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

Sticher, V.

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Author: Sticher, V.

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Chapter Five: War of Narratives⁵⁶

In times of war, governments face a key policy decision: should they engage in the search for a negotiated solution or continue on a purely military path? Conflict settlement promises a way out of a war that is costly. But while peace may be popular, the concessions necessary to reach a negotiated end to a conflict may render settlement politically unfeasible, as discussed in the preceding chapter. This chapter theorizes how a pro-settlement government seeks to create support for a peace agreement, and how political competitors seek to undermine such support through the use of strategic framing.

Focus of chapter five

Figure 11 shows the focus of chapter five in relationship to the overall analytical framework.

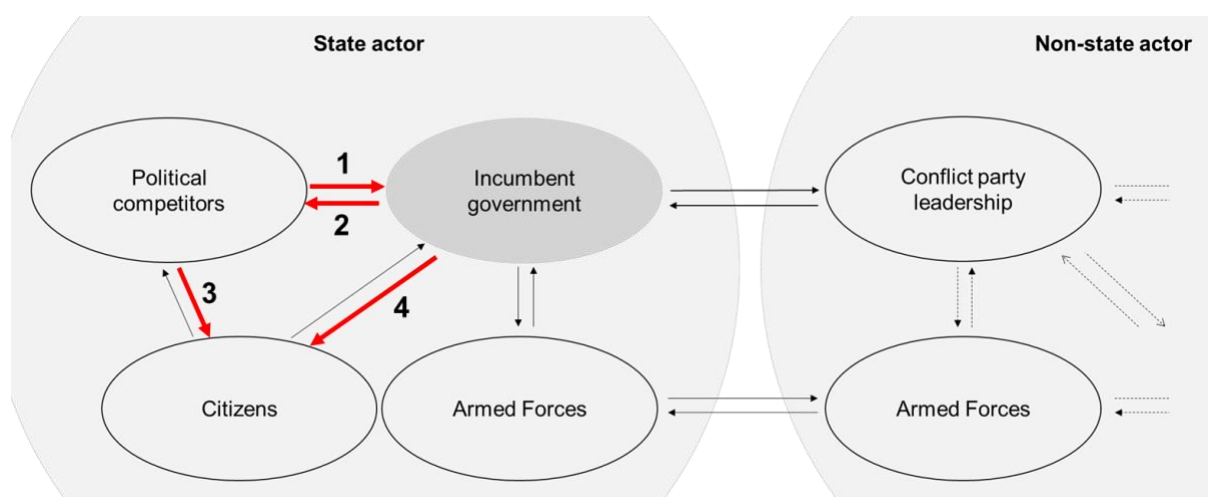


Figure 11: analytical framework applied to chapter five, part one. Source: author's own visualization.

The primary analysis focuses on the triangular interactions between the incumbent government, political competitors and citizens. More specifically, it theorizes how, in the context of elite competition (Figure 11, arrows 1 and 2), the incumbent government and

⁵⁶ Chapter five of this thesis is an adapted version of the following single-authored article: Sticher, Valerie. 2020. "War of Narratives: Elite Framing of the Colombian Peace Negotiations." *Manuscript*. The author is grateful to María Camila Gomez Serrano for excellent research assistance; Marta Fontes for translation services; and Katrina Abatis, Elias Blum, Govinda Clayton, Owen Frazer, Madeleine Hosli, Tamara Imboden, Simon Mason, Enzo Nussio, Hannah Smidt, Siniša Vuković, Andreas Wenger, and participants at the 2019 Ceasefire in Civil Wars Conference in Oslo, Norway and the 2020 Swiss Political Science Association Conference in Lucerne, Switzerland, for advice and comments on earlier versions of this article.

political competitors use frames in communication to rally support for or against conflict settlement (Figure 11, arrows three and four).

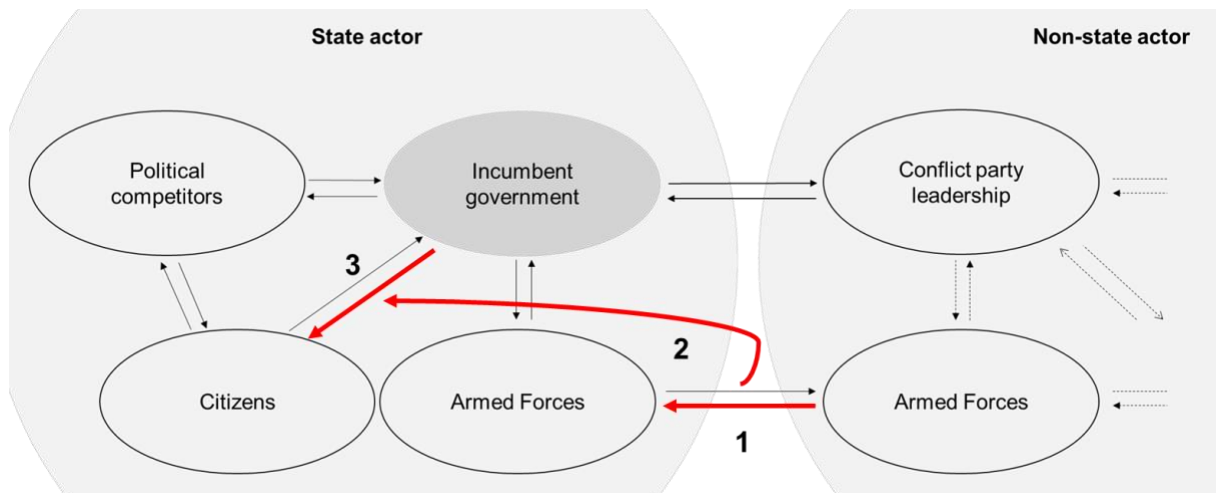


Figure 12: analytical framework applied to chapter five, part two. Source: author's own visualization.

Chapter five then assesses how conflict violence affects these dynamics. More precisely, it theorizes how the non-state actor's conflict behavior (Figure 12, arrow 1) conditions (Figure 12, arrow 2) the government's ability to promote a peace narrative (Figure 12, arrow 3).

Structure

This chapter proceeds as follows. The first section merges insights from chapter four with insights from framing theory, to theorize how elites may emphasize or de-emphasize aspects of conflicts to create or negate space for a mutually acceptable agreement. The second section proposes characteristics of conflict narratives⁵⁷ used in the context of democratic state actors with a pro-settlement government. Based on the insights of chapter four, it theorizes how conflict behavior conditions the effectiveness of these two narratives. The third section develops testable propositions to empirically assess the validity of the argument. The fourth section uses natural language processing techniques, supported by a manual content analysis, to test these propositions on the Colombian case. The fifth section discusses the implications, in particular how these conflict narratives relate to the role of ceasefires in bargaining processes.

⁵⁷ The term *narrative* is used here broadly to refer to speech acts that, by encompassing specific frames and characteristics, serve as a cognitive framework to assess actions and events (see Autesserre 2012; De Graaf, Dimitriu, and Ringsmose 2015; Roig 2019).

1. Insights from bargaining theory and framing literature

How may we expect elites to mobilize for and against conflict settlement, respectively?

Shaping perceptions and expectations

In bargaining theory, actors take decisions based on a comparison of the expected outcome of different approaches. Perceptions and expectations about future outcomes and future behavior thus stand at the center of bargaining problems (see Odell 2013). Yet, despite the centrality of these concepts, bargaining theory undertheorizes how elites may seek to instrumentally shape perceptions and expectations to create or negate space for settlement. This chapter discusses how elites present conflict dynamics and events in a way that favors their policy decisions. Elites who engage in negotiations will want to create a narrative that leads constituents to conclude that negotiations are more promising than continued war. From a bargaining perspective, this means that they will portray events and actions in a way that increases the range of acceptable agreements for their constituents. This may be called a *peace narrative*, as it aims to create space for a peace deal with an opponent.

By contrast, those who challenge a leadership decision to negotiate or to settle for a specific deal have an incentive to portray actions and events in a way that negates bargaining space. This may have one of two effects: it may create the impression that fighting is more beneficial than negotiating, or that the incumbent leadership should be able to achieve a better deal than what it will realistically be able to achieve, given the battlefield dynamics. This provides political competitors ground to flatly reject the decision to settle, or to challenge the government performance in the negotiations. Such portrayal may be called a *war narrative*, as it seeks to negate space for a deal with the non-state actor.

Insights from framing theory

Framing theory and related literature⁵⁸ help shed light on how elites may create such narratives by guiding our understanding about which bargaining parameters actors may focus on, and under what conditions.

⁵⁸One example of related literature is the literature on strategic narratives, which focuses specifically on foreign policy discourse during war (e.g. De Graaf, Dimitriu, and Ringsmose 2015; Freedman 2015; Roselle, Miskimmon, and O'Loughlin 2014).

A distinction can be drawn between frames in *thought* and frames in *communication*. Frames in thought refer to an individual's understanding of what is relevant in evaluating or understanding an event or an issue, whereas frames in communication refer to what individuals emphasize when communicating an issue or event to others (Druckman 2001, 227).

A subset of frames in communications deals specifically with how elites use such frames for strategic purposes, i.e. framing that is “deliberative, utilitarian, and goal directed” (Benford and Snow 2000, 624). Such framing processes are used by elites to mobilize constituents to think favorably about their propositions and support policy decisions. Rather than discussing an event or issue in all its complexity, elites may use frames strategically to highlight certain aspects of the event. By emphasizing or de-emphasizing certain aspects of the reality, they evoke specific frames that shape the attitude and perceptions of the recipient, with the aim of promoting their own policy decision or undermining the decisions of a political competitor (Chong and Druckman 2007, 104–5, 110; Entman 1991, 9; Gamson et al. 1992, 384–86).

For example, the ruling elite may refer to a suicide attack in a way that leads constituents to conclude that the war is unwinnable and the costs of war unbearably high. Alternatively, competitors may refer to such an attack as a sign of the other side's exhaustion, creating the impression that victory is close (see also De Graaf, Dimitriu, and Ringsmose 2015, 9). The former portrayal increases, while the latter decreases the perceived bargaining space.⁵⁹

Studies show that framing indeed has an effect on public support for government policies (e.g. Brewer and Gross 2005; Jacoby 2000; Nicholson and Howard 2003). To rally support for or against a policy, strategic actors tend to focus on a few frames only, selecting those where they believe to enjoy a comparative advantage (Haenggli and Kriesi 2012, 262). A strong frame is one that “provokes a defensive reaction” by the political competitors “and/or resonates in the media” (Haenggli and Kriesi 2012, 261). Naturally, the creation and promotion of such frames does not happen in a vacuum. A narrative is only effective when it

⁵⁹ A greater probability of victory improves a conflict party's outside option, and thus decreases its range of acceptable agreements.

“corresponds with events taking place in the physical world” (De Graaf, Dimitriu, and Ringsmose 2015, 8; see also Freedman 2015, 25). Such resonance is particularly important if there are competing narratives (Chong and Druckman 2007, 110–11). We can expect strategic actors to account for this when selecting the frames they are promoting.

2. Peace and war narratives

Contextual factors and constituencies may differ for various types of actors and regimes. In this chapter, the peace narrative is defined for a democratic, pro-settlement government that seeks to rally support for a peace agreement with a non-state actor. The war narrative is defined for political competitors of such a government. The incumbent government is constrained by voters, in that it considers consequences of its policies on future electoral outcomes. The public nature of elite statements in such contexts allows us to observe implications of the framework more easily than in cases where the framing takes place behind closed doors. The concluding section of this chapter discusses how the specific characteristics of the peace and war narratives may differ for other types of actors or regimes.

Theoretical expectations

Which aspects of reality are likely to be emphasized by pro-settlement governments seeking to promote support for conflict settlement, and which aspects would their political competitors highlight?

From bargaining theory, we know the basic parameters that have the potential to become frames in the war and the peace narrative. The expected costs of war and the expected probability of victory (determined by the relative fighting capabilities and resolve) influence perceptions about the outcome of a military approach, thus shaping the bargaining space. As chapter four demonstrated, the bargaining space is also affected by the saliency of out-group preferences. Negative behavior by an opponent, such as fighting, increases the saliency of such preferences. Finally, leaders may seek to directly shape perceptions of the benefits of peace or of concessions.

A pro-settlement government and its political competitors have to consider multiple audiences. A pro-settlement government not only wants to rally support for an eventual peace agreement, but also wants to increase its negotiation position vis-à-vis the non-state actor. It also needs to anticipate how framing affects other issues it cares about, such as citizen

assessment about government performance. Political competitors want to avoid that, due to the way they frame a situation, the government scores political points in other policy areas.

Both sides need to consider how events on the ground are likely to affect the resonance of their framing. As shown in chapter four, battlefield dynamics – in particular whether a non-state actor continues to engage in hostilities or implements a ceasefire – affect support for negotiations. This leads to the following expectations.

Peace narrative: A pro-settlement government is likely to use the *costs of war* frame, as this increases the bargaining range. Downplaying the government's strength and highlighting the strength of the opponent also increases the perceived bargaining space but plays into the hands of political competitors, who may portray the incumbent leadership as weak. We may therefore expect a pro-settlement government to de-emphasize the importance of relative strength when rallying support for an agreement. In terms of the presentation of an eventual outcome of negotiations, a pro-settlement government is likely to focus on the welfare for the in-group (*benefits of peace* frame) and use them to justify any necessary concessions. The possibility of future gains, together with the negative history of the armed conflict, suggest that promoters of conflict settlement use a forward-oriented narrative.

The conflict behavior of the non-state actor determines how well these frames resonate. Costs of war are particularly high when fighting is ongoing, while a ceasefire temporarily lowers these costs. But after years if not decades of fighting, costs of war will in all likelihood continue to resonate with the public even when conflict violence ceases temporarily. At the same time, it may be hard to imagine a joint future while violence is ongoing. A pro-settlement government may thus primarily focus on the costs of war while war rages and shift the focus to the benefits of peace once the fighting stops. It presumably acknowledges positive changes in the conflict behavior of the non-state actor, such as compliance with a ceasefire, as this creates space for a settlement.

War narrative: Political competitors seeking to undermine peace negotiations with a non-state actor will seek to decrease the perceived bargaining space. Highlighting relative capabilities and resolve would work towards this end but may end up boosting the image of the government leadership, which competitors want to avoid. We can thus expect political competitors to de-emphasize the importance of relative strength in the context of peace negotiations. Similarly, they will seek to de-emphasize the costs of war, as high costs of war

increase rather than decrease the bargaining space. Instead, we may expect them to focus on the negative behavior of the non-state actor to increase the saliency of out-group preferences. In terms of an eventual outcome, they are likely to highlight any concessions that need to be made while de-emphasizing the benefits of a peace agreement.

Unlike a pro-settlement government, political competitors are not likely to acknowledge positive changes in the conflict behavior of the opponent, as this could decrease the saliency of out-group preferences. If the non-state actor engages in a ceasefire, they are likely to focus on shortcomings, imply devious objectives or highlight negative behavior in the past. In general, we may expect political competitors to promote a backwards-oriented narrative that makes the deal about the out-group, rather than focusing on the benefits for the in-group.

3. Testable propositions

This section derives observable implications from the two narratives to turn the theoretical expectations into testable propositions. First, if promoters of the peace narrative make conflict settlement primarily about the in-group, whereas promoters of a war narrative frame settlement dynamics around the out-group, we would expect this to be reflected in the frequency of references they make to these respective sides.

H1a: Promoters of a peace narrative refer to their own citizens more often than promoters of a war narrative.

H1b: Promoters of a war narrative refer to the armed non-state actor more often than promoters of a peace narrative.

Similarly, if the peace narrative is forward-oriented and the war narrative backwards-oriented, we would expect this to be reflected in the usage of future and past tense.

H2a: A peace narrative has a higher percentage of sentences in future tense than a war narrative.

H2b: A war narrative has a higher percentage of sentences in past tense than a peace narrative.

In terms of content, we should find instances of the respective frames being used in the peace and war narratives.

H3a: The peace narrative contains references to the costs of war.

H3b: The peace narrative contains references to the benefits of peace.

H3c: The war narrative contains references to negative behavior by the non-state actor.

H3d: The war narrative contains references to concessions an eventual settlement would involve.

We would also expect promoters of a peace narrative to acknowledge positive changes in behavior, whereas promoters of a war narrative may deny them. An observable implication would be acknowledgement or denial of compliance with a ceasefire.

H4: Promoters of a peace narrative acknowledge compliance with a ceasefire whereas promoters of a war narrative deny such compliance.

We would expect changes in the framing when the behavior of the non-state actor changes. It may be hard to promote a joint future while hostilities are ongoing.

H5: Promoters of a peace narrative use the future tense more often in the presence than in the absence of a ceasefire.

By contrast, promoters of a war narrative may shift from a focus on current to past negative behavior during ceasefires to keep the saliency of out-group preferences high.

H6: Promoters of a war narrative use the past tense more often in the presence than in the absence of a ceasefire.

A null-hypothesis in all these cases is that elite communication is mainly driven by personal characteristic of the elites, in which case we may not find the predicted characteristics and frames.

4. Colombian peace talks

The negotiated peace agreement between the Government of Colombia and the FARC was submitted to a plebiscite, rendering the need for political support among voters particularly salient. This is not a necessary condition to finding competing elite narratives, but makes it more likely to find supporting evidence, should the theoretical framework be valid. The changes in conflict behavior over the course of the peace talks allow us to test for the shifts in framing in the absence and presence of a ceasefire.

4.1. Research approach

To test the hypotheses, tweets from two key protagonists rallying for and against the peace deal are analyzed. President Santos represents the pro-settlement government, and former president Uribe represents the political competitors.

The analysis is limited to the period between the public announcement of peace talks (27 August 2012) and the day of the plebiscite (2 October 2016). Twitter data is publicly available and provides a record of some of the key messages the two presidents sought to promote. As is the case with any public statement, elites may omit or highlight aspects that serve their strategic purposes on Twitter. While this provides selection bias challenges to some research questions, the strategic elements of communication are precisely what is of interest in this particular analysis. Twitter audiences may potentially be more educated and more affluent than audiences that are not online. However, tweets by politicians are regularly picked up by traditional media, and it is thus reasonable to assume that the presidents were using messaging on Twitter that appeal to a wider audience. Compared to other speech data, we may miss some messages that resonate locally or within specific communities, but such targeted messages are not relevant with regard to the hypotheses that are tested in this chapter.

Both Santos and Uribe made active use of Twitter to mobilize for and against the negotiations and the eventual peace agreement. Uribe was a more avid user of Twitter, posting 27,763 tweets during the defined period, compared to the 8,188 tweets by Santos. To include only those tweets that appeared to refer to the conflict or the peace process, an algorithm was employed to check if they contained reference to the FARC, peace, war, plebiscite, or a hashtag used by either of the presidents in conjunction with the conflict and the peace process (e.g. #FinDelConflicto or #RenegociemosLosAcuerdo). Tweets that included a reference to the ELN but not the FARC were excluded from the selection, as there were simultaneous efforts to negotiate with this smaller guerilla group.

For both presidents, the algorithm identified just fewer than a fourth of tweets that likely referred to the FARC conflict or the related peace talks (1,925 in the case of Santos and 6,049 in the case of Uribe). These tweets constituted the basis of the analysis, which was divided into two parts: first, text data between the two presidents were compared and, second, changes in the framing were analyzed as the conflict behavior of the FARC shifted. For the

exploratory data analysis and to test hypotheses H2, H5 and H6, pre-trained natural language processing libraries and models⁶⁰ were employed on a machine-translated version of the corpora.⁶¹ The code for downloading and selecting conflict and peace process related tweets, compilation of the sets of corpora, and the main data analysis can be found in the appendix of chapter five.

The machine-learning-assisted analysis was complemented by a manual content analysis of conflict and peace process related tweets during selected time periods (i.e. the period leading up to the plebiscite, during, and in the aftermath of ceasefires) and of all sentences of the corpora in past and future tense.

4.2. Santos versus Uribe: time and actor orientation

To compare between the two presidents, two sets of corpora were compiled. One version, used to detect the tense of the sentences, consisted of all conflict and peace process related tweets broken up into sentences, without URLs, hashtags and mentions. A second version, used for the exploratory data analysis, was a bags-of-words version, i.e. a cleaned-up, lemmatized version of the corpora excluding stop words.⁶²

Actor orientation

Figure 13 and Figure 14 show visual representations of word frequencies, generated with the second version of the corpora. They reveal a marked difference in the choice of words by the two presidents.

⁶⁰ The Natural Language Toolkit (NLTK) platform was used to remove stopwords; spaCy (en_core_web_sm model) was used for parts-of-speech tagging and lemmatization; and the Google Natural Language application programming interface was used to translate tweets from Spanish to English.

⁶¹ For the bags-of-words analysis, as used in the exploratory data analysis, research shows that Google translated corpora render highly similar results, making it a useful tool for analysis (Vries, Schoonvelde, and Schumacher 2018). For the parts-of-speech tagging, as used in the tense analysis, the available English model has a higher accuracy than the available Spanish model. The Spanish model may also perform inconsistently on social media text because of the corpus on which it was trained (“Documentation Language Models: Spanish (Release 2.2.5)” 2019).

⁶² See Zhao (2018) for common steps of text data preparation for exploratory data analysis.



Figure 13: most frequently used words by Santos. Source: author's own visualization, based on Twitter data, created with WordCloud for Python.



Figure 14: most frequently used words by Uribe. Source: author's own visualization, based on Twitter data, created with WordCloud for Python.

The most frequently used word by Uribe is ‘FARC’, whereas the second most frequently used word by Santos is ‘Colombia’. Indeed, Uribe mentions the FARC by name in 65% of all tweets, compared to only 8% in the case of Santos. By contrast, Santos uses Colombia as the main reference to describe the beneficiaries of an eventual peace deal, mentioning it in 28% of tweets. Compared to 10% for Uribe, this is a noteworthy difference. Together, the findings offer support for hypotheses H1a and H1b.

Time orientation

To quantify the use of future and past tense in the presidents' tweets, the corpora were split into sentences and an algorithm was employed to identify specific parts-of-speech tags.⁶³ In the case of the future tense, the algorithm checked whether the sentence contains the modal auxiliary 'will' or 'shall', as these indicate a common construction of future tense sentences in English. This simplification misses out on some forms of future tense, but avoids the inclusion of false positives, and offers a good approximation for the benefit of comparison. For the past tense, the algorithm checked – again as an approximation for the benefit of comparison – whether a) the root of the sentence is a verb in past simple or b) one of the dependency children of the root is an auxiliary verb in past simple.

The findings for future tense offer support for hypothesis H2a. Santos uses the future tense in 18%, versus Uribe in only 7% of all sentences. Content-wise, Santos uses the future tense repeatedly in reference to the benefits of peace, planned steps in the peace process, and to make public promises on concessions that will not be made (e.g. there will be no impunity). By contrast, Uribe uses the future tense extensively to talk about gains for the FARC and what damage a peace deal may imply.

For the past tense, the findings are also as expected, offering support for hypothesis H2b. Santos uses the past tense less frequently (10% of all sentences) than Uribe (12%), although the difference is not as marked as for future tense. Besides relatively generic tweets, such as about meetings with foreign leaders offering support to the peace process, Santos uses the past tense repeatedly to tweet about military successes. He also uses it occasionally to allude to a general improvement of the situation or to highlight progress in the negotiation process. Meanwhile, Uribe tweets in the past tense primarily about negative behavior by the FARC, including in reference to recent attacks, reports of kidnappings, drug trafficking or extortion. Uribe also uses tweets in the past tense to accuse Santos and his government of selling out to the FARC, or of failing to protect the country.

⁶³ Strings identified as sentences with a length of under 10 characters were removed from the analysis, as these were likely wrongly identified as sentences (e.g. numbering) or were tweets that originally contained a URL and/or hashtags/mentions but no substantive text.

Importantly, Uribe does not always use the past tense to refer to past behavior, especially in generic comments about the group's past actions:

*Those responsible for the FARC atrocities, who make fun of their victims, could be our new rulers. Prevent it. #VoteNo #CartagenaWhistlesNo.*⁶⁴

In addition, he often uses labels, in particular the label *terrorist* (742 times, top 4 word) and *terrorism* (263 times),⁶⁵ as well as more graphic terms to refer to the FARC or their behavior, for example,

*#MyReasonToVoteNo the child rapists will be our next rulers. Let's prevent it by voting No.*⁶⁶

The use of such labels not only delegitimizes the FARC as a political actor with potential grievances, but also conflates past and contemporary behavior, making it hard to create space for a negotiated settlement (see Fisher, Ury, and Patton 2011).

Statistical significance

The findings presented above confirm the expected time and actor orientation: Santos uses future tense and the word Colombia more often than Uribe, and Uribe uses past tense and references to the FARC more often than Santos. But are these detected differences really due to different framing?

While we cannot test this directly, we can exclude the possibility that the differences are due to chance. To do so, a chi-square test was conducted for all findings. Such a test helps determine the likelihood that the observed frequency of a finding (e.g. sentences in the future tense) for one categorical variable (e.g. Santos tweets) is different from the observed frequency for another categorical variable (e.g. Uribe tweets).

⁶⁴ AlvaroUribeVel, 25 September 2015, original: Responsables de atrocidades FARC que se burlan de las víctimas podrán ser nuestros próximos gobernantes. Evítelo. #VoteNo #CartagenaPitaNo.

⁶⁵ Santos hardly uses these terms: he mentions terrorist six times and terrorism three times, whereof two references appear to relate to other groups. For the use of the term terrorism by the two presidents, see also Nussio (2013)

⁶⁶ AlvaroUribeVel, 21 September 2016, original: #MiRazónParaVotarNo los violadores de niños serán nuestros próximos gobernantes. Evitémoslo votando NO.

The results of the test are listed in Table 9. The value of the chi-square statistic is listed as X^2 , the number of total observations (e.g. number of sentences or tweets) as N , and the level of significance as the p value. The level of significance is of most interest to the analysis, as p indicates the probability that the difference in proportions is random. In all cases, the p value is below 0.05, suggesting that there is less than a 5% probability that the difference is due to chance. Conventionally, this means that the results are statistically significant.

Tested	Santos	Uribe	Chi-square test
H1a: Colombia mentions	28%	10%	$X^2 = 415.1, N = 7,974, p < 0.001$
H1b: FARC mentions	8%	65%	$X^2 = 1874.5, N = 7,974, p < 0.001$
H2a: Future tense	18%	7%	$X^2 = 185.0, N = 7,190, p < 0.001$
H2b: Past tense	10%	12%	$X^2 = 5.6, N = 7,190, p = 0.018$

Table 9: statistical significance of difference in proportions. Source: author's own statistical analysis.

Robustness of findings

To assess the robustness of the findings, the natural language processing analysis was re-run with a number of assumptions changed.

For the difference in proportion of the future and past tense, it may be that the method that was used fails to capture specific expressions or sentence constructions that one of the actors uses more often than the other. The content analysis revealed a frequent use of imperative – translated in English with ‘let’s’ plus verb – to suggest future behavior, particularly during the lead-up to the plebiscite. It may be that Uribe uses ‘let’s’ more often than Santos, in which case the difference in proportion of future tense could be due to different preferences for expressions rather than a difference in time-orientation. In robustness check 1, ‘let’s’ is included as an indication of the future tense.

Similarly, for the past tense, it may be that specific constructions of the past tense are not covered. As a complementary, very basic measure, the presidents’ percentages of verbs in past (either simple past or past participle) are compared (robustness check 2).

Model	Tested	Santos	Uribe	Chi-square test
Robustness check 1: including expression ‘let’s’ as future tense	H2a: future tense	18%	7%	$X^2 = 185.0, N = 7,190, p < 0.001$
Robustness check 2: percentage of all verbs in past tense	H2b: past tense	21%	30%	$X^2 = 116.7, N = 12,223, p < 0.001$
Robustness check 3: including only tweets with related hashtags	H1a: Colombia mentions	29%	16%	$X^2 = 26.3, N = 1,053, p < 0.001$
	H1b: FARC mentions	5%	20%	$X^2 = 44.5, N = 1,053, p < 0.001$
	H2a: future tense	23%	10%	$X^2 = 31.7, N = 933, p < 0.001$
	H2b: past tense	8%	11%	$X^2 = 2.7, N = 933, p = 0.102$
Robustness check 4: expanding tweets selection criteria	H1a: Colombia mentions	27%	10%	$X^2 = 419.7, N = 8,714, p < 0.001$
	H1b: FARC mentions	7%	60%	$X^2 = 1791.3, N = 8,714, p < 0.001$
	H2a: future tense	19%	8%	$X^2 = 288.5, N = 7,924, p < 0.001$
	H2b: past tense	9%	12%	$X^2 = 10.6, N = 7,924, p = 0.001$

Table 10: robustness checks Santos versus Uribe. Source: author’s own statistical analysis.

More generally, it is possible that the criteria for identifying tweets as conflict or peace process related are too broad, including a specific type of tweet that affects the findings. To guard against this, the analysis is re-run on corpora that only contain tweets with a specific, conflict or peace process related hashtag (robustness check 3).⁶⁷ Similarly, to ensure that the findings are not due to the systematic exclusion of some tweets, the selection criteria were broadened to also cover the terms ‘Havana’, ‘agreement’ and ‘conflict’ (robustness check 4).

For all robustness checks, the findings are in line with the findings of the main analysis, as summarized in Table 10. All findings remain statistically significant, with the exception of the difference in proportions of past tense for the smaller sample of robustness check 3.

Santos versus Uribe: use of frames

To check whether Santos and Uribe used the expected frames, the manual analysis was narrowed down to the time period between the formal announcement of the peace agreement (24 August 2016) and the day of the plebiscite (2 October 2016). During this period, competition to rally support for or against the agreement was particularly high. The details of

⁶⁷ A total of 54 hashtags were added to the algorithm that were previously covered directly through the selection criteria (e.g. #VotaPorLaPaz).

the deal had already been negotiated. Consequently, the government could focus its framing entirely on rallying support for this deal. There were no conflict dyad causalities (Croicu and Sundberg 2017), suggesting that the conflict context remained relatively stable. We would expect the war and peace narratives to crystallize in this period.

There is evidence of all expected frames during this period, i.e. instances of Santos emphasizing the costs of war (H3a) and the benefits of peace (H3b), and Uribe highlighting negative behavior of the FARC (H3c) and concessions the deal allegedly contained (H3d).

Santos evoked the *costs of war* frame by pointing to the suffering of the past, as exemplified in this tweet:

*NO MORE young men killed for a senseless war. No soldiers, no policemen, no peasants, no guerrilla! #PeaceIsAlmostHere*⁶⁸

To highlight the future benefits of a negotiated peace deal, he argued, among others, that a peaceful Colombia would attract foreign investment, create the framework for the best performance of the oil industry, and generate development, infrastructure, and economic opportunities. For example:

*Peace will benefit us all. Colombia will be more attractive for foreign investment. There'll be more tourism and jobs. #PeaceIsAlmostHere*⁶⁹

This stood in stark contrast to the frames used by Uribe. Uribe repeatedly highlighted past negative behavior by the FARC, referring to acts such as past attacks, drug trafficking, kidnapping, extortion and massacres. For example:

*TNN "FARC dissidents would have stolen over 2500M from drug trafficking, kidnapping, extortion, the security agencies report"*⁷⁰

Uribe emphasized that the peace deal would leave such behavior unpunished or even reward it, arguing that it would include impunity for FARC crimes, eligibility for political office, the

⁶⁸ JuanManSantos, 26 September 2016, original: NO MÁS jóvenes sacrificados por una guerra absurda ¡Ni soldados, ni policías, ni campesinos, ni guerrilleros! #LaPazGerminaYa.

⁶⁹ JuanManSantos, 26 September 2016, original: La paz traerá beneficios para todos. Colombia será más atractiva para la inversión extranjera. Habrá más turismo y empleo. #LaPazGerminaYa

⁷⁰ AlvaroUribeVel, 1 October 2016, original: TNN"Disidentes FARC habrían robado + d 2500 mill, generados por el narcotráfico, el secuestro, la extorsión, reportan agencias d seguridad"

right to be consulted on certain issues, and financing for a political party. This is reflected in the following example:

*#ISayNoToAgreements because they reward rapists and child recruiters with no jail and they get eligibility.*⁷¹

Uribe also repeatedly called for renegotiations and corrections of the deal, using hashtags #RenegociemosLosAcuerdos (Let's renegotiate the Accords) and #CorrijanLosAcuerdos (Let's correct the Accords) to create the impression that the bargaining space was larger than what the administration was able to materialize in the negotiations.

Acknowledgment of ceasefire compliance

To assess whether the two presidents acknowledged positive shifts in FARC behavior, tweets during and in the aftermath of unilateral ceasefires declared by the FARC were analyzed. The comparison reveals a stark difference in the portrayal of ceasefire compliance.

When the FARC announced the first unilateral ceasefire at the start of the public phase of negotiations, Santos did not acknowledge it on Twitter, nor comment on it during the two months of ceasefire. However, at the end of the ceasefire, he issued a carefully worded government statement, in which he affirmed that the FARC ceasefire led to a significant reduction in the number of soldiers and police killed or injured (Santos 2013).

During the same ceasefire, Uribe highlighted acts that appeared to violate the FARC commitment to the ceasefire and accused the FARC of preparing for a new wave of attack. He challenged the government assessment of FARC compliance with the ceasefire, asking why the government was indulging with terrorists. After the ceasefire, he continued to list confirmed and alleged attacks by the FARC.

While Santos did not comment on compliance with the second temporary ceasefire, Uribe repeatedly tweeted about alleged violations. He cast doubt upon the underlying intentions, implying that the FARC intended to use the stop in fighting to reorganize. In the aftermath of the ceasefire, FARC attacks provided further munition for Uribe to attack Santos over his decision to negotiate.

⁷¹ AlvaroUribeVel, 8 September 2016, original: #DigoNoALosAcuerdos porque se premia a violadores y reclutadores de niños con cero cárcel y se les da elegibilidad.

When the FARC declared an indefinite ceasefire at the end of 2014, Santos acknowledged compliance in early January 2015 in a tweet, later announcing measures to further de-escalate the conflict. While he was cautious about commenting on compliance in the early years of the talks, he was more outspoken towards the end, tweeting, for example,

*ZERO injured, ZERO dead in one month of cease fire, reports @CERAC. It's time to be a normal country, a country in peace! <https://goo.gl/MR09KD>.*⁷²

Uribe, who had consistently called for the FARC to cease fire, reacted to the indefinite ceasefire announcement by calling it a trap. He emphasized shortcomings and highlighted alleged violations. In reaction to Santos' assessment of ceasefire compliance, Uribe accused Santos of lying, tolerating terrorism and confusing the public. Uribe also claimed that the stop in fighting had benefited the FARC:

*The truce has provided Farc: rearmament, narco expansion and extortion, territorial control and planning of criminal acts.*⁷³

In short, the findings offer support for hypothesis H4, with Santos acknowledging ceasefire compliance and Uribe challenging such assessment, pointing to shortcomings, violations and implying devious intentions.

4.3. Shifts in framing during ceasefires

To track shifts in framing during ceasefire periods, two distinct corpora were compiled for each president: one consisting of tweets posted during days without ceasefires, and one when a ceasefire by the FARC was in place.⁷⁴ According to UCDP GED data, in the 782 days without a ceasefire, there were 35 events with at least one government death, compared to five such events during 716 days of ceasefire.

⁷² JuanManSantos, 30 September 2016, original: CERO heridos, CERO muertos en un mes de cese al fuego reporta @CERAC. Es hora de ser un país normal ¡un país en paz! <https://goo.gl/MR09KD>. Note that the URL included in the tweet links to a monitoring report by the civil society organization CERAC.

⁷³ AlvaroUribeVel, 2 November 2015, original: Tregua ha facilitado a Farc: rearme, expansión de narco y extorsión, control territorial y planeación de acción criminal.

⁷⁴ For the ceasefire dates, see chapter three, *Phases of the 2012–2016 peace talks*.

Results

Santos used the future tense more often during ceasefires (22%) than during their absence (13%), offering support for hypothesis H5. He used the *benefits of the peace* frame in both contexts, but more prominently when a ceasefire was in place. The proportion of the past tense did not change with a shift from fighting to a ceasefire (10% in both cases). However, the content of tweets in the past tense shifted over time. During fighting, particularly in the early years of negotiations, Santos used the *military strength* frame repeatedly. When the FARC ceased fire, particularly once it committed to an indefinite ceasefire, Santos shifted from highlighting military successes, to highlighting improved circumstances and progress in the peace talks. In mid-April 2015, when the FARC killed eleven soldiers in its first and only serious breach of the indefinite unilateral ceasefire, Santos condemned the act and ordered offensive actions to retaliate. However, he also added that such an attack was precisely the reason why the war needed to end.⁷⁵ In the aftermath of successful government retaliations, he called on Colombians not to celebrate the deaths of fellow citizens.⁷⁶

The use of the *military strength* frame in the early years of the talks is against the theoretical expectations, as we would expect a pro-settlement government to downplay the relative strength in the context of negotiations. A possible explanation for the finding is that Santos sought to appease hardliners within his own administration and political competitors, who accused him of being lenient towards the FARC. Another explanation may be that the emphasis on military strength was primarily directed at the FARC. The next chapter offers a systematic framework to analyze such a shift in framing over the course of peace talks.

Against expectations, Uribe used sentences in past tense more often in the absence (14%) than in the presence of ceasefires (10%). This may be the case because, as described above, Uribe used the past tense primarily to talk about events in the immediate past (what may be referred to as contemporary behavior), while using the present tense and labels to refer to more generic past behavior. And during fighting, there were simply more occasions to comment on negative contemporary acts by the FARC. The findings thus contradict

⁷⁵ JuanManSantos, 15 April 2015, original: Lamento muerte de soldados en Cauca. Esta es precisamente la guerra que queremos terminar.

⁷⁶ JuanManSantos, 25 May 2015, original: Dejemos de felicitarnos por las muertes de la guerra. Todos somos colombianos. Recordemos a Ghandi: "Ojo por ojo y el mundo quedará ciego".

hypothesis H6, but they do not undermine the theoretical framework: as the analysis reveals, a shift from current to past behavior is not necessarily reflected in the use of the past tense.

Uribe's use of the future tense also differed between periods of fighting (4%) and ceasefires (10%). The content of these tweets remained largely the same, with Uribe focusing on the potential negative impact of peace talks and rewards to the FARC.

Statistical significance and robustness checks

As above, chi-square tests were conducted to exclude the possibility that the findings are purely due to chance. Again, all findings are statistically significant (see Table 11).

Tested	No ceasefire	Ceasefire	Chi-square test
H5: future tense, Santos	13%	22%	$X^2 = 23.5, N = 1,961, p < 0.001$
H6: past tense, Uribe	14%	10%	$X^2 = 22.4, N = 5,230, p < 0.001$

Table 11: statistical significance of difference in proportions. Source: author's own statistical analysis.

Some assumptions were then modified to assess the robustness of the findings. In the period leading up to the plebiscite, incentives to rally support for or against a peace deal were particularly high. During this entire period, a ceasefire was in place. It may be that the findings are driven by the competition in the lead-up to the plebiscite, rather than by differences in framing during fighting and ceasefires. To exclude that possibility, the analysis was re-run, excluding the period between the final agreement and the plebiscite (robustness check 5).

Model	Tested	No CF	Ceasefire	Chi-square test
Robustness check 5: excluding period leading up to plebiscite	H5: future tense, Santos	13%	22%	$X^2 = 24.1, N = 1,766, p < 0.001$
	H6: past tense, Uribe	14%	11%	$X^2 = 15.7, N = 4,825, p < 0.001$
Robustness check 6: excluding resumption of hostilities	H5: future tense, Santos	13%	22%	$X^2 = 25.2, N = 1,925, p < 0.001$
	H6: past tense, Uribe	14%	10%	$X^2 = 22.9, N = 5,167, p < 0.001$
Robustness check 7: excluding temporary ceasefires	H5: future tense, Santos	13%	22%	$X^2 = 24.7, N = 1,824, p < 0.001$
	H6: past tense, Uribe	14%	9%	$X^2 = 27.3, N = 4,899, p < 0.001$

Table 12: robustness checks absence versus presence of ceasefires. Source: author's own statistical analysis.

Next, the period in which major hostilities resumed during the first indefinite ceasefire was excluded (robustness check 6), as in the eyes of many Colombians, the ceasefire may no longer have been seen as effective in the aftermath of the FARC attack in mid-April 2015.

Finally, there are important differences in the nature of temporary and indefinite ceasefires. In robustness check 7, temporary ceasefires were excluded from the analysis, and periods of no ceasefires were then compared to periods with an indefinite ceasefire in place. The findings of all robustness checks are in line with the findings of the main analysis, and all differences in proportions remain statistically significant (see Table 12).

5. Discussion

Leaders need constituent support for critical policy decisions, such as settling an armed conflict with a non-state actor. When engaging in peace talks, they have an incentive to present conflict dynamics in a way that creates space for a negotiated settlement. Their political competitors, by contrast, seek to present conflict dynamics and events in a way that negates space for a peace agreement to challenge the government over its decision to negotiate or settle. Building on insights from bargaining and framing theory, this chapter proposes two distinct conflict narratives.

A pro-settlement government promotes a forward-oriented peace narrative, using the *costs of war* and the *benefits of peace* frames, to rally support for a negotiated end to the conflict. Meanwhile, political competitors promote a backward-oriented war narrative, using the *negative behavior* and the *concessions* frames to rally against the government initiative to settle. While the peace narrative focuses on benefits for the state, the war narrative makes conflict settlement primarily about the non-state actor. A natural language processing analysis and a manual content analysis of tweets by President Santos and former president Uribe offer support for the existence of these two narratives.

The theory also implies that elites adapt their framing to the conflict behavior of the non-state actor. The analysis confirms that Santos shifted to more forward-oriented framing when a FARC ceasefire was in place. In the absence of a ceasefire, FARC attacks provided munition for Uribe to highlight the negative behavior of the FARC and attack the government over its decision to negotiate. When the FARC stopped fighting, Uribe continued to refer to past actions, including through the use of labels, to justify opposition to any concession that (from a government perspective) was necessary to reach a peace agreement. This reveals two key challenges for a government seeking to rally support for a negotiated settlement with an armed non-state actor: a vulnerability to continued attacks or ceasefire violations by the non-

state actor, and the long shadow of the past, as political competitors continue to refer to past hostilities to mobilize against peace talks even once the non-state actor stops fighting.

Application beyond democratic state actors

The empirical assessment demonstrates the plausibility of the theoretical argument that elites seek to shape the bargaining space through strategic communication in order to rally support for or against conflict settlement. The peace and war narratives were specified for an incumbent democratic government that seeks to settle a conflict with an armed non-state actor. However, the logic expands to other types of pro-settlement leaders.

For authoritarian regimes, we would expect the official peace narrative to be similar to the one in a democratic state. However, political competition plays a lesser role in authoritarian regimes. With mainstream media controlled by the regime, an authoritarian leader is also less vulnerable to the conflict behavior of the opponent. Because of a lack of electoral accountability, authoritarian leaders are less dependent on public support, even though they risk being overthrown if they are too unpopular. Their key constituency are the military leadership (Chiozza and Goemans 2011, 5). Discussions with the military leadership take place in private, so authoritarian leaders do not need to consider multiple audiences when choosing their frames. Therefore, in addition to the frames discussed above, authoritarian leaders are also likely to emphasize the costs of continued war and the strength or resolve of the opponent.

Armed non-state actors share some characteristics with authoritarian regimes, in that their key constituency comes from the military circle. Leaders of such groups can (usually) not be voted out of office, but they are still highly dependent on popular support. Commanders vying for the leadership position may challenge incumbent leaders who lack support from the rank and file. A key question related to their choice of effective frames relates to their ability to tailor messages to a specific audience. If messages are expected to be intercepted by the government, non-state actors may seek to de-emphasize aspects that would lower their bargaining position (as discussed for the democratic state actor above).

Framing will also differ if a pro-settlement elite acts in opposition to an incumbent government. Political competitors are provided with more space to make promises without accounting for the delivery of such promises, compared to their peers who serve in office.

Outlook

This chapter revealed an important, if undertheorized role of ceasefires: creating space for a peace narrative to take hold. As the discussion of the Colombian case illustrates, it appears unlikely that the Santos administration could have rallied support for the peace agreement in the way it did, had the FARC continued to stage attacks throughout the process. And even with a FARC ceasefire in place, the agreement was rejected (if only by a narrow margin). The Colombian case seems to suggest that a ceasefire or a strong de-escalation of conflict violence may be necessary (but not sufficient) for a peace narrative to prevail.

This chapter has focused on how ceasefires relate to strategic framing, which is only one of many ways in which ceasefires affect the trajectory of conflicts. This poses a larger question: when and why do conflict party leaders use a ceasefire? And how can they ensure that a ceasefire fulfils its underlying objectives? Building on the insights generated in part two, the next part of this thesis systematically assesses the role of ceasefires in relation to a wider military or political approach to solve a conflict.