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Ceasefires as bargaining instruments in intrastate conflicts: ceasefire objectives and their effects on peace negotiations

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Ceasefires as Bargaining Instruments in Intrastate Conflicts

Ceasefire Objectives and
Their Effects on Peace Negotiations

Valerie Sticher

**Ceasefires as Bargaining Instruments in Intrastate Conflicts:
Ceasefire Objectives and Their Effects on Peace Negotiations**

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Abstract

All conflict settlements involve a ceasefire, but not all ceasefires help settle conflicts. Despite the multifaceted – and often critical – role of ceasefires in intrastate conflicts, we know surprisingly little about them. In particular, we lack a systematic understanding of how state and non-state actors use ceasefires as part of a larger military or political process. This thesis seeks to shed light on the use of ceasefires as bargaining instruments and on how they shape the trajectory of a conflict. It investigates *when* and *why* conflict party leaders use *what types of ceasefires*, and how this affects progress in peace negotiations. The thesis consists of four parts. Part one introduces the analytical framework that guides the theory building and discusses the literature and research design. Part two investigates when, how and why battlefield dynamics affect progress towards a negotiated conflict settlement. Part three shows how, over the course of a bargaining process, the strategic goal of conflict party leaders evolves, and how this evolving goal drives the design of a ceasefire. Part four summarizes the findings and discusses their implications for our understanding of ceasefires as an integral part of the transition from war to peace. The theoretical and empirical contributions of this thesis demonstrate how, far from interrupting the bargaining process, ceasefires can fulfill important bargaining functions that shift over the course of a conflict.

To Esther and Ernst Sticher

Acknowledgements

When I started my PhD, I thought that continuing to work part-time would be the most exceptional part of this journey. Little did I know that I would write parts of this thesis with a sleeping baby in a sling, and parts under lockdown in the midst of a global pandemic. I owe my deep gratitude to the many people who ensured that I not only completed this thesis, but immensely enjoyed the process of writing it.

Siniša Vuković, thank you for your support and encouragement. You believed in me from the start, pushed me to do my very best, and made me laugh at the absurdities of the peer review process. Andreas Wenger, thank you for taking that leap of faith and enabling this project. Your enthusiasm and personal investment made the Center for Security Studies the perfect environment to research all things ceasefire. Madeleine Hosli, thank you for supporting me from the start of this journey. Your sound advice and clear vision helped me steer through all milestones of this project. Simon Mason, thank you for your common sense, your humor and for having my back throughout the years. I would not have managed to do this part-time without you shielding me from various requests whenever I went into deep writing mode.

I had the privilege of being a member of the GREAT team – Owen Frazer, Govinda Clayton, Allard Duursma, Enzo Nussio and Claudia Wiehler, I learned a lot from your experiences and your sharp minds. Thank you for all your advice and feedback.

Thank you also to colleagues from the mediation and mediation support world. To Juanita Millán, thank you for sharing a fascinating insider view on the ceasefire negotiations in the Colombian peace process. Jeremy Brickhill, Julian Thomas Hottinger and Georg Stein, thank you for generously sharing your vast knowledge on ceasefires and peace processes. Franziska Barmettler, Irene Bösch, Sara Hellmüller and Tabea Mettler, your advice has always been most helpful, and you are true role models. I am grateful to many more people, including my colleagues at the CSS – Katrina Abatis, Cora Alder, Inbal Ben Ezer, Myriam Dunn, Anna Hess, Eemeli Isoaho and Emanuel Schäublin, to name just a few – for providing such a supportive environment and helping with feedback and advice. Thank you to Tamara Imboden for meticulously proofreading this thesis.

Most of all, I want to thank my family. To my parents Esther and Ernst and my brothers Benjamin and Silvio Sticher, thank you for your love and your support all my life. You made me who I am today. To the Blum family, thank you for your open hearts and minds. And Elias and Yuri Ezra Blum, thank you for being there for me. You make me happy.

Articles and Synergies

This section provides an overview of the context in which this thesis emerged. By embedding five academic articles – three single and two co-authored – in an overall analytical framework, this thesis is a mix between a paper dissertation and a traditional monograph, as provided for in the Leiden University PhD Regulations 2018, Article 13, 2.

Articles underlying chapters four to eight

Chapters four to eight build on five academic articles, as outlined below. I have edited and adapted these articles into thesis chapters, so that they build on each other, avoid repetition, and form a coherent text. Some elements of the articles, such as discussions of methodological choices or case selection strategies, are used in part one of this thesis.

The five articles are the following:

Article 1

Sticher, Valerie. 2021. “Negotiating Peace with Your Enemy: The Problem of Costly Concessions.” *Journal of Global Security Studies*. Advance online publication: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogaa054>.

This single-authored article forms the basis of chapter four.

Article 2

Sticher, Valerie. 2020. “War of Narratives: Elite Framing and Peace Negotiations.” *Manuscript*.

Status: Preparing submission.

This single-authored article forms the basis of chapter five.

Article 3

Sticher, Valerie, and Siniša Vuković. Forthcoming. “Bargaining in Intrastate Conflicts: The Shifting Role of Ceasefires.” *Journal of Peace Research*. DOI: 10.1177/0022343320982658.

This article forms the basis of chapter six. The article is co-authored, with me as first author and Dr. Siniša Vuković as second author. I had the lead in developing the theoretical framework, the methodological approach and the implication section, and researched and drafted the Colombian case study. My co-author and I jointly researched and drafted the case

comparison. My co-author coordinated the work with the research assistant to compile the density plots included in the article.¹ Throughout the writing process, my co-author and I discussed and refined the theoretical and empirical contributions.

Article 4

Clayton, Govinda, and Valerie Sticher. Forthcoming. “The Logic of Ceasefires in Civil War.” *International Studies Quarterly*. DOI: 10.1093/isq/sqab026.

This article forms the basis of chapter seven. The article is co-authored with Dr. Govinda Clayton. The order of authors is alphabetical, as my co-author and I consider our contributions to be equal. I had the lead on the theory part (literature review, theory building, hypotheses development and implications) and my co-author had the lead on the empirical analysis (research design, statistical analysis and robustness tests). We jointly developed the coding scheme, and both contributed to the coding of agreements based on the UN Peacemaker dataset, with the help of a research assistant. The final version based on the latest PA-X dataset (Bell and Badanjak 2019; Bell et al. 2020) was coded by my co-author.

I substantially edited the article text for chapter seven to ensure that it builds on the earlier thesis chapters, in particular the bargaining contexts developed in chapter six. I also included additional empirical material to illustrate and further validate the statistical findings, including a counter-factual case study. Chapter seven of this thesis can thus be ascribed primarily to me.

Article 5

Sticher, Valerie. 2020. “Healing Stalemates: The Role of Ceasefires in Ripening Conflict.” *Manuscript*.

Status: Minor revisions (*Ethnopolitics*).

This single-authored article forms the basis of some parts of chapter eight.

Figures and tables

All figures and tables used in this thesis are my own or, in the case of chapters six and seven, those of my co-authors and me. Figures 17, 18 and 19 contain commissioned artwork to

¹ See *Figures and tables*.

visualize the intent of conflict party actors that engage in ceasefires during various stages of a conflict. Figure 19 was compiled by a research assistant.

Other relevant synergies and contributions

My research contributed to and profited from synergies with other research activities. In my role as a senior program officer in mediation support at the Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich, I helped build up the CSS Ceasefire Project, with the aim of increasing the understanding of the role of ceasefires in intrastate peace processes. The labels and characteristics of different classes of ceasefire design, as presented in chapter seven, were developed by Dr. Govinda Clayton, Dr. Simon Mason and me, in collaboration with Julian Th. Hottinger and Georg Stein from the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

As part of the CSS Ceasefire Project, jointly with Professor Dr. Andreas Wenger, Dr. Govinda Clayton and Dr. Simon Mason, I lead a book project that seeks to explore the interactions between ceasefires and peace negotiations. While the topic of my thesis and the book project overlap, the main contributions, audiences, methodological approaches and actor perspectives are different. The main contribution of my thesis is of a theoretical nature. Its primary audience is the academic community and it takes a conflict party perspective on ceasefires. The empirical contribution focuses on theory testing, through a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. The main contribution of the book project is of empirical nature, using an inductive approach to draw insights through a structured, focused case comparison (see George and Bennett 2005). The book is geared towards a practitioner audience and takes a third party perspective on ceasefires.

For the ceasefire book project, I conducted several interviews with a member of the government delegation to the technical working group tasked with designing the bilateral ceasefire in the Colombian case. This shaped my understanding of the Colombian peace process discussed as a case study in this thesis. Parts of the single-authored chapter three (i.e. of the section *Introduction to the Colombian case*) will be included in a co-authored chapter of the ceasefire book (Millán Hernández, Sticher, and Nussio 2020).

Also in the context of the CSS Ceasefire Project, I contributed to the conceptualization of the ETH/PRIO Civil Conflict Ceasefire database (Clayton et al. 2020). A pre-release version of this data was used in chapter six.

I received generous funding to conduct my PhD from the Center for Security Studies. As part of the research group “Tough Choices: Dilemmas and Decisions in Peacemaking”, I also received funding for a Spanish speaking research assistant to compile speeches by presidents Santos and Uribe, through a Viadrina Center B/ORDERS IN MOTION grant. The illustrative tweets included in chapter five are translations from Spanish to English by a professional translator. The Dutch summary of the abstract is a translation from English to Dutch by a professional translator. Several iterations of the ceasefire agreement provision coding for chapter seven were conducted by a research assistant, in the context of the CSS Ceasefire Project. A research assistant helped visualize conflict dynamics for the comparative case study in chapter six. All names and contributions are listed in footnotes in the respective chapters.

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