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

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PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

Ceasefires are a common phenomenon of intrastate conflicts. Since the end of the Cold War, belligerents have formally agreed to cease hostilities on more than two hundred occasions² – not counting the many more informal, often unilateral arrangements.³ Some of these arrangements have created momentum for or even revived peace negotiations, while others have stalled progress or were simply disregarded. This thesis systematizes our understanding of these dynamics, by assessing the strategic role of ceasefires as bargaining instruments from the perspective of conflict parties. It investigates when and why conflict party leaders use what types of ceasefire arrangements as part of a larger military or political approach to the conflict.

The thesis consists of four parts, using the following overarching logic. The first part embeds the research question in the theoretical and methodological state of the debate. The second and third parts form the backbone of the thesis and contain its main theoretical and empirical contributions. Guided by the analytical framework introduced in part one, they assess how interactions between actor sub-groups constrain and shape elite decision-making processes with regard to ceasefires and peace negotiations. Part two discusses when and why battlefield dynamics affect bargaining processes; part three builds on this to conceptualize ceasefires as bargaining instruments. Part four summarizes the main findings and discusses their implications for our understanding of the war-to-peace transition.

To set the scene for this endeavor, the first chapter of part one introduces the research subject and the analytical framework that guides through the thesis. Chapter two provides an overview of ceasefire and bargaining literature, demonstrating how the thesis contributes to these two bodies of work. The third and final chapter of part one discusses the research design and introduces the 2012–2016 Colombian peace talks that serve as a case study throughout the thesis.

² Figure based on the agreements that were coded for the analysis in chapter seven.

³ The ETH/PRIO Civil Conflict Ceasefire dataset records 2,107 ceasefire arrangements between 1989 and 2018 (Clayton et al. 2020).