

When Do UN Peacekeeping Operations Implement Their Mandates?



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Abstract: *Under what conditions do UN peacekeeping operations (PKOs) implement the tasks in their mandates? Contemporary PKOs are expected to fulfill increasingly fragmented mandates in active conflict zones. We argue that these two trends—increasingly fragmented mandates, increasingly implemented amidst violence—exacerbate delegation and coordination problems that hinder PKOs from pursuing mandated tasks, potentially undermining their legitimacy in the eyes of the Security Council, troop-contributing countries, and host governments. Combining new data sets on PKO activities and mandates in Africa (1998–2016) and using instrumental variables and two-way fixed effects models, we find that mandate fragmentation is negatively correlated with mandate implementation, especially for peacebuilding tasks. Ongoing violence is also negatively correlated with implementation of peacebuilding tasks, but not with security tasks. We show that this is likely due to the offsetting effects of violence perpetrated by governments and rebels, as PKOs are better equipped to respond to the latter.*

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When the UN Security Council (UNSC) authorizes a peacekeeping operation (PKO), it creates the expectation that peacekeepers will do their best to implement the tasks specified in their mandates. Peacekeepers who fail to meet this expectation risk losing legitimacy in the eyes of UNSC members, troop-contributing countries, host governments, and civilians. During mass killings near the town of Beni in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), for example, nearby MONUSCO peacekeepers reportedly hid in their camps. The mission's passivity provoked violent demonstrations demanding that peacekeepers either execute their mandate or leave the country (Al Jazeera 2019). In contrast, at

the UNMISS base of Tongping in South Sudan, civilians witnessed peacekeepers attempting to repel rebel attacks. According to those who sought refuge at the base, peacekeepers were “trying day and night to protect us” (CIVIC 2016, 50). Civilians died at both sites. However, the disparate responses to the violence provoked equally disparate reactions from stakeholders, including the civilians whom PKOs were mandated to protect. In South Sudan, peacekeepers were praised because they tried to protect civilians from harm. In the DRC, they were condemned because they did not even try.

What explains these disparities in peacekeepers' actions? Under what conditions do PKOs actually

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implement the tasks assigned to them in their mandates? We posit and test an answer to this question that focuses on two factors in particular. First, PKOs are increasingly deployed to active conflict zones, as in Mali or South Sudan, where they are subjected to the almost daily threat of violence (Karlsrud 2015). Second, PKOs are increasingly assigned what we call “fragmented” mandates—mandates that include not just *many* tasks, but many *dissimilar* tasks. In addition to implementing security-related tasks, such as protecting civilians and enforcing ceasefires, PKOs are now mandated to pursue a variety of peacebuilding-related tasks, such as organizing elections, as well as “cross-cutting” tasks, such as promoting gender equality and improving human rights (Paris 2004; Paris and Sisk 2009). We argue that these two trends—increasingly fragmented mandates, increasingly implemented in active conflict zones—hinder PKOs’ ability to meet the expectations set for them by the UNSC. Our article departs from existing research on PKOs, most of which focuses on theorizing and evaluating peacekeepers’ “outcome performance”—that is, the extent to which they achieve specific goals, such as preventing civilian deaths or promoting democracy. Variation in peacekeepers’ “process performance”—that is, the extent to which they even attempt to achieve these goals—remains understudied and poorly understood. This is a significant blind spot in the peacekeeping literature. Like outcome performance, process performance is crucial to maintaining the legitimacy of peacekeeping. As noted above, mandates generate expectations among a wide variety of stakeholders that peacekeepers are trying in good faith to implement mandated tasks in challenging environments. Failure to meet these expectations can be devastating for the reputation of PKOs.

Relatedly, process performance increases PKOs’ legitimacy by signaling “adherence to the principles of the [UN] Charter and to the objectives of a mandate that is rooted in those Charter principles” (United Nations General Assembly 2000b, para. 50). This is true even if UN mandates are partly aspirational or designed broadly to provide operational flexibility (Bellamy and Hunt 2019). Even if the UNSC does not expect PKOs to pursue *all* components of their mandates, unless UNSC members agree on *which* mandate components are more and less expendable, a PKO’s decision to prioritize certain tasks over others may diminish its legitimacy. Except for the occasional prioritization of civilian protection, the UNSC typically does not specify which tasks are higher priorities than others, nor does it suggest a particular sequence in which mandated tasks should be fulfilled (Maus 2020, 4344). Indeed, the latest High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) report

laments that PKO mandates remain insufficiently “prioritized” and “sequenced.” PKOs that fail to abide by their mandates risk losing legitimacy either by neglecting tasks that some stakeholders view as essential or prioritizing tasks that others find objectionable.¹

Process performance is also a fundamental metric for organizational learning (Campbell 2008). In order to identify which mandate provisions worked as intended, we first need to know which provisions were implemented as expected. Assessing the determinants of process performance is a first-order concern for mission planning, and possibly an influential scope condition for outcome performance.² Peacekeeping is hard, and success stories are far more surprising than failures (Autesserre 2017). In some cases, failure is due to factors that prevent peacekeepers from even attempting to implement mandated tasks. Understanding these factors can inform future peacekeeping reforms, as the UN’s Division of Policy, Evaluation, and Training has long understood (Lipson 2010, 268).

Finally, process performance is an important criterion for evaluating international organizations (IOs) more generally. As Barnett and Finnemore (1999, 699) asked over two decades ago, “do international organizations really do what their creators intend them to do?” States and other stakeholders want to know whether IOs pursue the tasks that are written into their mandates. Researchers have begun to explore the determinants of process performance for some IOs, including the European Union (Pollack 2010) and the World Trade Organization (Blackhurst 2006). Yet analyses of process performance in the domain of peacekeeping remain scarce (for an exception, see Gutner and Thompson 2010). Process and outcome performance are distinct criteria, and both are crucial for legitimacy, organizational learning, and evaluation of IOs, including PKOs. While most scholarship has focused on outcomes, we instead focus on process as an important indicator of success in and of itself.

Our theory begins by identifying two broad challenges to the process performance of IOs: *delegation problems* resulting from divergent interests and asymmetric information between IOs and the states that authorize them, and *coordination problems* resulting from cultural contestation, turf wars, and competition over resources

¹Importantly, we do not claim that failures of process performance *always* undermine the legitimacy of PKOs. There may be cases where a mandate becomes so outdated that the tasks it prescribes are simply no longer relevant. But these cases are likely to be exceptions.

²The relationship between process and outcome performance remains contested (Lipson 2010). We leave this relationship for future research to explore.

between different units and agencies within IOs themselves (Barnett and Finnemore 1999; Pollack 1997). Our theory thus resonates with principal–agent and constructivist accounts of the process performance of IOs in general. We then describe the ways that these challenges afflict PKOs specifically. We argue that violence and mandate fragmentation exacerbate the delegation and coordination problems that are inherent to the practice of peacekeeping. We theorize that violence is likely to *diminish* process performance on peacebuilding-related tasks while *improving* process performance on security-related tasks, since peacekeepers tend to prioritize mitigating imminent threats to civilians (and themselves) over pursuing longer-term reforms. In contrast, we theorize that mandate fragmentation is likely to reduce process performance on both security- and peacebuilding-related tasks, since PKOs typically struggle to pursue many disparate goals simultaneously. We develop these predictions in further detail below.

We test our theory using two new data sets on PKOs in Africa from 1998 to 2016. The first data set captures the tasks specified in UNSC resolutions that authorize or extend PKO mandates. The second captures the extent to which PKOs implement these tasks on the ground, drawing on UN Secretary-General (UNSG) progress reports. We operationalize process performance as the share of mandated tasks that PKOs actually implement in the field. Following our theoretical framework, we distinguish between process performance on security-related tasks and peacebuilding-related tasks. The former seek to prevent violence, whereas the latter seek to transform the political, social, and economic structures of host states.

Consistent with our expectations, we find that violence in the field of operations is negatively correlated with process performance on peacebuilding-related tasks. Somewhat surprisingly, we find that violence is not correlated with process performance on security-related tasks. We disaggregate this result to show that rebel-perpetrated violence is, as expected, positively correlated with security-related process performance, but this is offset by a negative correlation between state-perpetrated violence and security-related process performance, resulting in a net null. We speculate that this disparity is a result of PKOs' reliance on the consent and cooperation of host governments, which typically makes them more reluctant to respond to violence committed by state security forces (Fjelde, Hultman, and Nilsson 2019; White 2015). We also show that the negative correlation between violence and peacebuilding-related process performance is driven by state-perpetrated violence in particular. Also consistent with our expectations, we show that mandate fragmentation is strongly negatively corre-

lated with process performance on peacebuilding-related tasks, and negatively but weakly correlated with process performance on security-related tasks as well.

Although these are correlations rather than relationships of cause and effect, we use multiple identification strategies to address bias and mitigate potential endogeneity concerns. We control for the most important sources of confounding, including the size, composition, and length of each PKO, the duration of the conflict, and the demographic, political, and economic features of the host country (e.g., population, GDP, and regime type). We also use two-way fixed effects to address potential endogeneity to unobserved correlates of process performance that are fixed in time or space. Finally, we instrument the fragmentation of any given PKO mandate with the average fragmentation of all ongoing PKO mandates to alleviate the concern that mandate design is endogenous to conditions on the ground. None of these identification strategies is flawless; our goal is to triangulate between them. Taken together, they provide support for a causal interpretation of our results.

Determinants of Process Performance

What causes IOs to deviate from their mandates? In developing our theoretical framework, we begin by summarizing two broad challenges to IOs' process performance and then describe two specific manifestations of those challenges that are endemic to PKOs in particular. The first broad challenge arises as a result of *delegation problems* between IOs and the states that endow them with particular roles and responsibilities (Hawkins and Jacoby 2006). IOs exercise a form of “delegated authority”: They have authority only because states “put them in charge of certain tasks” (Barnett and Finnemore 2005, 171–72). But IOs are also autonomous actors with their own interests (Barnett and Finnemore 1999), which may diverge from the interests of the states that created them.

Divergence of interests is especially likely when states do not themselves agree on what the IO's priorities should be—a problem of “multiple principals” or “common agency” (Moe 1984). Moreover, even when states agree on the IO's priorities, they may struggle to monitor its actions, creating information asymmetries that allow the IO to pursue its own interests without detection or punishment. Divergence between state principals' interests and IO agents' behavior is more likely when rapidly changing conditions in the IO's field of operations force it to prioritize some tasks over others. Volatile

operating environments also tend to hamper monitoring, especially when the IO is mandated to fulfill a variety of disparate functions, each of which can only be imperfectly observed (Gailmard 2009). These interrelated issues—divergent interests and asymmetric information, especially in the presence of multiple principals—exacerbate delegation problems and undermine IOs’ process performance.

The second broad challenge emerges due to *coordination problems* within IOs themselves. Cultural contestation, turf wars, and competition over the distribution of finite resources can foment dysfunction within IOs (Barnett and Finnemore 1999). Coordination problems may become especially intense during moments of crisis or uncertainty, when units within the IO may intentionally or inadvertently encroach on one another’s “territory” or may refuse to share information or resources in order to prevent encroachment of this sort. Cultural contestation is also likely when the IO has a multifaceted mandate and thus comprises a large number of specialized agencies and actors, each with its own beliefs, preferences, and standard operating procedures. These dynamics—cultural contestation, turf wars, and competition over resources—foment coordination problems and impede process performance.

Delegation and coordination problems can afflict PKOs in myriad ways. We focus on two sources of these problems in particular: *violence in the field of operations* and *mandate fragmentation*. We focus on these two factors for three reasons—one theoretical, one empirical, and one practical. First, from a theoretical perspective, violence in the field of operations and mandate fragmentation are especially likely to activate the mechanisms described above, which principal–agent and constructivist theorists have identified as critical to the process performance of IOs more generally. Second, from an empirical perspective, these two issues have become especially salient and pervasive in recent years, as PKOs have deployed to increasingly violent settings with increasingly complex mandates.

Finally, from a practical perspective, violence and mandate fragmentation are among the most important preoccupations of policy makers within the UN system itself. Indeed, in a 2018 speech that launched the Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative, UNSG António Guterres stressed that PKOs “face serious challenges” as they “now operate in far more dangerous, complex, and high-risk environments,” and he implored UNSC members to “put an end to mandates that look like Christmas trees,” as these mandates further complicate PKOs’ efforts in the field (United Nations Secretary-General 2018). Of course, violence and mandate fragmentation

are not the only causes of delegation and coordination problems within PKOs, nor are they the only obstacles to process performance. But they are among the most significant.

Violence in the Field of Operations

In recent decades, peacekeepers have increasingly been deployed to active conflict zones where there is no peace to keep (Karlsrud 2015). The hostile and unpredictable environments in which PKOs now operate may undermine their ability to implement some of the tasks assigned to them. We argue that violence in the field of operations exacerbates the delegation and coordination problems that are inherent to the practice of peacekeeping. However, we expect the effects of violence on process performance to depend on the particular tasks that PKOs are mandated to pursue. While we theorize that violence is likely to diminish process performance on peacebuilding-related tasks, if anything it is likely to *improve* process performance on security-related tasks as priorities in the field shift to confronting violence and protecting civilians.

Violence exacerbates delegation problems by creating a divergence of interests between PKO agents and their principals. As violence intensifies, PKOs often become targets of aggression by rebel groups and other armed actors (Fjelde, Hultman, and Bromley 2016; Lindberg Bromley 2018). In the most extreme cases, this may induce peacekeepers to privilege self-preservation over *all* mandated tasks, including even protection of civilians, as the incident in the DRC (described in the introduction) illustrates. In most cases, however, violence is not so extreme as to cause missions to “bunkerize” completely. Rather, violence creates incentives for PKOs to prioritize certain tasks over others. In particular, faced with the threat of violence, peacekeepers are likely to reorient away from peacebuilding-related tasks and toward the security-related tasks that they deem necessary to repel or respond to attacks.

This shift in priorities can have detrimental consequences for PKOs’ legitimacy. Some of the PKOs’ principals are likely to support the prioritization of security-related over peacebuilding-related tasks, but others are likely to oppose it, especially if they view peacebuilding as central to their exit strategies. UN member states are generally resistant to lengthy delays in mandate implementation, and they may disapprove of PKOs’ ad hoc prioritization of certain tasks over others (Bertram 1995, 402–4). Violence in the field of operations creates a tension between tasks that are necessary to provide protection in

the short term and those that are necessary to ensure stability in the medium to long run. In South Sudan, for example, the UNSC mandated peacekeepers to support the expansion of state authority (a peacebuilding-related task) and, simultaneously, to protect civilians (a security-related task) from abuses perpetrated by the very same state whose authority was being expanded (Williams 2011). The PKO decided to abandon statebuilding altogether and focus instead on civilian protection. Deviations of this sort risk undermining the PKO's legitimacy in the eyes of stakeholders who view violence as a function of state weakness—a widely held belief among UN member states (Autesserre 2010), not to mention host governments themselves.

Violence also compounds delegation problems by creating information asymmetries between PKO agents in the field and their principals in New York. During periods of conflict, the “fog of war” makes it easier for PKOs to hide agency slippage. Violence may also prevent third parties (e.g., nongovernmental organizations and journalists) from documenting PKOs' activities, thus reducing the amount of information available to PKOs' principals and forcing them to rely on information provided by PKOs themselves (Honig 2019). This makes it more difficult to monitor peacekeepers' actions. Violence thus creates delegation problems by exacerbating interest divergence and information asymmetries between PKOs and their principals. But because violence induces PKOs to prioritize security over peacebuilding, it is likely to weaken process performance on peacebuilding-related tasks while *strengthening* process performance on security-related tasks.

Violence also undermines process performance on peacebuilding-related tasks by fomenting coordination problems within PKOs. To implement peacebuilding-related tasks during periods of conflict, civilian staff must rely on protection from soldiers and (to a lesser extent) police officers. But uniformed and civilian contingents have different “organizational cultures, histories, and competencies” (Lipson 2010, 260). Beyond the sheer logistical challenges of coordinating civilian and uniformed personnel, close contact between contingents increases the risk of culture clashes, turf battles, and competition over resources—a perennial concern in the literature on civil–military relations (Baumann 2008).

Violence can also make coordination especially fraught because civilian staff may believe that uniformed personnel are encroaching on humanitarian “space” or, conversely, because uniformed personnel may believe that civilian staff are exposing soldiers and police officers to unnecessary risks. In the DRC, for example, as MONUC responded to violence by forcibly disarm-

ing rebel groups, humanitarian agencies both within and outside the mission distanced themselves from MONUC troops in order to preserve their own perceived impartiality, thereby hampering the implementation of humanitarian activities (De Coning 2005). More generally, as violence induces missions to prioritize security over peacebuilding, the balance of power within PKOs is likely to shift from civilian to uniformed personnel. This shift is likely to diminish process performance on peacebuilding-related tasks while improving process performance on security-related tasks.

We therefore hypothesize the following:

- H1: Violence increases process performance on security-related tasks.
- H2: Violence decreases process performance on peacebuilding-related tasks.

Mandate Fragmentation

The end of the Cold War precipitated a shift from “traditional” peacekeeping, which involved monitoring belligerents and maintaining buffer zones between them, to multidimensional “peacebuilding.” This shift resulted in the fragmentation of PKO mandates. Beyond security-related tasks, such as protecting civilians and overseeing disarmament and demobilization, mandates also began to include peacebuilding-related tasks, such as administering elections and reforming justice sector institutions, as well as “cross-cutting” tasks, such as promoting the rights of women and children (Paris and Sisk 2009). Scholars have criticized the UN for ignoring questions of feasibility when designing these “Christmas tree” mandates (Lipson 2010), and they have also suggested that fragmentation makes mandates more difficult to implement (Howard 2019; Paris 2009). To date, however, the consequences of mandate fragmentation for PKOs' process performance have not been systematically theorized or tested.

We argue that fragmented mandates exacerbate the delegation and coordination problems that are endemic to PKOs. But unlike violence in the field of operations, mandate fragmentation is likely to undermine process performance on both security- and peacebuilding-related tasks. Fragmented mandates typically include a wide variety of disparate tasks that are ambitious, political, and sometimes deeply conflicting (Paris 2004). As discussed in the introduction, these mandated tasks are not sequenced in any clear or coherent way in UNSC resolutions, forcing PKOs either to pursue contradictory goals simultaneously or to delay or abandon some tasks

while expediting others (Jarstad and Sisk 2008; Paris 2004). This foments delegation problems by increasing the risk that PKOs' interests will diverge from the interests of the UNSC, the UNSG, and troop-contributing countries.

For example, the UNSC assigned the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) both peacebuilding- and security-related tasks—in particular, administering elections and disarming the parties to the conflict. But these two tasks worked at cross-purposes since elections raised the prospect of unfavorable changes in the balance of power, which made some factions reluctant to disarm and resistant to participating in elections. The UNSC mandated UNTAC to engage in both disarmament and democratization, but UNTAC opted to prioritize the latter over the former (Stedman 1997, 35). About six months before elections were held, the Special Representative to the Secretary-General announced that the mission would suspend disarmament altogether (United Nations 2019). While UNTAC's leadership viewed this prioritization as necessary, it nonetheless jeopardized the mission's legitimacy in the eyes of some of its most powerful stakeholders—in particular China, which was “unenthusiastic” about the prospect of a democratic Cambodia, and thus preferred prioritizing other components of UNTAC's mandate (Howard 2008, 139–40).

Fragmented mandates also compound the common agency problem inherent to peacekeeping. PKOs are agents of multiple principals: most obviously the UNSC, which authorizes mandates, but also the UNSG, who reports on mandate implementation, and troop-contributing countries, which provide financial and human resources to fulfill mandates. While these principals are jointly responsible for designing mandates, they may have incongruent interests and thus make conflicting demands on PKOs. The more fragmented the PKO's mandate, the greater the risk that the UNSC, the UNSG, and troop-contributing countries will disagree on which components of the mandate the PKO should prioritize at any given time. Mandate fragmentation thus heightens the risk of interest divergence between the PKO's various principals, inviting agency slippage (Moe 1984, 768–69).

Fragmented mandates also create delegation problems by exacerbating the information asymmetries that inevitably arise between PKOs in the field and the UNSC, the UNSG, and representatives of troop-contributing countries in New York. For these stakeholders, monitoring the implementation of even a few similar activities is difficult in the unpredictable dynamics that accompany transitions from civil war (Guéhenno 2015). Monitoring a much more diverse set of activities is even more

challenging, making it easier for PKOs to hide agency slippage (Gailmard 2009). Mandate fragmentation thus compounds the sources of delegation problems described above—divergent interests and asymmetric information in the presence of multiple principals—and undermines process performance.

Fragmented mandates also diminish process performance by hindering coordination within PKOs. While mandate fragmentation does not necessarily imply a greater *number* of tasks, it does imply a greater *dispersion* of tasks across the security and peacebuilding domains. Consider, for example, the highly fragmented mandate of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in 2015, which included 10 tasks that were evenly divided between security and peacebuilding. Contrast this with the less fragmented mandate of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). UNMIL's 2015 mandate included more tasks—17—but 13 of them were related to peacebuilding. Since tasks within the same domain are often interdependent, they tend to be mutually reinforcing and thus easier to execute simultaneously (Rietjens and Ruffa 2019).

Fragmented mandates are more difficult to implement because they require coordination across disparate actors and agencies within the PKO. This, in turn, heightens the risk of cultural contestation, turf wars, and competition over resources. All multidimensional PKOs comprise both uniformed and civilian contingents. These contingents represent multiple sections and units, such as the Disarmament and Demobilization Unit, the Election Unit, and the Civil Affairs Section, among others. The more fragmented the PKO's mandate, the greater the proliferation of units involved in mandate implementation. These units tend to have disparate goals that reflect equally disparate values—stability, democracy, reconciliation, and so on—that may clash with one another in practice. For example, Civil Affairs sections generally seek to build close working relationships with local authorities in order to resolve communal conflicts, at the same time that Human Rights units monitor, investigate, and respond to human rights complaints lodged against those very same local authorities (Veit 2010). In these situations, human rights promotion (a cross-cutting task) may undermine communal conflict resolution (a peacebuilding task) and vice versa, provoking culture clashes and turf wars between the entities tasked with pursuing these divergent goals.

Cultural contestation tends to be starkest between uniformed and civilian personnel, and fragmented mandates exacerbate the resulting coordination problems. For example, UNMISS military personnel in South Sudan reportedly perceive their civilian counterparts as

having “unrealistic expectations of what the military can do,” and some find it “difficult to work under civilian leadership” (Fenton and Loughna 2013, 15). The effects of cultural contestation are especially detrimental in cases like South Sudan because implementing a mandate as fragmented as UNMISS’s—including civilian protection (a security-related task), humanitarian relief (a peacebuilding-related task), and assistance to victims of sexual violence (a cross-cutting task)—requires close civil–military coordination. Fragmented mandates may also aggravate turf wars by instigating bureaucratic quarrels and fomenting ambiguity about who is responsible for which task. Finally, mandate fragmentation may cause the units and sections that must coexist within multidimensional PKOs to compete over budgets and staff, and to prioritize their own performance over the performance of the mission as a whole (Barnett and Finnemore 1999, 717–18). In all of these ways, we theorize that fragmented mandates exacerbate the delegation and coordination problems that are intrinsic to PKOs, and to IOs generally.

We therefore hypothesize the following:

- H3:* Mandate fragmentation decreases process performance on security-related tasks.
- H4:* Mandate fragmentation decreases process performance on peacebuilding-related tasks.

Research Design

We test these hypotheses for 12 multidimensional Chapter VII PKOs in Africa deployed since the publication of the Brahimi Report in 2000,³ which triggered the addition of many more tasks to the peacekeeping portfolio. Our unit of analysis is the country-month.

Data

We combine two new data sets for our analyses: the Peacekeeping Mandates (PEMA) data set (Di Salvatore et al. 2020) and the Peacekeeping Activities (PACT) data set. PEMA includes information on 39 different tasks that PKOs were mandated to pursue from 1998 to 2016. For each mandated task, we record three categories of

engagement: (1) monitoring, (2) assisting or implementing, and (3) providing security. The data set draws on “founding” UNSC resolutions that establish a PKO, resolutions that extend a PKO’s mandate, resolutions that add or subtract mandated tasks, and resolutions that overhaul the mandate. We assume that the UNSC still authorizes previously mandated tasks if not otherwise mentioned in a new resolution. We double-code each resolution and reconcile any discrepancies between coders through detailed secondary review of our source materials.

PACT provides data on 37 different PKO activities. For each activity, we record PKOs’ level of engagement on an 8-point scale: (1) monitoring, (2) outreach (e.g., to civilians or civil society organizations), (3) meeting, (4) advocating, (5) assisting (e.g., through training), (6) providing material support, (7) implementing (without host state involvement), and (8) sanctioning. PACT draws on 465 UNSG progress reports, covering 24 PKOs in 14 countries in sub-Saharan Africa from 1989 to 2016. Progress reports are usually published three to seven times per year. If an activity is mentioned in a report, we assume that it is implemented each month throughout the reporting period. To maximize data quality, over one-third of reports (selected at random) are double- or triple-coded. Inter-coder reliability checks indicate over 70% inter-coder reliability for all variables in our analysis and over 80% inter-coder reliability for 85% of the variables. We provide further details on the PEMA and PACT data sets in the supporting information (SI; Section I, p. 21).

These data sets complement and extend recent efforts to quantify the dynamics of peacekeeping on the ground. Dorussen and Gizelis (2013), for example, have compiled event data on PKO activities in Africa, but their data set stops in 2005 and thus omits some of the most ambitious and innovative PKO activities of the last two decades. Other scholars have collected data sets on mandates, but these typically exclude many potentially relevant mandated tasks (e.g., Diehl and Druckman 2018). Our data are more detailed and comprehensive. But they are not without limitations. Since mandates generally do not specify sequencing or prioritization, PEMA will not capture any tacit understanding between PKOs and the UNSC about which tasks should be implemented first. But as discussed above, unless this understanding is shared by all stakeholders—not only the UNSC but also troop-contributing countries, host governments, and civilians—failures of process performance may jeopardize the PKO’s legitimacy even if they are concentrated in tasks that the UNSC implicitly designates as low priority. The only possible and more

³They are MINURCA, MINURCAT, MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUC, MONUSCO, ONUB, UNAMSIL, UNMIL, UNMIS, UNMISS, and UNOCI. For MINURCAT, we record mandated tasks and activities in Chad. We exclude UNAMID in the Sudanese region Darfur because of its hybrid nature as a UN–African Union mission and because our unit of analysis is the country-month.

recent exception with regard to explicit prioritization in UNSC mandates is civilian protection. In the SI (Section B, p. 2), we show that our results do not change when we drop protection of civilians from our measure of process performance on security-related tasks.

PACT may suffer from missing data problems if UNSG progress reports exclude activities that PKOs consider minor or routine (Sannerholm et al. 2012). In the SI (Section I, p. 21), we discuss why underreporting of this sort is unlikely, and also unlikely to bias our results. First, following our theoretical framework, progress reports are unlikely to underreport implementation of mandated tasks, as this would risk undermining the PKO's reputation among stakeholders. Second, our approach to constructing PACT should guard against underreporting since we code an activity as having been implemented if the corresponding progress report mentions the PKO implementing the activity anywhere in the host country, at any time during the reporting period. Third and perhaps most important, in general, underreporting will only bias our results away from the null if it is systematically positively correlated with either violence in the field of operations or mandate fragmentation. But if anything, our theory predicts the opposite. We argue that violence and mandate fragmentation make it easier for PKOs to hide agency slippage. One way PKOs could hide agency slippage is by overreporting implementation of mandated tasks that they did not actually carry out (Clayton et al. 2017). In this case, measurement error would cause us to *underestimate* the negative effects of violence and mandate fragmentation on process performance.⁴

Dependent Variables

We measure process performance by comparing mandated tasks as specified in UNSC resolutions (using PEMA) to actual activities on the ground as described in UNSG progress reports (using PACT). A total of 35 tasks and activities are recorded in both PACT and PEMA. We distinguish between process performance on security- and peacebuilding-related tasks. Security-related tasks include disarmament and demobilization;

⁴Bias of this sort would make it harder to find evidence for Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4. Evidence for Hypothesis 1 could still be an artifact of overreporting of security-related tasks during periods of violence. Our empirical results, however, suggest this is not the case. To explain the positive effect of rebel violence and the negative effect of government violence on security-related process performance, PKOs would have to systematically overreport security-related tasks when rebels are involved in violence, but systematically underreport them when governments are involved. This strikes us as unlikely.

reintegration; control of small arms and light weapons; demilitarization; civilian protection; and enforcement of arms embargoes, cease-fires, and peace agreements. Peacebuilding-related tasks include police, military, justice sector, prison, and legal reform; transitional justice; border control; demining; natural resource management; extension of state authority; election security and administration; voter education; assistance to political parties, civil society organizations, and the media; reconciliation; economic development; humanitarian relief; public health; and assistance to refugees.

This classification into security- and peacebuilding-related tasks reflects peacekeepers' understanding of their own mandates, and the UN's own predeployment training programs use these same categories to explain the nature of different peacekeeping activities (United Nations Integrated Training Service 2017). There is also a third category of tasks related to "cross-cutting" issues that PKOs are supposed to integrate into all of their security- and peacebuilding-related activities. The UN uses this category to refer to four tasks: human rights promotion, protection of children, prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, and gender mainstreaming. We include cross-cutting tasks in our measure of mandate fragmentation since they contribute to the diversity of agencies involved and the variety of goals pursued in any given PKO. For completeness, we test the effects of violence and mandate fragmentation on cross-cutting process performance in the SI (Section A, p. 1).

Our measure of process performance is constructed in three steps. First, we use PEMA to determine which of the 35 tasks a given PKO was mandated to implement or assist with in a given month. Second, we use PACT to determine whether the PKO actually implemented or assisted with each mandated task in that month.⁵ Third, we calculate the proportion of mandated tasks that the PKO implemented or assisted with in a given month. Figures E.2 and E.3 in the SI (Section E, p. 12) illustrate temporal variation in security- and peacebuilding-related process performance for all missions in our sample. Importantly, we find no evidence that PKOs implement more security-related tasks early in their deployments, or more peacebuilding-related tasks later on. This again suggests that peacekeepers do not sequence or prioritize security- and peacebuilding-related tasks in a coherent or consistent way.

⁵We omit other types of engagement recorded in PACT—monitoring, meeting, conducting outreach, advocating, and sanctioning—since these are less likely to be included in mandates.

Independent Variables

Our theoretical framework focuses on two factors that we argue are especially likely to affect PKOs' process performance by exacerbating delegation and coordination problems. The first is the intensity of ongoing conflict, which we measure as the number of violent events—including battles, violence against civilians, and remote violence—in the Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset (ACLED; Raleigh et al. 2010). We exclude acts perpetrated by protesters and rioters because these tend to be less severe. Our second independent variable is the fragmentation of PKO mandates.⁶ We operationalize mandate fragmentation by adapting the “fractionalization” index often used to estimate ethnic diversity (Herfindahl 1950). Our measure captures the degree of diversity in mandated tasks across the domains of security-related, peacebuilding-related, and cross-cutting tasks.⁷ In Figures G.4 and G.5 in the SI (Section G, p. 18), we show trends in violence and mandate fragmentation for all missions in our sample. In Table H.20 in the SI (Section H, p. 20), we demonstrate the robustness of our results using an alternative measure of mandate fragmentation based on the task categories proposed by Diehl and Druckman (2018).⁸

Identification and Control Variables

Violence and mandate fragmentation are not random, raising the possibility of selection bias. For example, if the UNSC assigns more fragmented mandates to PKOs in countries where civil war results in state collapse, and if process performance is harder to achieve in collapsed states, then we will be biased toward finding a negative correlation between mandate fragmentation and process performance. Alternatively, if the UNSC assigns more fragmented mandates to PKOs where the state remains intact, and if state stability makes process performance easier to achieve, then we will be biased toward finding a *positive* correlation between mandate fragmentation and process performance.

⁶Fragmented mandates are likely to be even harder to implement in ongoing conflicts. In our exploratory analyses in the SI (Section C, p. 3), we find suggestive evidence for such an interaction effect.

⁷Mandate fragmentation is thus calculated as $\pi_j = 1 - \sum_{i=1}^N s_{ij}^2$, where s_{ij} is the proportion of mandated tasks in each of our three domains (i.e., security-related, peacebuilding-related, and cross-cutting).

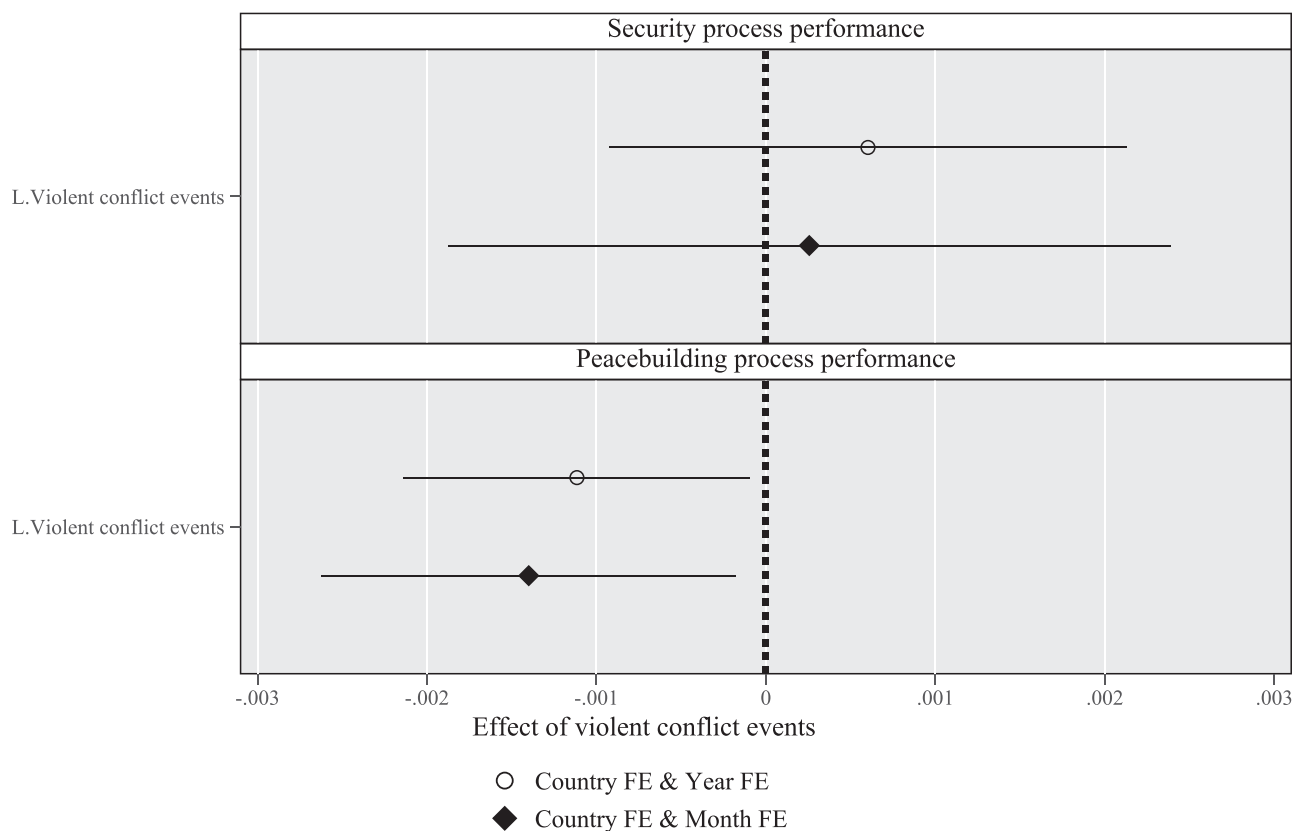
⁸Diehl and Druckman (2018) and Rietjens and Ruffa (2019) evaluate mandates based on their task compatibility and coherence, respectively. We prefer our measure of mandate fragmentation for its replicability and fit with our argument.

There are, however, reasons to believe the risk of confounding may be low, especially when we focus on mandate fragmentation. First, as discussed above, PKO mandates are the result of negotiations within the UNSC, which may be driven as much by external factors (e.g., UNSC members' interests) as by factors internal to the host country itself (Higate and Henry 2009). Second, and related, the UNSC is sometimes criticized for drafting mandates that reflect broad trends in the UN's priorities—for example, the recent emphasis on corrections and justice sector reform (Blair 2020, 2021)—rather than specific conditions on the ground (Carlson 2006). Third, and also related, the UNSC has been accused of adopting a “copy-and-paste,” “off-the-shelf” approach to drafting mandates (Bellamy and Hunt 2019). Indeed, many PKO mandates prescribe virtually identical tasks for disparate operating environments (Howard 2019, 9). Finally, and most important, mandates tend to change gradually over time; peace processes, in contrast, are highly dynamic, as are ongoing civil wars. In South Sudan, it took the UNSC six months to refocus the mission's mandate on security-related tasks after violence erupted in December 2013. This suggests that mandate fragmentation is likely to be only weakly correlated with conditions on the ground.

Nonetheless, the threat of confounding remains, and all model specifications include a set of controls intended to mitigate bias. We include PKO-specific factors such as the total number of peacekeepers (i.e., troops and police) deployed to a country (International Peace Institute 2019), as we may expect larger operations to perform better, all else equal (Hultman, Kathman, and Shannon 2014).⁹ We add the number of months since deployment because we expect PKOs to learn over time (Howard 2008). We also use the PEMA data set to calculate the total number of security- and peacebuilding-related tasks in the mandate, and to code whether the mission had previous experience with particular types of tasks.

We also control for characteristics of PKOs' field of operations. We include the duration of conflict using the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict data set (Gleditsch et al. 2002; Pettersson, Höglbladh, and Oberg 2019), since more protracted conflicts may create a hostile environment for PKOs. We also control for population and GDP per capita using data from the World Bank (2019) and regime type as measured by Polity IV (Marshall, Jaggers,

⁹We note that budgets correlate with deployment size, particularly *military* deployment size, the most expensive component of missions' budgets. By controlling for the number of troops, we mitigate bias due to differences in budgets. Our year fixed effects further mitigate bias due to any yearly shocks in financial resources that the UN devotes to peace operations.

FIGURE 1 Marginal Effect of Violent Conflict on Process Performances

Note: Conflict events are associated with lower process performances in peacebuilding tasks, but they do not affect the implementation of security-related tasks.

and Gurr 2009) because more democratic regimes are more likely to accept third-party intervention (Russett 2011), and thus to cooperate with the UN. We use country fixed effects to eliminate potential time-invariant confounders, such as colonial history. We also include time fixed effects (yearly and then monthly) to control for unobserved time-varying factors that are common to all countries in our sample, such as leadership changes at UN headquarters.

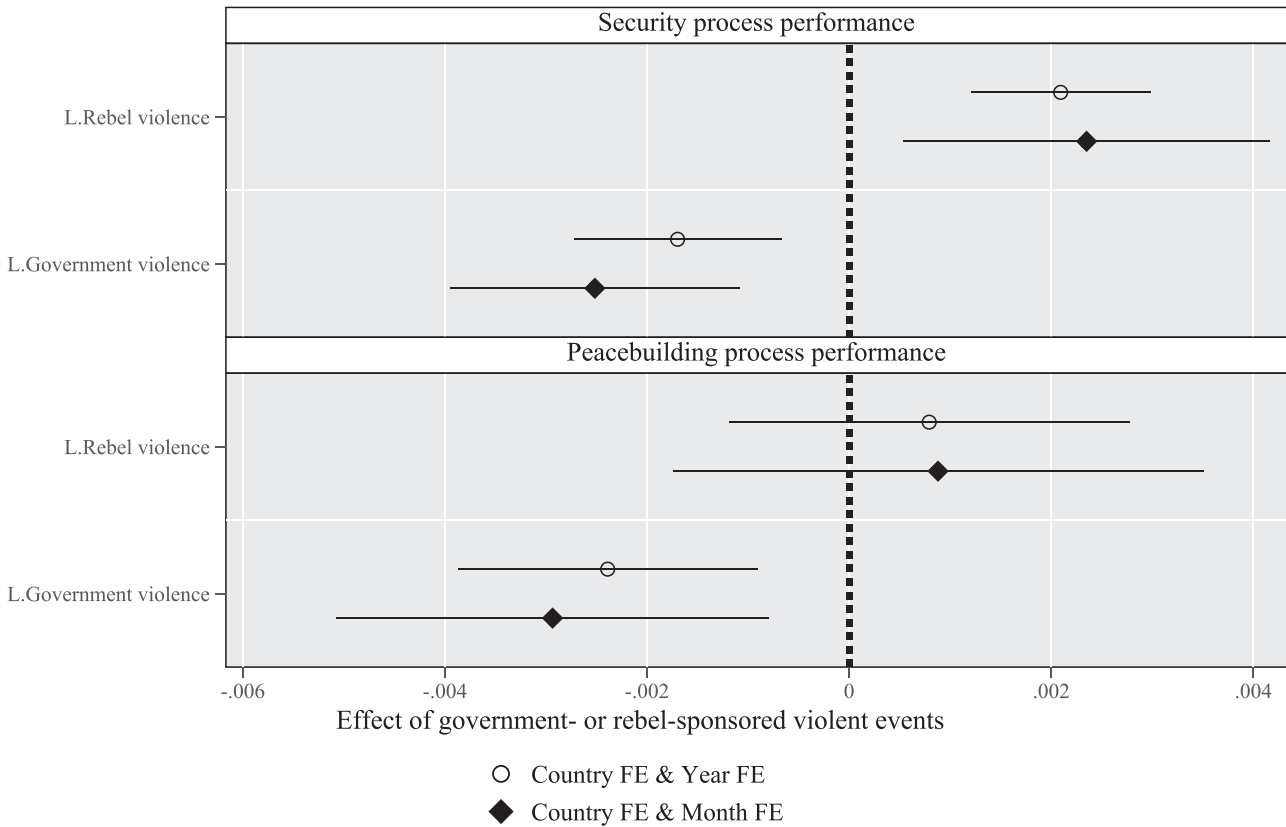
Finally, we adopt an instrumental variables strategy to further mitigate bias when estimating the relationship between process performance and mandate fragmentation. We use the average fragmentation of PKO mandates in Africa as an instrument for mandate fragmentation in a given PKO, excluding that PKO from our calculation of the average.¹⁰ Intuitively, despite the trend toward increasingly fragmented mandates overall, we expect the fragmentation of the average mandate to be negatively

correlated with the fragmentation of any given mandate in any given year. Our intuition is that the UNSC and other stakeholders may be reluctant to engage in too many complicated PKOs at the same time (for a similar finding, see Cordell, Wright, and Diehl 2020). Indeed, the debate about the dangers of “Christmas tree” mandates is motivated in part by concerns that the UN is engaging in more fragmented and thus more complicated missions than it can handle (Security Council Report 2019).

The UN also seeks peacekeeping success stories, and these are likely to become fewer and further between as mandates become more fragmented. Fragmented mandates also typically require personnel from multiple UN agencies—not just troops, but also civil affairs officers, legal experts, human rights liaisons, and so on. The UN has long struggled to mobilize even relatively small numbers of personnel to fill these positions (United Nations General Assembly 2000a). With multiple fragmented mandates already in the field, the UN may opt to simplify new or revised mandates in order to avoid stretching its human resources too thin. Fragmented mandates are

¹⁰In other words, if there are n PKOs in year t , then for any given PKO i we take the average fragmentation of the other $n - 1$ PKOs in that same year.

FIGURE 2 Marginal Effect of Violent Conflict on Process Performances, Disaggregated by Perpetrator



Note: Conflict events involving rebel groups are associated with higher process performances in security-related tasks, but violence does not affect the implementation of peacebuilding tasks; conflict events involving the government are associated with worse security-related and peacebuilding-related process performances.

also expensive to implement, and the UN may try to limit the fragmentation of new or revised mandates in order to contain costs.

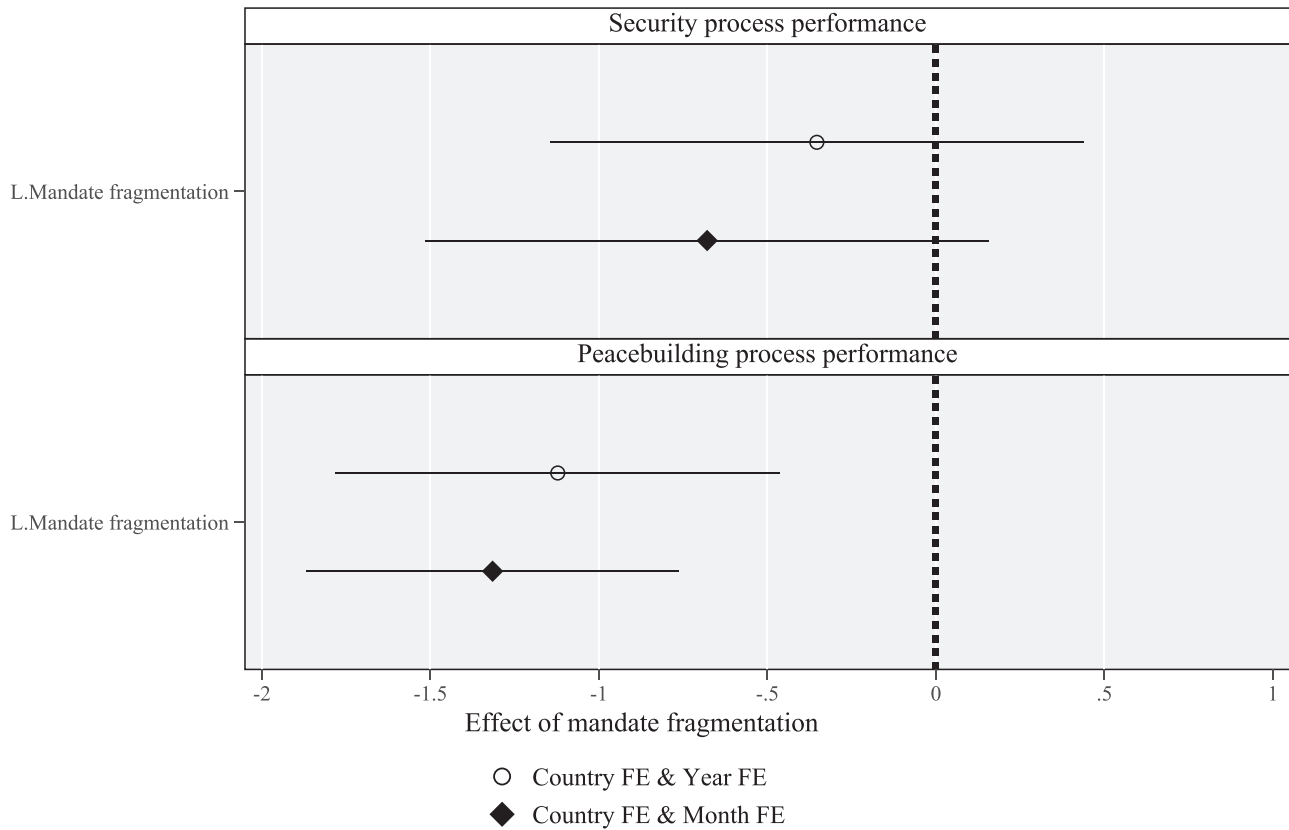
The validity of this identification strategy hinges on two assumptions: independence and excludability. Independence will be violated if our instrument (average mandate fragmentation) is correlated with omitted variables that are also correlated with our dependent variable (process performance); the exclusion restriction will be violated if our instrument affects our dependent variable through some mechanism other than our endogenous regressor (individual mandate fragmentation). We view the first of these assumptions as mostly uncontroversial. As discussed above, most PKO mandates are only loosely tailored to conditions in their host countries. It is highly unlikely that the mandates of *all other PKOs in Africa* are tailored to the host country conditions of any given PKO. This should mitigate independence concerns.

The most obvious exclusion restriction violation is the possibility that as mandates become more frag-

mented and more expensive to implement, the resources available to any individual PKO shrink. In this case, average mandate fragmentation would influence an individual PKO's process performance by reducing its budget rather than by changing the fragmentation of its mandate. However, the structure of PKO financing mitigates this concern. While average mandate fragmentation may increase the overall financial burden on UN member states, it is unlikely that this will affect the funding available for particular PKOs. Budgets are tailored to specific PKOs and their mandated tasks, and UN budgetary regulations do not allow cross-borrowing among missions (United Nations General Assembly 2004, §12). In other words, PKOs do not have to divide a fixed pool of resources among themselves.

As a result, the aggregate budget of all existing PKOs is unlikely to affect the budget available for newly mandated PKOs or PKOs with revised mandates. If new PKOs with fragmented mandates are deployed, the overall financial burden on the UN will simply increase (Mir

FIGURE 3 Marginal Effect of Mandate Fragmentation on Process Performances



Note: Fragmented mandates are associated with lower process performances in peacebuilding tasks but are not significantly associated with the implementation of security-related tasks.

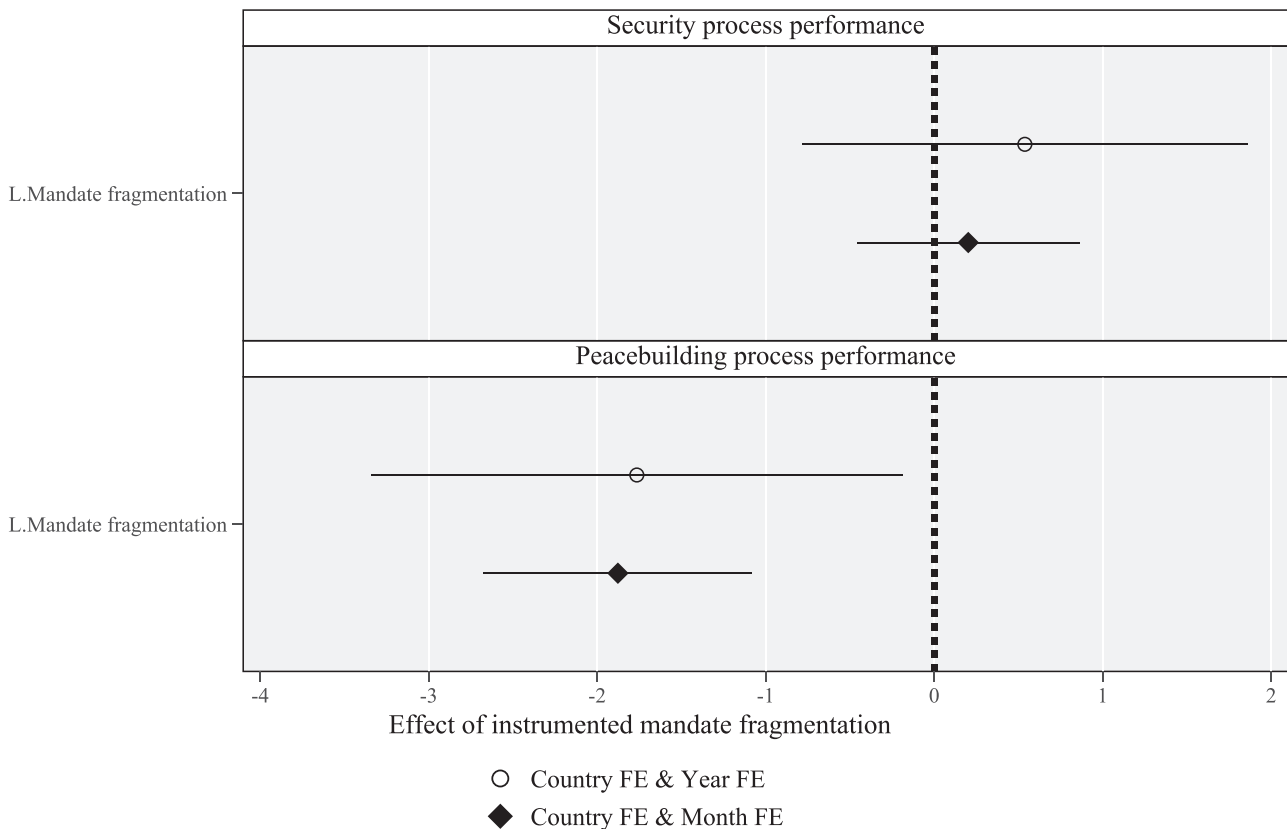
2019; United Nations General Assembly 2004, 12). If average mandate fragmentation is already high, human and financial resource constraints, feasibility concerns, and other factors will likely discourage the UNSC from adding more disparate tasks to newly issued or revised mandates. To the extent that average mandate fragmentation affects a specific PKO’s process performance, it is likely to do so through the fragmentation of that PKO’s own mandate. This lends additional credence to the excludability assumption.

Results

Our dependent variables are the proportions of mandated security- and peacebuilding-related tasks that PKOs actually implement in the field, ranging from 0 to 1. We first estimate ordinary least squares (OLS) models of security- and peacebuilding-related process performance with country and year fixed effects, and with country and month fixed effects. Standard errors are

clustered at the country level. We then present results from two-stage least squares (2SLS) models in which we instrument for mandate fragmentation in country *i* using average mandate fragmentation of PKOs in all African countries other than *i*. We report results graphically for ease of interpretation. Corresponding tables are reported in the SI (Section D, pp. 5–8).

Figure 1 displays the relationship between process performance and violence in the field of operations. Our results are consistent with Hypothesis 2 but not Hypothesis 1. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, violence is negatively correlated with process performance on peacebuilding-related tasks. Contrary to Hypothesis 1, however, the correlation between violence and security-related process performance is substantively small and not statistically significant at conventional levels. We investigate this further in Figure 2 by disaggregating violence by perpetrator. We find that the negative correlation between violence and peacebuilding-related process performance is driven by government-perpetrated violence in particular. More illuminating, we find that the

FIGURE 4 Marginal Effect of Instrumented Mandate Fragmentation on Process Performances

Note: Instrumental variable models confirm that fragmented mandates are associated with worse process performances, particularly for peacebuilding tasks; however, fragmented mandates do not affect process performances on security-related tasks.

correlation between violence and security-related process performance is positive for rebel-perpetrated violence but *negative* for government-perpetrated violence, resulting in the net null in Figure 1.

One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that PKOs rely on the consent and cooperation of host governments to implement mandates tasks, and they are almost always deployed with the expectation that they will engage host government officials and institutions in their activities. This creates a dilemma for PKOs: Attempting to control the actions of host state security forces (e.g., through forced disarmament or demilitarization) may jeopardize consent, but failing to do so may jeopardize the peace process itself. This helps explain why, “while the mantra may be of impartiality, the reality in a post-war country is that coercion is only used by peacekeepers against non-state actors, not normally against state actors” (White 2015, 51). This also helps explain why PKOs are generally more effective at deterring rebel- rather than government-perpetrated violence (Fjelde, Hultman, and Nilsson 2019). Given these trends, it is perhaps

unsurprising that government-perpetrated violence diminishes process performance on security-related tasks, whereas rebel-perpetrated violence improves it.

Figure 3 presents results from our two-way fixed effects regressions of process performance on mandate fragmentation. Consistent with our expectations (Hypotheses 3 and 4), we find that mandate fragmentation is negatively correlated with process performance on both security- and peacebuilding-related tasks. However, only the latter correlation is significantly different from zero at conventional levels. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that coordination problems, which we associate with mandate fragmentation, inflict peacebuilding-related tasks to a greater extent than security-related tasks. To implement peacebuilding in fragile environments, civilian peacekeepers are likely to rely on coordination with their uniformed counterparts (e.g., their transport and security services). Such extensive civil-military coordination may not be required to implement security-related tasks since these are primarily the responsibility of military contingents alone.

Finally, consistent with our results above, our instrumental variables models in Figure 4 suggest that mandate fragmentation is negatively correlated with process performance on peacebuilding-related tasks. Mandate fragmentation is *positively* correlated with security-related process performance in our instrumental variables model, but the relationship is substantively small and not statistically significant at conventional levels. As we show in the SI (Section D, p. 8, Table D.7), the fragmentation of each individual PKO's mandate is negatively and statistically significantly correlated with the average fragmentation of all other PKO mandates, with a sufficiently large first-stage F-statistic to support the relevance of our instrument.

Robustness

In the SI, we include a variety of additional analyses to support our theory and results. First, in Section A (p. 1), we include results for process performance on cross-cutting tasks. Second, in Section B (p. 2), we exclude protection of civilians—a potential high-priority task—from our measure of security-related process performance. Our results are substantively similar to those presented here. Third, in Section C (p. 3), we explore the potential interactive effects of violence and mandate fragmentation. We find some suggestive evidence that violence compounds the negative effect of mandate fragmentation on peacebuilding-related process performance. Fourth, to account for the possibility that PKOs are not able to implement their mandates effectively in the period immediately following deployment, in Section E (p. 9) we subset our sample by excluding the first 12 months after mission authorization. Our results are again substantively similar to those presented here. Finally, in Section F (p. 11), we show that our findings are robust to dropping individual tasks from our measures of process performance.

Conclusion

Under what conditions do IOs adhere to their mandates by pursuing the tasks they are authorized and expected to pursue? IOs' legitimacy often depends not just on whether they produce particular results—what we call outcome performance—but also on whether they even attempt to produce those results in the first place—what we call process performance. Despite its importance for the legitimacy of these institutions, process performance

remains understudied and poorly understood. Our article aims to help fill this gap, focusing in particular on UN peacekeeping.

We develop a theory to explain variation in PKOs' process performance across countries and over time. PKOs are increasingly deployed to active conflict zones where there is no peace to keep, and they are increasingly expected to implement fragmented mandates that comprise many disparate and potentially contradictory tasks. We argue that these two trends are likely to have especially powerful effects on process performance—though we acknowledge that other factors are of course likely to be important as well. For example, recent research has found that more diverse PKOs are more effective at reducing civilian casualties and improving other indicators of outcome performance (Bove, Ruffa, and Ruggeri 2020; Karim and Beardsley 2017); diversity may also affect process performance in ways that scholars have yet to explore. We view this as a promising avenue for future research.

We test our theory using two original data sets on PKO mandates and activities, gleaned from publicly available UN records. Our results are generally (though not uniformly) consistent with our theory. First, we find that violence is negatively correlated with process performance on peacebuilding-related tasks, but not security-related tasks. A more disaggregated analysis suggests that the null effect on security-related process performance may be due to the countervailing effects of government- and rebel-perpetrated violence. Second, we find that mandate fragmentation is strongly negatively correlated with process performance on peacebuilding-related tasks, and more weakly (and not statistically significantly) negatively correlated with process performance on security-related tasks. The negative correlation between mandate fragmentation and peacebuilding-related process performance holds when we use instrumental variables estimators to mitigate potential selection biases.

Taken together, our results suggest that the trend toward increasingly fragmented mandates, increasingly implemented in active conflict zones, may have adverse unintended consequences for PKOs' ability to execute the tasks that are expected of them. This does not imply that the UNSC should stop assigning ambitious mandates altogether. Rather, it suggests that in settings where obstacles to implementation are likely to be especially severe, mandates should be adapted to context and should avoid raising expectations that PKOs cannot meet. Future research could also shed more light on whether prioritization and sequencing can help missions in handling obstacles to implementation without needing to diverge from mandates. Notably though, we do not find evidence

that prioritization and sequencing are explicitly incorporated in UNSC mandates. While observers both inside and outside the UN system have warned of the risks associated with ever more complex mandates implemented in ever more hostile conflict situations (Karlsrud 2015), to our knowledge ours is the first study to analyze these risks systematically. Our results suggest that if these two trends continue, PKOs are likely to find themselves increasingly unable to implement the tasks assigned to them, potentially diminishing their legitimacy in the eyes of both domestic and international stakeholders.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Appendix A: Models for cross-cutting tasks

Appendix B: Excluding protection of civilians from process performance

Appendix C: Interaction between mandate fragmentation and violence

Appendix D: Main analyses in the paper in table form

Appendix E: Models excluding first 12 months of deployment

Appendix F: Our dependent variables and alternative measures

Appendix G: Illustration of the main independent variables

Appendix H: Alternative categorization of mandated tasks

Appendix I: Description of the PEMA and PACT datasets