating_body

- Definition: The principal UN organ that formally authorized the mission.
- Coding rules:
    - Code according to the original establishing authority documented in the DPPA *Compendium*.
    - If the mission is established by a Security Council resolution, code as SC.
    - If the mission is established by a General Assembly resolution, code as GA.
    - If both GA and SC are formally involved in the establishment decision, code as: GA; SC.
    - If the mission is established through a hybrid institutional arrangement involving the Security Council and an external body (e.g. OPCW), code as: SC; OPCW.

    - If a mission is renewed by another body, this variable still reflects the original authorizing body.
    - The ***mandating_body*** variable captures institutional authorization, not administrative reporting lines. For example, a mission operationally reporting to the Secretary-General but authorized through Security Council procedure is coded as SC.

g. mandate_decision

- Definition: The primary legal instrument establishing the mission.
- Coding rules:
    - Record the establishing resolution or formal legal instrument only.
    - Format examples: resolution 2085(2012)
    - Multiple instruments should be separated by semicolons (;).
    - Renewal resolutions are not recorded here and are captured in mandate-based dataset.

h. chapter_basis

- Definition: Indicates whether the authorizing resolution explicitly invokes a Chapter of the UN Charter.
- Coding rules:
    - Code only if explicitly referenced in the resolution text.
    - Values:
        - Chapter VI
        - Chapter VII
        - Chapter VIII
        - Mixed
        - Not specified
    - Do not infer Chapter authority if not stated.
    - If no Chapter is mentioned, code as “Not specified.”

i. penholder_country

- Penholders are identified based on Security Council practice and official documentation regarding resolution drafting responsibilities.
- When multiple penholders are associated with a mission, they are recorded in ***penholder_country*** using semicolon separation. For example:
    - United Kingdom; Germany

*j. **penholder_country_iso3***

- ***penholder_country_iso3*** must follow the same ordering as ***penholder_country***. For example:
  - ***penholder_country***: United Kingdom; Germany
  - ***penholder_country_iso3***: GBR; DEU

*k. **penholder_count***

- ***penholder_count*** reflects the total number of penholder countries listed in penholder_country. For example:
  - United Kingdom→1
  - United Kingdom; Germany→2

*l. **penholder_group***

- ***penholder_country*** are classified into the following institutional groups:
  - P3:
    - United States
    - United Kingdom
    - France
  - P2:
    - Russia
    - China
  - E10:
    - Non-permanent members of the Security Council
  - Mixed:
    - Penholders belonging to more than one institutional group

5. Political Process Variables

A. Section Introduction

This section records the Security Council decision-making processes associated with the establishment of Special Political Missions (SPMs). While Institutional and Legal Variables capture the formal authority and structural design of missions, the Political Process Variables document the procedural dynamics through which mandates are negotiated, adopted, and recorded within the Security Council.

These variables capture voting behavior, procedural adoption patterns, and the presence of vetoes or abstentions during mandate establishment. In addition, the dataset records the documentary sources associated with each mandate, including Security Council resolutions, voting records, and relevant letters from the Secretary-General.

Together, these variables allow the dataset to examine how political consensus, contestation, and negotiation dynamics shape the authorization of SPM mandates. By systematically recording voting outcomes and procedural features, the dataset provides a basis for comparing levels of political agreement across missions and identifying patterns in Security Council decision-making over time.

B. Variable Table

Variable Name	Description	Type
host_state_consent	Indicates whether the host state explicitly consented to the establishment or continuation of the mission as reflected in official UN documentation or Security Council deliberations.	Binary(0/1)
establishment_resolution	Security Council resolution number that formally established the mission.	String
resolution_date	Date on which the Security Council adopted the resolution establishing the mission.	Date (YYYY-MM)
mandate_word_count	Total word count of the operative mandate section contained in the establishing resolution.	Integer
adoption_vote_type	Type of voting procedure through which the resolution was adopted in the Security Council.	Categorical
veto_present	Indicates whether a veto was cast by a permanent member during the vote on the resolution.	Binary(0/1)
abstention_present	Indicates whether one or more Security Council members abstained during the vote on the resolution.	Binary(0/1)
total_votes_count	Total number of Security Council members participating in the vote.	Integer
yes_votes_count	Number of Security Council members voting in favor of the resolution.	Integer
no_votes_count	Number of Security Council members voting against the resolution.	Integer
abstentions_count	Number of Security Council members	Integer

	abstaining during the vote.	
veto_count	Number of vetoes cast by permanent members during the vote.	Integer
letter_from_SG	Indicates whether the establishment or mandate of the mission was based on or accompanied by an official letter from the UN Secretary-General to the Security Council.	Binary(0/1)
letter_word_count	Word count of the Secretary-General's letter when applicable.	Integer
hyperlink_letter	URL linking to the official UN document containing the Secretary-General's letter referenced in the mandate process.	String(URL)
hyperlink_resolution	URL linking to the official UN document containing the Security Council resolution establishing the mission.	String(URL)
hyperlink_vote	URL linking to the official UN document containing the Security Council resolution establishing the mission.	String(URL)

C. Coding Rules

a. Adoption Vote Type

- ***adoption_vote_type*** records the procedural mode through which the resolution was adopted
- Coding categories include:
  - 1=Adopted without vote
  - 2=Adopted unanimously
  - 3=Adopted with abstentions
  - 4=Adopted with opposition
- The category reflects the overall procedural outcome of the vote, not individual voting behavior.

b. Vote Count Consistency

- The following variables must remain internally consistent:
  - ***yes_vote_count***
  - ***no_vote_count***
  - ***abstentions_count***
- Their sum must equal:
  - ***Total_votes_count***
- **For example:**
  - ***yes_votes_count=14***
  - ***no_votes_count=0***

    - ***abstentions_count=1***
    - ***total_votes_count=15***

c. Veto Coding

- ***veto_present*** is coded as:
    - 1=A permanent member cast a veto vote against the resolution.
    - 0=No veto was cast.
- ***veto_count*** records the number of vetoes cast during the vote.
- In cases where a veto is present, the resolution fails to be adopted. However, the variable is retained to capture procedural dynamics associated with mandate proposals.

d. Abstention Coding

- ***abstention_present*** is coded as:
    - 1=One or more Security Council members abstained.
    - 0=No abstentions occurred.
    - This variable captures the presence of partial consensus or political hesitation during mandate adoption.

e. Word Count Variables

- ***mandate_word_count*** records the total number of words contained in the operative mandate section of the establishing resolution.
- The word count should exclude:
    - preambular paragraphs
    - annexes
    - unrelated procedural language
- ***letter_word_count*** records the length of the Secretary_General's letter where applicable.

f. Secretary-General Letters

- **letter_from_SG is coded:**
    - 1=An official letter from the Secretary-General is referenced in the mandate establishment process.
    - 0=No such letter is associated with the mission establishment.
    - Where a letter exists, ***letter_word_count*** and ***hyperlink_letter*** should be recorded.

g. Hyperlink Variables

- Hyperlink variables provide direct access to official UN documentation.
- These include:
  - ***hyperlink_resolution***
  - ***hyperlink_vote***
  - ***hyperlink_letter***
- Links should point to official UN document repositories, such as:
  - UN Digital Library
  - UN Official Document System (ODS)
  - Official UN resolution pages
- These variables are intended to facilitate verification, transparency, and dataset reproducibility.

h. Missing Data

- If voting records or associated documents cannot be located, variables should be coded as NA rather than inferred.

6. Leadership Variables

A. Section Introduction

The Leadership Variables capture information on the senior-most appointed official responsible for directing each Special Political Mission (SPM). Leadership characteristics provide insight into representation patterns, geographic distribution, and potential institutional dynamics across missions.

The mission-level dataset records the first appointed mission head as documented in the DPPA *Compendium*. This approach ensures consistency across historical cases and avoids uneven availability of successor leadership data.

Leadership variables are descriptive in nature and do not imply causal relationships between personal characteristics and mission outcomes.

B. Variable Table

Variable Name	Description	Type
first_mission_head	Name of the first appointed mission head	String
mission_head_nation	Nationality of the first mission head	String

ality		
mission_head_nationality_iso3	ISO3 code of mission head nationality	String
nationality_global south_or_global north	Global North/ Global South classification of the nationality of the first mission head	Categorical
mission_head_sex	Sex of the first mission head	Categorical
multiple_heads	Indicates whether more than one individual served as mission head during the initial leadership period of the mission.	Binary (0/1)

C. Coding Rules

a. ***first_mission_head***

- Definition: Full name of the first formally appointed mission head as recorded in the DPPA *Compendium*.
- Coding Rules:
  - Record full name as listed in the *Compendium*.
  - If two individuals are jointly listed as first mission heads, separate using semicolon (;).
  - If no mission head is listed, code NA.
  - Do not standardize name formatting beyond preserving official spelling.

b. mission_head_nationality

- Definition: Nationality of the first mission head.
- Coding Rules:
  - Record nationality as the country designation provided in the *Compendium*.
  - Nationality reflects citizenship, not ethnic origin.
  - Do not retroactively replace historical states with successor states.
  - For historical states that no longer exist, record the nationality as designated during the mandate period.
- Historical Consistency Principle: Nationality is coded according to the geopolitical designation in effect at the time of appointment. Successor states are not substituted for historical entities.
  - Examples:

        - Czechoslovakia (not Czech Republic or Slovakia)
        - United Arab Republic (historical designation)
    - This preserves temporal and institutional accuracy.

c. mission_head_nationality_iso3

- Definition: ISO 3166-1 alpha-3 code corresponding to ***mission_head_nationality***.
- Coding Rules:
    - Use ISO 3166-1 alpha-3 codes where available.
    - For historical states that previously had valid ISO codes, use the historical ISO3 code.
    - Do not replace historical ISO codes with successor-state codes.

d. nationality_global_south_or_global_north

- Definition: Classification of mission head nationality into Global North or Global South categories.
- Categories:
    - Global North
    - Global South
    - NA
- Coding Rules:
    - Classification follows broadly recognized economic-development groupings.
    - Global North generally includes OECD high-income Western states and similarly classified countries.
    - Global South includes developing and emerging economies across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and parts of Oceania.
    - Historical states are classified based on their position at time of appointment.
- Methodological Note: The Global North/ Global South classification is analytical and does not imply normative judgment. It is included to explore patterns of representation.

e. mission_head_sex

- Definition: Biological sex of the first mission head, as publicly documented.
- Categories:

- Male
- Female
- NA

- Coding Rules:
  - Code based on DPPA Compendium.
  - This variable does not attempt to capture gender identity beyond documented information.

f. multiple_heads

- Coding Rules:
  - 0=Only one individual served as mission head during the initial leadership period.
  - 1=Multiple individuals served as mission heads during the early phase of the mission.

7. Source and Documentation Variables

A. Section Introduction

The Source and Documentation Variables ensure traceability and transparency of data extraction. These variables document the primary source from which mission-level information was derived and provide page-level references within the DPPA *Compendium*.

All mission-level data in this dataset are extracted from official UN documentation as compiled in the DPPA *Compendium*. The inclusion of source and page references allows replication, verification, and cross-checking of coded information.

B. Variable Table

Variable Name	Description	Type
source_ref	Primary source document from which mission-level data were extracted	String
compendium_page	Page number (s) in the DPPA *Compendium* corresponding to the mission entry.	String

C. Coding Rules

a. source_ref

- Definition: Primary documentary source used for extracting mission-level information.
- Coding Rules:

- Record the official title of the source document.
- For the current dataset, all observations are coded as: Compendium
- If additional sources are incorporated in future dataset versions, they should be explicitly recorded.
- ***source_ref*** reflects documentary origin, not analytical interpretation.

b. compendium_page

- Definition: Page number (s) in the DPPA Special Political Missions Compendium where the mission entry appears.
- Coding Rules:
  - Record page numbers exactly as they appear in the Compendium.
  - If the mission spans multiple consecutive pages, use page range format:
    - Example: 15-16

VII. Case-Level Dataset Variables

1. Political and Institutional Dynamics

A. Section Introduction

This section captures the political and institutional context in which mandate decisions are made and implemented.

These variables focus on:

- Security Council decision-making dynamics
- Voting behavior and patterns
- Penholder roles and changes
- Broader negotiation and political environment

The purpose of this section is to enable analysis of how political factors shape mandate design, renewal, and evolution across cases.

B. Variable Table

a. Vote Type

Variable Name	Description	Type
adoption_vote_type	Type of voting procedure through which the resolution was adopted in the Security Council.	Categorical (Coded Integer)
veto_present	Indicates whether a veto was cast by a permanent member during the vote on the	Binary(0/1)

	resolution.	
abstention_present	Indicates whether one or more Security Council members abstained during the vote on the resolution.	Binary(0/1)
total_votes_count	Total number of Security Council members participating in the vote.	Integer
yes_votes_count	Number of Security Council members voting in favor of the resolution.	Integer
no_votes_count	Number of Security Council members voting against the resolution.	Integer
abstentions_count	Number of Security Council members abstaining during the vote.	Integer
veto_count	Number of vetoes cast by permanent members during the vote.	Integer

b. Penholder Variables

Variable Name	Description	Type
penholder_country	Security Council member state(s) serving as penholder(s) responsible for drafting and negotiating the resolution establishing the mission.	String
penholder_country_iso3	ISO-3 country code corresponding to the penholder country or countries.	String
penholder_count	Number of penholder countries associated with the mandate.	Integer
penholder_group	Institutional classification of the Security Council member state(s) serving as penholder(s) for the mission mandate. If multiple penholders belong to different institutional groups, the variable is coded as Mixed.	Categorical (P3/P2/E10/Mixed)
penholder_change	Indicates whether the penholder country (or group) changed compared to the previous mandate event or cycle.	Binary(0/1)

c. Council Dynamics

Variable Name	Description	Type

council_dynamics	Overall level of political cohesion or division within the Security Council during the negotiation and adoption of the mandate decision.	Categorical (Consensus/Fragmented/Contested)
council_dynamics_report_link	Reference to supporting sources used to assess Security Council dynamics (e.g. meeting records, Security Council Reports, press releases, or analytical sources).	String (URL or document reference)
negotiation_intensity	Degree of negotiation difficulty and political bargaining involved in reaching the mandate decision.	Categorical (Low/Medium/High)

C. Coding Rules

a. Vote Type

- The coding rules for vote-related variables (e.g. ***adoption_vote_type***, ***veto_present***, ***abstention_present***, and vote counts) are consistent with those defined in the mission-level dataset.
- Please refer to the corresponding coding rules above for detailed definitions and instructions.

b. Penholder Variables

- The coding rules for penholder-related variables (e.g. ***penholder_country***, ***penholder_country_iso3***, ***penholder_count***, ***penholder_group***, and ***penholder_change***) are consistent with those defined in the mission-level dataset.
- Please refer to the corresponding coding rules in the mission-level for detailed definitions and instructions.
- Unless otherwise specified, the same coding conventions apply.

c. Council Dynamics

- ***council_dynamics***
  - Definition: Overall characterization of Security Council dynamics during the mandate decision.
  - Coding Rules:
    - Use the following categories:
      - Consensus=No visible disagreement; resolution adopted smoothly (often unanimously or without vote)

- Fragmented=Some disagreement (e.g. abstentions, differing positions), but no open confrontation
- Contested=Significant political conflict (e.g. veto threats, strong disagreements, difficult negotiations)

- ***council_dynamics_report_link***
  - Definition: Reference to source supporting the assessment of council dynamics.
  - Coding Rules:
    - Provide link or citation to relevant UN report, meeting record, or analysis
    - If unavailable, code NA
- ***negotiation_intensity***
  - Definition: Degree of negotiation and political contestation surrounding the mandate decision.
  - Coding Rules:
    - Use the following categories:
      - Low=Minimal negotiation; routine or technical renewal
      - Medium=Noticeable negotiation; some disagreements or adjustments
      - High=Intensive negotiation; prolonged discussions, major disagreements, or risk of veto

2. Operational and Institutional Features

A. Section Introduction

This section captures the operational capacity and institutional characteristics of SPMs during each mandate cycle.

B. Variable Table

a. Leadership Variables

Variable Name	Description	Type
mission_head	Name of the Special Representative / Envoy / Mission Head in charge during the mandate cycle or event.	String
mission_head_sex	Sex of the mission head during the mandate cycle	Categorical (Female/Male)

mission_head_nationality	Nationality of the mission head during the mandate cycle	String
mission_head_nationality_iso3	ISO3 code of mission head nationality	String
nationality_global_south_or_global_north	Global North/ Global South classification of the nationality of the mission head	Categorical (Global North/Global South)
multiple heads	Indicates whether more than one individual served as mission head during the mandate cycle.	Binary(0/1)
leadership_change	Indicates whether a change in mission leadership occurred during the mandate cycle or event period.	Binary (0/1)
implementation_status	Operational condition of the mission during the mandate cycle or at the time of the event.	Categorical (Active/Constrained/Stalled)

b. Budget Variables

Variable Name	Description	Type
budget_proposed	Proposed annual budget for the mission as submitted by the UN Secretariat.	Numeric (Thousands of USD)
budget_approved	Approved annual budget authorized by the General Assembly.	Numeric (Thousands of USD)
budget_executed	Actual expenditure of the mission for the given year or mandate period.	Numeric (Thousands of USD)
backstopping_budget	Budget allocated for headquarters-based support (backstopping) to the mission.	Numeric (Thousands of USD)
extra_budget	Estimated extra-budgetary (voluntary or donor-provided) funding supporting the mission.	Numeric (Thousands of USD)

c. Personnel Variables

Variable Name	Description	Type

personnel_proposed	Proposed number of personnel positions for the mission.	Integer
personnel_approved	Approved number of personnel positions authorized for the mission.	Integer
personnel_total	Total number of personnel deployed in the mission, aggregated across all categories.	Integer
personnel_senior	Number of senior-level personnel, including USG, ASG, D1, and D2 levels.	Integer
personnel_professional	Number of professional-level personnel responsible for core operational tasks.	Integer
personnel_support	Number of support and locally recruited personnel.	Integer
mission_configuration	Type of operational presence of the mission in the field	Categorical (Light presence/Field presence/Remote/Liaison)

C. Coding Rules

a. Leadership Variables

- The coding rules for leadership-related variables (e.g. ***mission_head***, ***mission_head_sex***, ***mission_head_nationality***, ***mission_head_nationality_iso3***, ***nationality_global_south_or_global_north***, ***multiple heads***, ***leadership_change***) are consistent with those defined in the mission-level dataset.
- Please refer to the corresponding coding rules in the mission-level dataset for detailed definitions and instructions.

b. implementation_status

- **Definition:** Operational condition of the mission during the mandate cycle or at the time of the event.
- **Coding Rules:**
  - Use the following categories:

        - Active=Mission is able to implement its core mandated tasks broadly as intended
        - Constrained=Mission is operational but faces significant limitations in implementing its mandate
        - Stalled=Mission is largely unable to implement its mandate in practice
- **Guidelines:**
    - Prioritize actual operational capacity, not formal mandate existence
    - Base coding on:
        - UN reports
        - Security Council briefings
        - Credible secondary sources where necessary
    - Do not code as "Active" solely because the mission continues to exist
    - If evidence is limited, code conservatively and ensure consistency across cases

c. General Budget Rule

- Unit: all values must be recorded in **thousands of USD**
- Format:
    - Enter numbers only (no text, no "million" labels, no annotations in the cell).
    - For example:
        - Correct: 183244.3
        - Incorrect: 183 million, 183,244,300 USD, or approx. 183M
- Budget variables should reflect the **allocation applicable to the mandate cycle:**
- For mandate cycles shorter or longer than one year:
    - If official UN documents provide a budget specifically for that period → use that figure directly.
    - If not:
        - 6-month mandate → divide annual budget by 2
        - 3-month mandate → divide annual budget by 4

    - If the budget is presented as a two-year (biennial) plan → divide by 2 to obtain an annual equivalent.
- If budgets are revised (e.g. due to drawdown), record the update value

d. budget_proposed

- **Definition:** Proposed annual budget submitted by the UN Secretariat.
- **Coding Rules:**
    - Record official proposed budget (Thousands of USD)
    - Use datasets from the United Nations Peace and Security Data Hub and reports from the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ)
    - If unavailable, code NA.

e. budget_approved

- **Definition:** Approved annual budget authorized by the General Assembly.
- **Coding Rules:**
    - Record approved budget (Thousands of USD)
    - Use datasets from the United Nations Peace and Security Data Hub and reports from the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ)
    - If unavailable, code NA

f. budget_executed

- **Definition:** Actual expenditure of the mission for the given year.
- **Coding Rules:**
    - Record only full-year expenditure data (Thousands of USD)
    - Use datasets from the United Nations Peace and Security Data Hub and reports from the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ)
    - If data is incomplete (e.g. From January to August only), code NA

- Do not estimate or extrapolate partial data

g. backstopping_budget

- **Definition:** Budget allocated for headquarters-based support to the mission.
- **Coding Rules:**
  - Use dataset from the United Nations Peace and Security Data Hub
  - Record if available
  - If not available, code NA

h. extra_budget

- **Definition:** Estimated extra-budgetary (voluntary or donor-provided) funding
- **Coding Rules:**
  - Use dataset from the United Nations Peace and Security Data Hub
  - Record if available
  - If not available, code NA

i. General Personnel Rule

- Personnel variables should reflect **official UN staffing data**
- If breakdowns are unavailable, do not estimate
- Maintain consistency across cases rather than completeness

j. *personnel_proposed*/*personnel_approved*

- **Definition:** Number of proposed and approved personnel positions.
- **Coding Rules:**
  - Use dataset from the United Nations Peace and Security Data Hub and other UN data sources
  - If unavailable, code NA

k. personnel_total

- **Definition:** Total personnel deployed in the mission
- **Coding Rules:**
  - Use dataset from the United Nations Peace and Security Data Hub and other UN data sources
  - Record aggregated total where available

- If unavailable, code NA

l. personnel_senior

- **Definition:** Senior-level personnel (USG, ASG, D1, D2)
- **Coding Rules:**
  - senior=USG+ASG+D1+D2
  - Use official personnel breakdowns from the United Nations Peace and Security Data Hub and other UN data sources

m. personnel_professional

- **Definition:** Professional-level personnel (P-level+Field Service)
- **Coding Rules:**
  - professional=P-level+FS

n. mission_configuration

- **Definition:** Type of operational presence of the mission.
- **Coding Rules:**
  - Use the following categories:
    - Light presence
    - Field presence
    - Remote
    - Liaison
- **Guidelines:**
  - Code based on the **actual operational footprint**, not formal designation
  - Use mission descriptions, UN reports, and official documentation
  - If unclear, code based on dominant operational mode

3. Mandate Characteristics

A. Section Introduction

This section captures the structure, content, and evolution of SPM mandates at the level of individual mandate cycles/

It focuses on three key dimensions:

- Temporal structure of mandates
- Identification and linkage of mandate decisions

- Substantive content of mandates through functional components

The purpose of this section is to enable systematic analysis of how mandates evolve over time, including changes in scope, priorities, and functional composition.

B. Variable Table

a. Date and Mandate Identification Variables

Variable Name	Description	Type
mandate_start	Start date of the mandate cycle or mandate period as defined in UN documents.	Date (YYYY-MM-DD)
mandate_end	End date of the mandate cycle or mandate period as specified in the resolution.	Date (YYYY-MM-DD)
mandate_id	Unique numeric identifier assigned to each mandate. Mandates are numbered combining the mission_id and the chronological sequence.	Integer
mandate_decision_link	Reference to the UN document that formally extends the mandate duration.	String (URL)
mandate_word_count	Total number of words contained in the operative paragraph(s) that substantively define or renew the mandate of a Special Political Mission in a given Security Council resolution.	Integer
other_relevant_mandates	Additional Security Council resolutions related to the mandate (e.g., expansions, modifications, or supporting decisions) that are not captured in the extension link.	String
mandate_change_type	Type of change in mandate scope compared to the previous mandate cycle.	Categorical (Expansion/Contraction/Reprioritization/No change)

b. Mandate Components Variables

Variable Name	Description	Type
use_of_force_authorization	Provisions authorizing the use of force, including language such as “all necessary means” to implement the mandate.	Binary(0/1)
protection_of_civilians	Provisions relating to the protection of civilians under threat, including refugees and internally displaced persons.	Binary(0/1)
protection_of_personnel	Provisions relating to the protection of UN and humanitarian personnel, facilities, and the freedom of movement of personnel and equipment.	Binary(0/1)
ceasefire_monitoring	Provisions relating to the monitoring of ceasefire agreements.	Binary(0/1)
security_monitoring	Provisions relating to security monitoring, patrols, deterrence, or protection of specific areas, infrastructure, or state institutions.	Binary(0/1)
maritime_security	Provisions relating to maritime security activities, including anti-piracy operations.	Binary(0/1)
security_sector_reform	Provisions relating to reform of the security sector, including military reform.	Binary(0/1)
rule_of_law	Provisions relating to rule of law support, including judicial, legal, and constitutional reform.	Binary(0/1)
support_to_police	Provisions relating to support to national police, including capacity-building, reform, restructuring, and operational policing.	Binary(0/1)
support_to_military	Provisions relating to operational support to national military forces, including training and joint activities.	Binary(0/1)
support_to_state_institutions	Provisions relating to capacity-building and support to state institutions, excluding security sector and rule of law institutions.	Binary(0/1)

political_process	Provisions relating to political dialogue, mediation, reconciliation, peace agreements, and broader peacebuilding processes.	Binary(0/1)
electoral_assistance	Provisions relating to support for elections, referendums, or census processes.	Binary(0/1)
human_rights	Provisions relating to human rights monitoring, protection, investigation, and promotion, including WPS, CAAC, and related agendas.	Binary(0/1)
humanitarian_support	Provisions relating to humanitarian assistance or coordination, including support for refugees and IDPs.	Binary(0/1)
international_coordination	Provisions relating to coordination with international actors, including UN agencies, donors, regional organizations, and other missions.	Binary(0/1)
demobilization_arms	Provisions relating to disarmament, demobilization, reintegration (DDR), demining, and arms control.	Binary(0/1)
sanctions_support	Provisions relating to support for the implementation of sanctions regimes.	Binary(0/1)
public_information	Provisions relating to public communication, outreach, or information campaigns.	Binary(0/1)
civil_military_coordination	Provisions relating to coordination between civilian and military actors, including external or parallel forces.	Binary(0/1)
mission_impact_assessment	Provisions relating to environmental or operational impact assessment of mission activities.	Binary(0/1)

C. Coding Rules

a. mandate_start

- **Definition:** Start date of the mandate cycle or mandate period
- **Coding Rules:**

- Use the date specified in the relevant UN document (resolution or formal mandate reference)
- Record in **YYYY-MM-DD** format
- If only month/year is available, follow dataset-wide date standardization rules

b. mandate_end

- **Definition:** End date of the mandate cycle or mandate period
- **Coding Rules:**
  - Record the formal mandate expiration date specified in the resolution
  - Do not infer or estimate end dates
  - ***mandate_end*** reflects formal mandate duration, not operational status

c. mandate_id

- **Definition:** Unique identifier assigned to each mandate cycle.
- **Coding Rules:**
  - Constructed as a combination of **mission_id+chronological sequence**
  - Must be unique across the dataset
  - Must follow consistent ordering within each mission

d. mandate_decision_link

- **Definition:** Reference to the UN document formally extending the mandate.
- **Coding Rules:**
  - Record only mandate renewal/extension resolutions
  - Do not include resolutions that introduce changes but do not extend duration
  - Use official UN Digital Library links where available

e. other_relevant_mandates

- Definition: Additional resolutions relevant to the mandate that are not captured in mandate_decision_link
- Coding Rules:

        - Include resolutions that:
            - Expand mandate scope
            - Modify mandate functions
            - Introduce significant operational changes
        - Separate multiple entries using semicolons(;)
        - Do not duplicate entries already included in ***mandate_decision_link***

f. mandate_word_count

- **Definition:** Total number of words contained in the operative paragraph(s) that substantively define or renew the mandate of a Special Political Mission in a given Security Council resolution.
- This variable is designed to approximate the textual scope and density of the mandate as expressed in the resolution itself. It captures the portion of the resolution that outlines the mission's authorized tasks, responsibilities, and functional priorities.
- Where a resolution renews or maintains a mandate by explicit reference to a previous resolution (rather than restating the mandate text in full), the word count is drawn from the referenced mandate paragraph(s). This ensures that continuity of mandate content is accurately reflected, even when the text is not reproduced verbatim in the current resolution.
- This variable does not measure mandate quality or effectiveness, but provides a standardized proxy for tracking changes, continuity, or expansion in mandate articulation over time.
- **Coding Rules:**
    - **Scope of Counting**
      Count only the words contained in **operative paragraph(s) that explicitly define, renew, or substantively describe the mission mandate**.
    - **Inclusions**
      Include:
        - Paragraphs that specify mission tasks, functions, or areas of responsibility
        - Paragraphs that modify, expand, or reaffirm mandate components

        - Paragraphs that renew the mandate with substantive content (even if partially restated)
    - **Referenced Mandates**
        - If a resolution **renews the mandate by referring to a previous resolution** (e.g. "decides to extend the mandate as set out in resolution XXXX"),
          → Use the **word count from the referenced mandate paragraph(s)**
        - Apply the same word count to both the original and referencing resolutions where the mandate content is unchanged
    - **Exclusions**
      Exclude:
        - Reporting clauses (e.g."requests the Secretary-General to report…")
        - Procedural or administrative language
        - Closing formulae (e.g. "decides to remain seized of the matter")
        - Preambular paragraphs
    - **Consistency Principle**
        - When mandate language remains identical across renewal cycles, retain the same word count
        - Minor textual variations (e.g. 1–2 word differences) should be reflected but interpreted cautiously in analysis
    - **Analytical Note**
        - Stable word counts across cycles may indicate **mandate continuity**
        - Significant increases or decreases may signal **expansion, contraction, or restructuring of mandate content**, though interpretation should be cross-checked with qualitative mandate change variables

g. mandate_change_type

- **Definition:** Type of change in mandate scope compared to the previous cycle
- **Coding Rules:**
    - Use the following categories:
        - **Expansion** = new tasks or responsibilities added
        - **Contraction** = removal or reduction of tasks
        - **Reprioritization** = shift in emphasis without major addition/removal
        - **No change=** no substantive modification
    - Coding must be based on substantive changes in mandated functions, not wording, length, or emphasis. Do NOT classify as expansion based on:
        - Longer text
        - Stronger language (e.g. “urge”, “request”)
        - Increased urgency
    - Always compare with the **immediately preceding mandate cycle**. If unclear, default to **No change** to ensure consistency.

h. Mandate Components Variables

- All component variables are binary: 0/1
- **General Coding Rule:**
    - Code 1 if the function is explicitly mandated in operative paragraphs
    - Code 0 otherwise
- **Baseline Logic:**
    - Identify a **baseline mandate cycle** for each mission
    - For subsequent cycles:
        - If no substantive change → carry forward previous coding
        - Only re-code components when mandate_change_type ≠ No change
- **Source Priority:**
    - **Primary:** UN Field Missions Dashboard
    - **Secondary:** Security Council resolutions
    - Use resolutions only when:
        - Dashboard data is unavailable
        - There is a known mandate change
- **Interpretation Rule:**

- Prioritize **clarity and consistency over fine-grained interpretation**
- Do not infer components from general language

i. Component Categories:

- **Security/Hard Functions**
  - Includes:
    - ***use_of_force_authorization***
    - ***protection_of_civilians***
    - ***protection_of_personnel***
    - ***ceasefire_monitoring***
    - ***security_monitoring***
    - ***maritime_security***
- **State-building/Governance**
  - Includes:
    - ***security_sector_reform***
    - ***rule_of_law***
    - ***support_to_police***
    - ***support_to_military***
    - ***support_to_state_institutions***
- **Political/Process**
  - Includes:
    - ***political_process***
    - ***electoral_assistance***
    - ***human_rights***
    - ***humanitarian_support***
    - ***international_coordination***
- **Technical/Niche**
  - Includes:
    - ***demobilization_arms***
    - ***sanctions_support***
    - ***public_information***
    - ***civil_military_coordination***
    - ***mission_impact_assessment***

4. Host-State & Operational Environment

A. Section Introduction

This section captures the political and operational environment in which SPMs implement their mandates.

These variables focus on:

- The relationship between the mission and the host-state government
- The broader security environment
- Constraints affecting mandate implementation
- The degree of operational access available to the mission

The purpose of this section is to contextualize mandate implementation by incorporating external conditions that shape mission performance and effectiveness.

B. Variable Table

Variable Name	Description	Type
host_state_relationship	Nature of the relationship between the host-state government and the UN mission.	Categorical (Cooperative/Conditional/Hostile)
security_environment	Level of security risk in the mission's area of operation	Categorical (Permissive/Volatile/High-risk)
implementation_constraints	Main constraints affecting the implementation of the mandate.	String (multiple entries separated by semicolons)
access_level	Degree of access the mission has to relevant areas and actors for mandate implementation.	Categorical (Full access/Partial access/Restricted)

C. Coding Rules

a. host_state_relationship

- **Definition:** Nature of the relationship between the host-state government and the UN mission
- **Coding Rules:**
  - Use the following categories:
    - **Cooperative** = Host government actively supports or facilitates mission activities

        - **Conditional** = Cooperation exists but is selective, inconsistent, or politically constrained
        - **Hostile** = Host government resists, obstructs, or undermines mission activities
    - Base coding on observable behavior, not formal statements
    - Consider:
        - Restrictions imposed by the host government
        - Public positioning toward the mission
        - Evidence from UN reports or briefings
    - Changes in the relationship between the host state and the mission do not necessarily require a change in category. In many cases, shifts in cooperation (improvement or deterioration) occur within the same category, particularly within the "Conditional" category
    - Coding should reflect **qualitative thresholds between categories**, rather than minor fluctuations in behavior. A category change should only be made when there is clear evidence of a substantive shift in the overall nature of the relationship.

b. security_environment

- **Definition:** Level of security risk in the mission's area of operation.
- **Coding Rules:**
    - Use the following categories:
        - Permissive
        - Volatile
        - High-risk
    - Code based on actual security conditions, not mandate type
    - Use UN reports, conflict data, and credible sources where available
    - Prioritize consistency across cases

c. implementation_constraints

- **Definition:** Primary constraints affecting the implementation of the mandate
- **Coding Rules:**
    - Record constraints as short descriptive entries
    - Separate multiple constraints using semicolons (;)
    - Examples of constraints may include:
        - Host-state restrictions
        - Security risks
        - Resource limitations
        - Political fragmentation
        - Lack of cooperation from parties
    - Focus on major, recurring constraints, not minor issues
    - Avoid overly detailed or narrative descriptions
    - Maintain consistency in terminology across cases

d. access_level

- **Definition:** Degree of access the mission has to relevant areas and actors for mandate implementation
- **Coding Rules:**
    - Use the following categories:
        - **Full access**=Mission can operate across relevant areas and engage with key actors
        - **Partial access**=Access is uneven, restricted in some regions or with some actors
        - **Restricted**=Significant limitations on movement or engagement
    - Consider both:
        - Geographic access
        - Political access to stakeholders
    - Code based on **practical operational access**, not formal authorization

VIII. Mandate-Cycle Dataset Variables

A. Section Introduction

The mandate-cycle dataset uses a subset of variables that are also included in the case-level dataset.

These variables focus on mandate structure, voting behavior, and selected institutional features, and are designed to support cross-mission comparison at the

mandate level.

To ensure consistency across datasets, variable definitions and coding rules are shared with the case-level dataset.

B. Variable Table

a. Mandate Variables

Variable Name	Description	Type
mandate_id	Unique numeric identifier assigned to each mandate. Mandates are numbered combining the mission_id and the chronological sequence.	Integer
mandate_start	Start date of the mandate cycle or mandate period as defined in UN documents.	Date (YYYY-MM-DD)
mandate_end	End date of the mandate cycle or mandate period as specified in the resolution.	Date (YYYY-MM-DD)
mandate_decision_link	Reference to the UN document that formally extends the mandate duration.	String (URL)
other_relevant_mandates	Additional Security Council resolutions related to the mandate (e.g., expansions, modifications, or supporting decisions) that are not captured in the extension link.	String
mandate_change_type	Type of change in mandate scope compared to the previous mandate cycle.	Categorical (Expansion/Contraction/Reprioritization/No change)
mandate_word_count	Word count of the operative paragraphs defining the mandate in the resolution.	Integer

b. Vote Variables

Variable Name	Description	Type
adoption_vote_type	Type of voting procedure through which the resolution was adopted in the Security Council.	Categorical (Coded Integer)

veto_present	Indicates whether a veto was cast by a permanent member during the vote on the resolution.	Binary(0/1)
abstention_present	Indicates whether one or more Security Council members abstained during the vote on the resolution.	Binary(0/1)
total_votes_count	Total number of Security Council members participating in the vote.	Integer
yes_votes_count	Number of Security Council members voting in favor of the resolution.	Integer
no_votes_count	Number of Security Council members voting against the resolution.	Integer
abstentions_count	Number of Security Council members abstaining during the vote.	Integer
veto_count	Number of vetoes cast by permanent members during the vote.	Integer

c. Penholder Variables

Variable Name	Description	Type
penholder_country	Security Council member state(s) serving as penholder(s) responsible for drafting and negotiating the resolution establishing the mission.	String
penholder_country_iso3	ISO-3 country code corresponding to the penholder country or countries.	String
penholder_count	Number of penholder countries associated with the mandate.	Integer
penholder_group	Institutional classification of the Security Council member state(s) serving as penholder(s) for the mission mandate. If multiple penholders belong to different institutional groups, the variable is coded as Mixed.	Categorical (P3/P2/E10/Mixed)
penholder_change	Indicates whether the penholder country (or group) changed compared to the previous mandate event or cycle.	Binary(0/1)

d. Components Variables

Variable Name	Description	Type
use_of_force_authorization	Provisions authorizing the use of force, including language such as “all necessary means” to implement the mandate.	Binary(0/1)
protection_of_civilians	Provisions relating to the protection of civilians under threat, including refugees and internally displaced persons.	Binary(0/1)
protection_of_personnel	Provisions relating to the protection of UN and humanitarian personnel, facilities, and the freedom of movement of personnel and equipment.	Binary(0/1)
ceasefire_monitoring	Provisions relating to the monitoring of ceasefire agreements.	Binary(0/1)
security_monitoring	Provisions relating to security monitoring, patrols, deterrence, or protection of specific areas, infrastructure, or state institutions.	Binary(0/1)
maritime_security	Provisions relating to maritime security activities, including anti-piracy operations.	Binary(0/1)
security_sector_reform	Provisions relating to reform of the security sector, including military reform.	Binary(0/1)
rule_of_law	Provisions relating to rule of law support, including judicial, legal, and constitutional reform.	Binary(0/1)
support_to_police	Provisions relating to support to national police, including capacity-building, reform, restructuring, and operational policing.	Binary(0/1)
support_to_military	Provisions relating to operational support to national military forces, including training and joint activities.	Binary(0/1)
support_to_state_institutions	Provisions relating to capacity-building and support to state institutions, excluding security sector and rule of law institutions.	Binary(0/1)

political_process	Provisions relating to political dialogue, mediation, reconciliation, peace agreements, and broader peacebuilding processes.	Binary(0/1)
electoral_assistance	Provisions relating to support for elections, referendums, or census processes.	Binary(0/1)
human_rights	Provisions relating to human rights monitoring, protection, investigation, and promotion, including WPS, CAAC, and related agendas.	Binary(0/1)
humanitarian_support	Provisions relating to humanitarian assistance or coordination, including support for refugees and IDPs.	Binary(0/1)
international_coordination	Provisions relating to coordination with international actors, including UN agencies, donors, regional organizations, and other missions.	Binary(0/1)
demobilization_arms	Provisions relating to disarmament, demobilization, reintegration (DDR), demining, and arms control.	Binary(0/1)
sanctions_support	Provisions relating to support for the implementation of sanctions regimes.	Binary(0/1)
public_information	Provisions relating to public communication, outreach, or information campaigns.	Binary(0/1)
civil_military_coordination	Provisions relating to coordination between civilian and military actors, including external or parallel forces.	Binary(0/1)
mission_impact_assessment	Provisions relating to environmental or operational impact assessment of mission activities.	Binary(0/1)

e. Resources Variables

Variable Name	Description	Type
budget_approved	Approved annual budget authorized by the General Assembly.	Numeric (Thousands of USD)

personnel_approved	Approved number of personnel positions authorized for the mission.	Integer

C. Coding Rules

Coding Rules for these variables are identical to those defined in the case-level dataset. Please refer to the corresponding sections for detailed definitions and instructions.

IX. Data Reliability and Quality Control

To ensure the accuracy, consistency, and transparency of the dataset, all coded entries will undergo a cross-review process after the initial coding stage is completed. The purpose of this process is to identify potential coding inconsistencies, verify source alignment, and improve the overall reliability of the dataset before quantitative analysis begins.

1. Peer Cross-Review

Each observation will be reviewed by at least one team member who was not responsible for the original coding. The reviewer should verify that:

- the coding follows the definitions provided in the codebook
- the coding decision is supported by the cited source
- the variable values are internally consistent with related fields

If the reviewer identifies a potential issue, they should flag the observation and briefly describe the concern.

2. Source Traceability Rule

Every coded variable that requires interpretation should be traceable to a clearly identifiable source. When reviewing entries, team members should confirm that:

- the cited document supports the coding decision
- the source reference is complete and identifiable
- the interpretation of the source is consistent with the coding rule

If a coding decision cannot be clearly traced back to a source, it should be flagged for clarification.

3. Ambiguity Resolution Protocol

When disagreements arise between the original coder and the reviewer, the issue should first be discussed between the two team members. If the ambiguity results from unclear coding rules rather than interpretation, the team may collectively revise or clarify the codebook. Any clarification should be documented so that the same rule is applied consistently across the dataset.

4. **Codebook Amendment Rule**
   If repeated coding disagreements reveal that a variable definition is unclear or incomplete, the codebook should be updated to reflect the clarified rule. All updates should be documented so that subsequent coding follows the revised definition.

5. **Dataset Versioning**
   Any corrections or updates made during the review process should be recorded in the dataset version history. This ensures transparency and allows earlier coding decisions to be traced if necessary.

6. **Spelling and Standardization Check**
   Because several variables were manually entered, reviewers should also verify spelling and naming consistency. Team members should check that:
   - mission names match the official UN mission names
   - spelling is consistent across all entries
   - abbreviations and formatting follow a uniform standard

   Any inconsistencies should be corrected to ensure the dataset remains standardized and searchable.

X. Known Limitations

While this dataset provides a structured and systematic approach to analyzing the evolution of UN Special Political Missions (SPMs), several limitations should be acknowledged.

These limitations primarily reflect trade-offs between analytical ambition and feasibility within the project timeline, and they inform the areas identified for future extension.

1. **Temporal Coverage Constraints**
   The current version of the dataset focuses on a defined temporal scope (2010-2026), with historical coverage prioritized for the construction of ***mandate_id*** and selected case-level observations.

   As a result:
   - Earlier missions and mandate cycles may not be fully captured
   - Some historical inconsistencies in documentation may affect temporal precision

These limitations may constrain long-term longitudinal analysis but can be addressed through future dataset expansion.

2. **Reliance on Official UN Documentation**
   The dataset relies primarily on:
   - UN DPPA *Compendium*
   - Security Council resolutions
   - UN reports and official mission documentation

   While these sources ensure consistency and comparability, they also introduce limitations:
   - Formal mandate language may not fully reflect operational realities
   - Political negotiations and informal practices are only partially observable
   - Some variables (e.g. political dynamics) require interpretation based on limited publicly available evidence

3. **Simplification of Mandate Content**
   The use of binary mandate component variables (0/1) allows for standardization and cross-case comparison, but it necessarily simplifies complex mandate language.
   In particular:
   - Variations in emphasis, intensity, and prioritization are not fully captured
   - Differences between core and secondary tasks may be flattened
   - Subtle shifts in mandate interpretation may not be reflected

4. **Distinction Between Extension and Substantive Change**
   The dataset distinguishes between:
   - Temporal changes (mandate extensions)
   - Substantive changes (e.g. expansion, contraction, reprioritization)

   However, in practice:
   - The boundary between these categories may not always be clear
   - Some changes in wording or emphasis may be difficult to classify consistently

   To mitigate this, standardized coding rules are applied, but a degree of interpretive judgement remains.

5. **Partial Coverage of Resource and Capacity Variables**
   While the dataset includes selected budget and personnel variables, coverage remains limited:
   - Data availability is uneven across missions and years
   - Historical resource data may be incomplete or inconsistent

- Some variables (e.g. extra-budgetary funding, staff composition) are not fully integrated

This constrains the ability to systematically assess the relationship between mandate scope and operational capacity.

6. **Limited Representation of Implementation Outcomes**

The dataset focuses primarily on:

- Mandate design
- Institutional and political dynamics

It does not yet fully capture:

- Implementation outcomes
- Mission effectiveness
- Ground-level operational impact

As a result, the dataset is better suited for analyzing mandate evolution than for evaluating mission performance.

7. **Structural Trade-offs in Dataset Design**

The dataset adopts a cycle-based structure for comparability across missions.
However:

- Some types of UN engagement (e.g. Special Envoys) follow accumulative or non-cyclical governance models
- These cases may not be fully captured within a standardized cycle-based framework

This reflects a deliberate design choice to prioritize cross-mission comparability, while acknowledging reduced coverage of certain mission types.

8. **Limited Variation in Selected Variables**

Some variables included in the dataset exhibit limited variation due to the scope of the study.

For example, variables such as ***veto_present*** and ***veto_count*** are unlikely to vary significantly, as the dataset focuses on adopted Security Council resolutions rather than draft resolutions that fail to pass. As a result, these variables are typically coded as zero across observations.

While these variables are retained for completeness and potential future extensions, their analytical contribution in the current dataset is limited. This reflects a broader limitation of studying adopted resolutions, which may underrepresent instances of failed negotiation or veto use.

These limitations highlight areas where the current dataset remains constrained and directly inform the planned extensions outlined in the following section.

XI. Planned Extensions

This dataset is designed as a structured and extensible foundation for analyzing the evolution of UN Special Political Missions (SPMs).

In particular, the use of ***mandate_id*** as the core unit of observation allows the dataset to be consistently extended over time, as new mandate cycles and decisions can be incorporated without altering the underlying structure.

While the current version prioritizes core variables and feasibility within the project timeline, several extensions are planned to further enhance analytical depth and coverage.

1. **Expansion of Temporal Coverage**
   Future versions of the mandate-level dataset may extend beyond the current temporal scope to:
   - Include earlier historical missions (pre-2000)
   - Incorporate new mandate cycles as additional resolutions are adopted

   This will enable more comprehensive longitudinal analysis of mandate evolution.

2. **Integration with UN Operational Data**
   The dataset may be expanded through integration with existing UN data sources, including:
   - Budget (proposed, approved, and expenditure)
   - Personnel (staffing levels and composition)
   - Backstopping and extra-budgetary resources

   This integration would enable systematic analysis of the relationship between **mandate design and resource allocation**, including potential gaps between mandate scope and available capacity.

3. **Incorporation of Event-Based Mandate Tracking**
   While the current dataset primarily follows a cycle-based structure, future versions may incorporate:
   - Event-level tracking of mandate changes
   - Clear differentiation between extensions and substantive modifications (e.g. expansion, contraction, reprioritization)

This would allow for more granular analysis of how mandates evolve over time.

4. **Enhanced Coding of Political Dynamics**
   Future iterations may further develop variables related to Security Council dynamics, including:
   - Negotiation processes and intensity
   - Reporting cycles
   - Voting alignment patterns
   - Penholder influence and leadership dynamics

   This would strengthen the analysis of how political factors shape mandate design and evolution.

5. **Development of Implementation and Performance Indicators**
   The dataset may be extended to include indicators related to:
   - Implementation capacity
   - Operational constraints
   - Alignment between mandate objectives and observable outcomes

   This would support more systematic evaluation of mission effectiveness.

These extensions aim to progressively transform the dataset from a structured descriptive tool into a more comprehensive analytical framework for studying mandate design and evolution.

XII. Contributor Roles

This dataset was developed through collaborative work across the project team, with contributions spanning dataset design, data collection, coding, and review. The distribution of roles reflects the collaborative and iterative nature of dataset construction.

Team members contributed in the following areas:

- **Dataset design, architecture, and coordination:** Jiani Jiang
- **Codebook development and methodological framework:** Jiani Jiang
- **Mission-level and Mandate-cycle dataset development:** Jiani Jiang; Homaira Sharifi; Wanonno Iqtyider
- **Data analysis and visualization:** Jiani Jiang
- **Case-level dataset coding:**
  - **United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA):** Rukhsar Balkhi

    - **United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia (UNVMC):** Ahad Bakhit
    - **United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH):** Aruzhan Boranbayeva
    - **United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL):** Mohammed E Ibrahim
    - **United Nations Missions to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA):** Anoushka Joshi

- All team members contributed to the **data validation** and **internal review** of the dataset.

Annex C—Interview Protocol

1. Purpose of the Interview

Interviews are conducted to complement the report's broader analysis of how Special Political Missions (SPMs) evolve under conditions of geopolitical fragmentation and institutional constraint. While the project's dataset and document-based analysis enable the identification of patterns in mandate design, renewal practices, and mission structure, they are less able to capture the informal political dynamics and institutional processes that shape these outcomes.

Therefore, the purpose of the interviews is to provide expert insight into areas that are not fully observable through official documentation, including mandate negotiations, budget pressures, and the relationship between formal mandate language and implementation in the field. Interviews are used to interpret and contextualize empirical findings rather than to serve as standalone evidence.

2. Use of Interviews in the Report

Interview material is incorporated in three main ways. First, it provides contextualization by offering background explanations for patterns identified in the dataset, particularly with respect to mandate adaptation, renewal dynamics, and evolving Security Council practices. Second, interviews help identify underlying mechanisms that are difficult to observe directly, including bargaining dynamics among Council members, the role of penholders, and the influence of fiscal constraints on mandate formulation. Third, interviews enrich the comparative case studies by providing practitioner insights on how mandate design operates in specific political and operational contexts.

Across all sections of the report, interview insights are used in a supplementary and interpretive capacity. They are integrated to clarify patterns and support analytical arguments, rather than to establish independent empirical claims.

3. Interviewee Profile

Interviewees include current and former United Nations officials, policy practitioners, and subject-matter experts with direct experience in Special Political Missions, Security Council processes, mediation efforts, or mission management. Selection follows a purposive logic aligned with the analytical focus of the report, prioritizing individuals

whose professional experience provides insight into mandate design, negotiation dynamics, and implementation challenges.

Where relevant, interviewees are also selected based on their expertise in specific thematic areas, such as mediation processes, mission transitions, or budgetary governance, in order to ensure coverage across key dimensions of the analysis.

4. Ethical Considerations

Participation in all interviews is voluntary. Interviewees are informed that they may decline to answer any question or withdraw from the interview at any stage. Interviews are conducted on a non-attributable basis unless explicit consent for attribution is provided.

With the permission of interviewees, conversations may be recorded, or detailed notes may be taken. All responses are used solely for academic research purposes within the scope of this project. These safeguards are particularly important given the political sensitivity of the topics discussed, including Security Council negotiations, internal UN processes, and operational constraints in the field. The protocol is designed to protect confidentiality while ensuring methodological transparency in the use of interview material.

5. Interview Structure and Procedure

Interviews are conducted in a semi-structured format, combining a consistent set of core questions with the flexibility to adapt to the expertise and experience of each interviewee. Each interview begins with a brief introduction outlining the purpose of the research, the conditions of confidentiality, and the format of the discussion.

Core Questions focus on the evolution of SPM mandates, Security Council dynamics, implementation challenges, and the relationship between mandate design and operational realities. Follow-up questions are included where appropriate to explore specific insights or clarify points raised during the conversation.

Interviews are conducted both virtually and in person, and typically last between 45 and 60 minutes. Interviews are recorded when permitted, and detailed notes are taken in each case.

6. Limitations

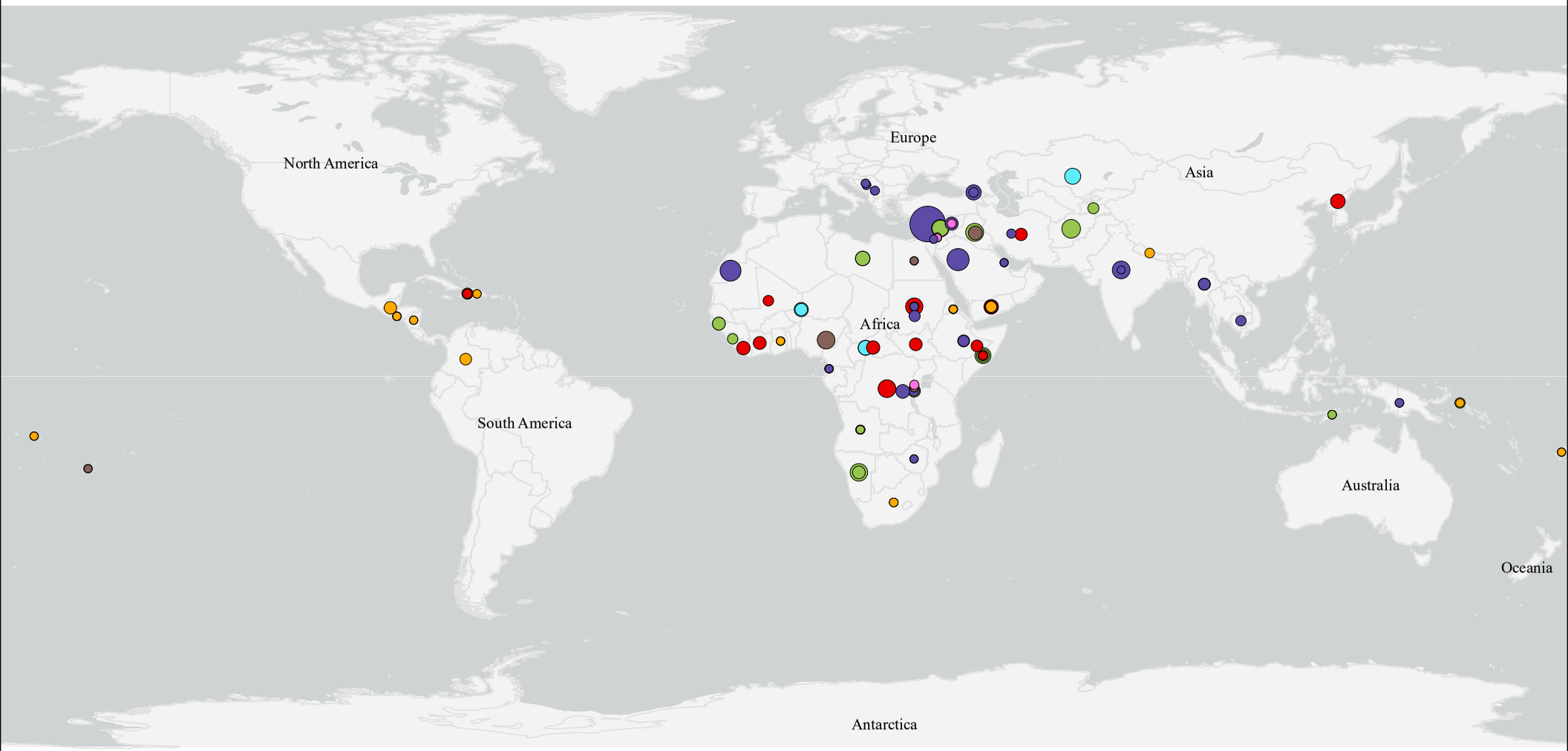
The use of interviews in this study is subject to several limitations. Access to relevant practitioners is uneven, and time constraints limit the number of interviews that can be conducted. As a result, the sample size remains relatively small.

In addition, interview responses may reflect institutional or elite perspectives, which may not fully capture field-level experiences. Given the political sensitivity of many issues discussed, some responses may also be cautious or shaped by diplomatic considerations. Finally, interview insights are inherently subjective and based on individual experience and interpretation.

For these reasons, interview findings are used in conjunction with dataset analysis and documentary evidence, rather than as independent sources of generalizable conclusions.

UN Special Political Missions: Global Deployment, Functional Type, and Mandate Duration (1948-2026)

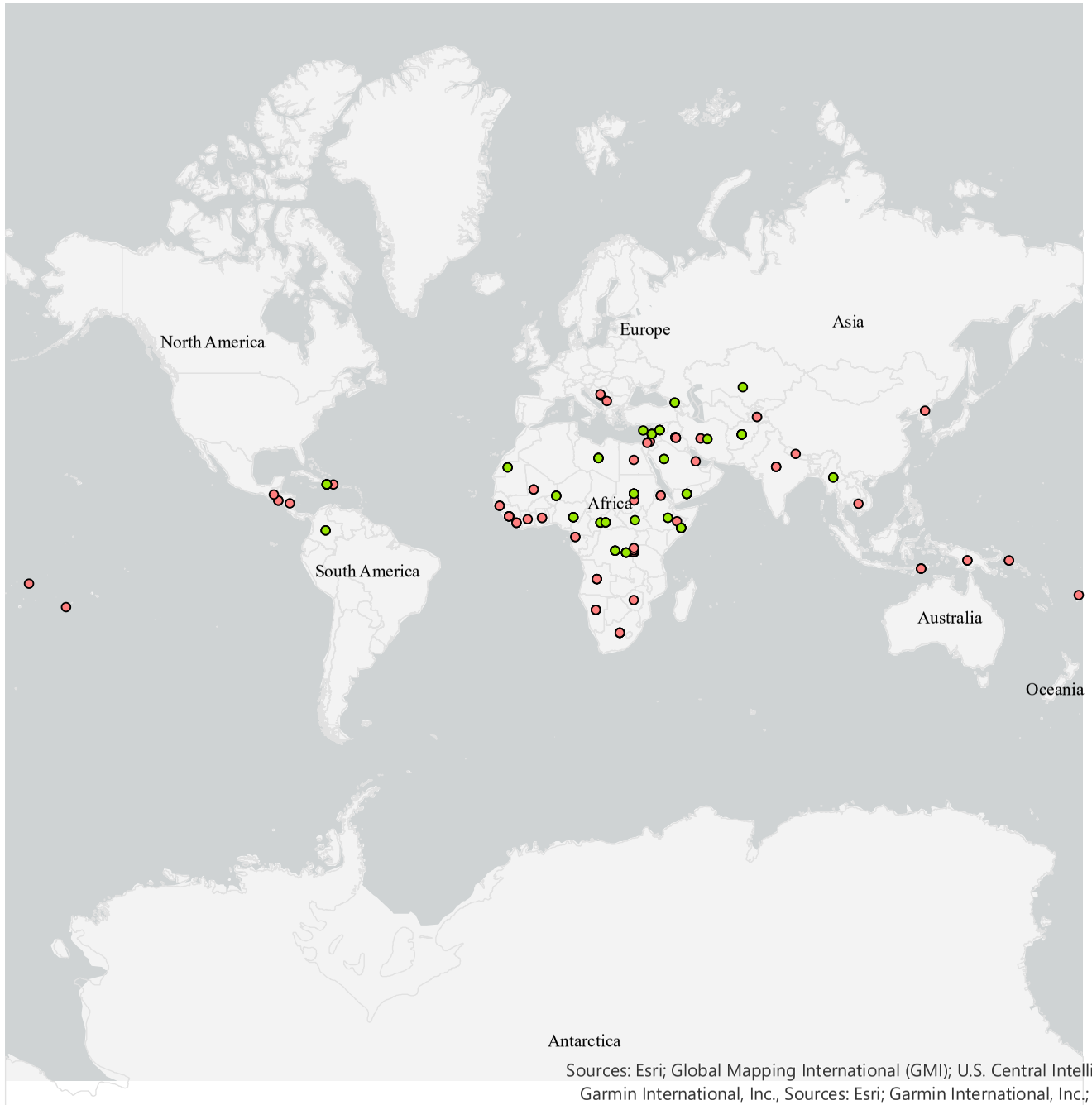
Symbol color indicates mission functional type; symbol size reflects mandate duration years (n=161)



Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community, Sources: Esri; Global Mapping International (GMI); U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (The World Factbook); Garmin International, Inc., Sources: Esri; Garmin International, Inc.; U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (The World Factbook); National Geographic Society, Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

Global Distribution of Special Political Missions (SPMs)

Ongoing and Completed Missions as of February 2026 (n=161)



N

Mandate Status of SPMs

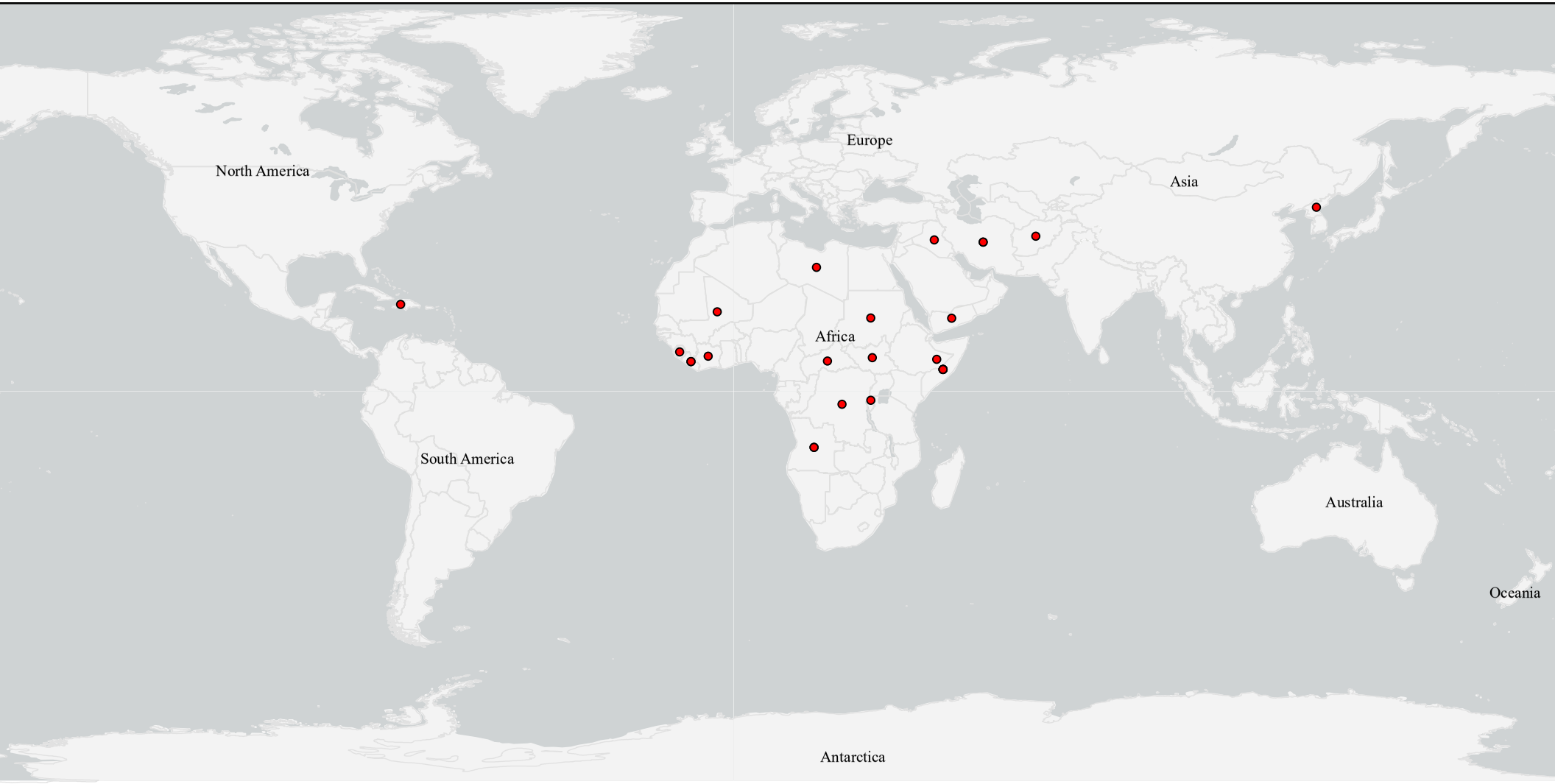
- Ended
- Ongoing

0 3,950 7,900 15,800 Kilometers

Sources: Esri; Global Mapping International (GMI); U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (The World Factbook); Garmin International, Inc., Sources: Esri; Garmin International, Inc.; U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (The World Factbook); National Geographic Society, Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community, Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

Global Distribution of Sanctions-Related Special Political Missions (SPMs)

1948-2026



Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community, Sources: Esri; Garmin International, Inc.; U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (The World Factbook); National Geographic Society, Sources: Esri; Global Mapping International (GMI); U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (The World Factbook); Garmin International, Inc., Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

Global Distribution of Special Political Missions (SPMs) by Leadership Origin Nationality of First Mission Heads

Global North vs. Global South, 1948-2026

