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

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Chapter Eight: Findings and Implications¹¹⁰

What is the role of ceasefires as strategic bargaining instruments? Part one and two of this thesis prepared the ground to answer this main research question, by introducing an analytical framework and theorizing when and why battlefield dynamics affect peace negotiations. Building on these insights, part three clarified the role of ceasefires as strategic instruments in different bargaining contexts. This concluding chapter discusses how, in light of their instrumental use, ceasefires affect bargaining dynamics.

The chapter proceeds as follows. The first section summarizes the main theoretical, conceptual and empirical findings of the previous chapters. The second section recounts the Colombian case from a bird's-eye perspective, illustrating when and why, in the context of intragroup dynamics, conflict violence and ceasefires affect progress in peace negotiations. The third section assesses the main contributions of this thesis and their implications for our understanding of the transition from war to peace. The fourth section discusses the implications for third party engagement and the fifth section offers concluding remarks.

1. Summary of findings

Conflict party leaders use ceasefires, among other bargaining instruments, to maximize the outcome of a conflict. Once they recognize the benefits of a negotiated settlement, leaders may use ceasefires to overcome bargaining problems that cannot be addressed through fighting, in particular the problems of costly concessions and credible commitment.

1.1. Summary of part two: bargaining barriers to conflict settlement

Leaders need to make concessions to reach a peace agreement with their opponent, but in the context of violent conflicts, such concessions may be highly unpopular and costly to make. Chapter four revises bargaining theory to account for this dilemma. It demonstrates how

¹¹⁰ Parts of this chapter are based on a substantially edited version of the following single-authored article: Sticher, Valerie. 2020. "Healing Stalemates: The Role of Ceasefires in Ripening Conflict." *Manuscript*. The article was invited for submission to a special issue on ripeness for *Ethnopolitics*. At the time of submission of this thesis, the manuscript passed a first round of reviews suggesting minor revisions. The author is grateful for comments from Julian Thomas Hottinger and Laurie Nathan on an earlier version of the manuscript.

integrating social preferences and constituent constraints into a standard bargaining model of war changes our expectations of the impact of fighting on bargaining dynamics.

The theory builds on the simple idea that negotiating in armed conflicts is different from ordinary bargaining situations: conflict party members not only care about their own benefits, but also want to avoid rewarding the negative behavior of their opponent. This renders the search for a mutually acceptable agreement a delicate balancing act. Any negotiated, mutually acceptable agreement contains concessions to both sides. Leaders may prefer continued fighting over conflict settlement if they have a strong personal dislike for making such necessary concessions. But even if they focus on in-group gains and prefer settlement over continued fighting, leaders may find it politically unfeasible to secure constituent support for a settlement if concessions to an opponent are widely unpopular.

This implies that the transition from war to peace is more difficult than bargaining theory commonly assumes. War entrepreneurs have long been recognized as a major risk to peace. But war can be a preferred policy option even for actors who do not thrive on the instability that war causes. When making rational decisions, leaders consider not only the costs of war but also the costs of peace, and in particular the political ramifications of entering into an agreement that contains unpopular concessions to an enemy. The modified bargaining setup allows us to identify conditions that make concessions an insurmountable obstacle to conflict settlement. For leaders in democratic states, negotiated conflict settlement is politically unfeasible if citizens have strong hatred for the non-state actor and are not directly affected by the armed conflict.

Chapter five assesses the role of ceasefires in helping conflict party leaders overcome the vicious cycle of conflict once they recognize the benefits of settlement. Focusing on the use of strategic framing, the chapter discusses how leaders who favor conflict settlement seek to gain support from their constituents. Merging insights from bargaining and framing theory, the chapter identifies conflict aspects that elites may emphasize or de-emphasize to shape perceptions of the bargaining space. It proposes two distinct conflict narratives used to rally support for and against conflict settlement. Supporters of a negotiated agreement promote a forward-oriented peace narrative that makes settlement about the gains to the own conflict party, emphasizing the costs of war and the benefits of peace. Their competitors use a backward-oriented war narrative that makes settlement about the gains of the opponent, emphasizing concessions and the negative behavior of the opponent. A machine-learning

supported analysis of Twitter feeds from two key protagonists on the state side – President Santos and former president Uribe – offers support for the existence of these two narratives.

The analysis also assesses how elites adapt their framing in line with shifts in the opponent's conflict behavior. Santos shifted to more forward-oriented framing when a FARC ceasefire was in place. In the absence of a ceasefire, Uribe highlighted FARC attacks and used them to challenge the government over its decision to settle. During periods when the FARC engaged in a unilateral ceasefire, Uribe shifted his focus on past actions, including through the use of labels, to justify opposition to any concession the government made.

The analysis demonstrates the vulnerability of a pro-settlement government to continued attacks from the non-state actor. It also points to the important role of ceasefires in creating space for a peace narrative to take hold. As the discussion of the Colombian case illustrates, it is unlikely that the Santos administration could have rallied support for the peace deal in the same way, had the FARC continued to stage attacks throughout the process. And even with a FARC ceasefire in place, the agreement was ultimately, if narrowly, rejected in the plebiscite. The dynamics demonstrate that the shadow of the past can impede cooperation in the future: in an effort to rally support against a peace agreement, political competitors will likely continue to refer to past hostilities even once the non-state actor stops fighting.

1.2. Summary of part three: ceasefires as bargaining instruments

Building on the insights generated in part two, part three conceptualizes ceasefires as bargaining instruments.

Chapter six theorizes how individual readings of a bargaining situation shape the strategic goal of conflict party leaders. The analysis identifies three distinct bargaining contexts in which leaders may find themselves. In the Diminishing Opponent context, leaders believe that a military solution yields a better outcome than a political settlement. In the Forcing Concessions context, they recognize the benefits of conflict settlement, but their expectations about a mutually acceptable agreement still widely diverge. Accordingly, leaders may be willing to endure further costs of war to reach a better outcome. In the Enabling Agreement context, leaders seek to pursue conflict settlement without incurring further costs as their expectations of a military outcome converge.

In line with these shifting readings, conflict party leaders adapt their strategic goal from seeking to gain a military advantage, to boosting their bargaining power, to increasing the chances of reaching a peace agreement. They may use a mix of fighting, negotiations and ceasefires in pursuit of these strategic goals. However, fighting is only a useful means towards the strategic goal in the Diminishing Opponent and Forcing Concessions contexts. In the Enabling Agreement context, fighting hurts rather than helps leaders achieve their goal.

The role of ceasefires shifts in line with these three bargaining contexts. In the Diminishing Opponent context, leaders may announce ceasefires disingenuously, in an attempt to set up a military advantage. In the Forcing Concessions context, they may use a ceasefire to project strength and signal intent to explore a political settlement of the conflict. In the Enabling Agreement context, leaders use ceasefires to build up trust and gain constituent support for a peace agreement. It is in this context in particular that we may expect ceasefires to create space for a peace narrative to take hold.

At an aggregate level, the three bargaining contexts suggest that after the start of peace negotiations, parties will likely use a mix of fighting and ceasefires to press for concessions. Negotiations are prone to experience impasses and a ceasefire put in place early in the process is likely to collapse. By contrast, towards the end of negotiations, bilateral ceasefires are likely to hold. Even in the absence of a bilateral ceasefire, parties will need to find ways of mutually reducing or suspending conflict violence to facilitate progress towards settlement.

A study of violence and ceasefire patterns in six contemporary cases confirms these expectations. Chapter six lists additional observable implications, showing how fighting, ceasefires and negotiations are used in all contexts, but how their use differs in important ways as leaders move towards a peace agreement. A congruence test conducted on the Colombian case offers further support for the theory.

Together, the findings imply that a change in conflict behavior, in particular a commitment to suspending conflict violence by the conflict party leadership is often necessary (though not sufficient) to move towards a negotiated settlement.

Chapter seven investigates what types of ceasefires leaders use in different bargaining situations. It theorizes that the strategic goal leaders pursue through a ceasefire affects the logic of the ceasefire design, and that this logic *and* the actual provisions that are included

condition how long a ceasefire holds. Previous studies have shown that agreement provisions influence the durability of a ceasefire, but these studies fail to consider why such provisions are included and how this affects the likelihood that a ceasefire holds.

Building on the bargaining contexts introduced in chapter six, the chapter argues that in the Diminishing Opponent context, conflict parties have no interest in implementing compliance mechanisms, as such mechanisms make it more costly to gain a military advantage from a ceasefire. In the Forcing Concessions context, leaders have an interest in complying with a ceasefire to signal strength and intent, but a monitoring mechanism may be too costly and time consuming to implement, particularly if leaders are uncertain about an opponent's intent. Consequently, in the Diminishing Opponent and Forcing Concessions contexts, we are likely to see parties use cessations of hostilities, i.e. simple ceasefire arrangements without compliance mechanisms.

By contrast, in the Enabling Agreement context, the stakes for a ceasefire are much higher, as violence hurts progress towards an agreement. Leaders are thus likely to accept monitoring mechanisms to avoid the involuntary collapse of a ceasefire, even if such mechanisms are costly to implement. Accordingly, we expect to see the use of preliminary ceasefires, i.e. ceasefires with compliance provisions in this context.

Chapter seven extends the analysis of the bargaining contexts to the implementation phase to account for the fact that the sequencing of steps after a peace agreement affects bargaining processes. Ceasefires that follow a peace agreement need to terminate armed conflict, not merely suspend the violence. This requires the inclusion of demobilization provisions. Such provisions make it more difficult and more costly for the non-state actor to return to violent conflict. Yet precisely because of this, non-state actors will only accept such provisions once the conflict parties agree on how to address their contested issues and the problem of credible commitment is overcome. Definitive ceasefires – arrangements that include demobilization provisions and are linked to incompatibility provisions – are thus a key *outcome* of the bargaining process, as defined in this thesis.

Together, the underlying ceasefire logic and the independent effect of ceasefire provisions suggest that definitive ceasefires are the most effective way of suspending violence long-term, followed by preliminary ceasefires, which are still more effective than narrower cessation of hostilities arrangements. To assess these expectations, a survival

analysis was conducted on the basis of a ceasefire dataset coded specifically for this purpose. The initial analysis and a range of robustness tests confirm the expectations, finding that the inclusion of additional ceasefire provisions is associated with longer periods of violence suspension. A counterfactual case study of a key episode in the Colombian peace talks offers supporting evidence for the independent effect of monitoring provisions, suggesting that both the underlying logic and the design of a ceasefire matter.

By conceptualizing ceasefires as part of the larger bargaining process, part three of this thesis provides a concise answer to the main research question: the role of ceasefires shifts – from creating a military advantage to increasing the bargaining position to facilitating progress towards settlement – as conflict party leaders adapt their overall strategic goal to their reading of a bargaining situation. Part three also addresses the specific primary research sub-question by theorizing and demonstrating *when* and *why* (chapter six) conflict party leaders use *what types of ceasefires* (chapter seven) as part of a larger bargaining process. The secondary research sub-question – how ceasefires affect bargaining dynamics, in particular the negotiation of the contested issues between the conflict parties – remains to be discussed in this concluding chapter (see *Ceasefires and progress in peace negotiations*).

2. A bird’s-eye perspective on the Colombian case

The 2012–2016 Colombian peace negotiations served as a case study throughout parts two and three to test and illustrate specific components of the complex net of interactions between various actor sub-groups. Building on the insights provided by the previous chapters, this section recounts the Colombian case using the analytical framework introduced in part one. Focusing on the government perspective, it illustrates how interactions between actor sub-groups affect the willingness and ability of conflict party leaders to engage in a ceasefire or settle a conflict, and how the use of conflict violence or ceasefires in turn provide the context in which these actor sub-group interactions take place.

2.1. Recounting key dynamics of the case

In 2016, after four years of negotiations, the Government of Colombia reached an agreement with the FARC on how to address the main contested issues between them, terminating a half-century old armed conflict. Throughout the negotiation phase and in the period leading

up to it, the government's interactions with the FARC took place in the context of intraparty relations that constrained the decision-making process of the incumbent leadership.

While the talks in Havana were literally and metaphorically removed from citizens in Colombia, public opinion nevertheless influenced government decisions in important ways. President Santos needed to ensure a minimal level of public support to secure his re-election, to facilitate the endorsement of an eventual peace agreement in a referendum that he had promised, and to incentivize a future administration to comply with such an agreement. His efforts to mobilize public support for conflict settlement were countered by the opposition camp under the leadership of former president Uribe. Santos and Uribe had, in all likelihood, similar information available about the relative strengths of the government and the FARC, as Santos had served as defense minister under Uribe. Yet, Uribe publicly challenged the decision of President Santos to engage in peace negotiations. It may be that Uribe genuinely disagreed about the benefits of a negotiated settlement: his father was killed by the FARC and he may have had highly salient social preferences for punishment, making settlement an unattractive choice. Alternatively, Uribe may have disagreed for political reasons: the rupture between the two protagonists had started prior to the announcement of the peace process and, by challenging Santos over his decision to negotiate, Uribe was able to mobilize a large following.

Regardless of the underlying motivation, the power struggle between the two presidents had important implications for the peace talks. Uribe mobilized a powerful coalition of political forces against the undertaking. While Santos sought to convey the impression that conflict settlement was preferable to a continuation of armed conflict, Uribe countered this narrative by promoting a backwards-oriented narrative that made the settlement about the FARC, rather than about a better future for the Colombian public.

The armed forces formed another key constituent group in the negotiations. Previous administrations had treated the political approach to the armed conflict as an aspect separate from the military approach, leading to problems and spoiling behavior of the military. Careful not to repeat these experiences, Santos thought to gain the support of the armed forces for the peace negotiations, *inter alia*, by involving high level representatives of the armed forces directly in the negotiation process. The president's clear rejection of a bilateral ceasefire and

his public commitment to continue military operations should also be understood as a nod to the military and to history.¹¹¹

These sub-actor dynamics provided the context in which the government negotiated an end to the armed conflict with FARC leaders. At the leadership level, there was an explicit understanding that battlefield dynamics would not affect the peace negotiations. FARC leaders consistently pressed for a bilateral ceasefire but, in principle, they had agreed to peace talks without such an arrangement in place. Indeed, during the confidential phase of the process, pre-negotiations around the agenda and the rules and procedures of eventual talks continued uninterrupted from the ongoing conflict violence, even in the aftermath of major military offensives on both sides.

These dynamics changed once the peace talks were announced publicly. The Uribe camp raised concerns about the absence of a FARC ceasefire as soon as the government confirmed its decision to engage with the FARC publicly. It built its war narrative around the ongoing hostilities, arguing that peace talks would reward the FARC for its egregious behavior.

During the first two years of the peace negotiations, the fighting was only interrupted by a few temporary FARC ceasefires. The FARC by and large complied with these self-declared arrangements. Yet, because they were temporally limited and bookended by conflict violence, the ceasefires did little to improve public opinion about the peace talks. Towards the end of 2014, in the context of ongoing hostilities, waning public patience and stalled progress at the negotiations, President Santos suspended the talks after FARC members had kidnapped a serving general. This was the clearest sign yet that, despite the often-cited principle of talking-while-fighting, battlefield dynamics *did* affect what happened at the negotiation table. Importantly, Santos did not suspend the talks because he lacked trust in FARC's commitment to the peace process, but in response to a public outcry about the abduction.

After the swift release of the general and the resumption of peace talks, the FARC declared an indefinite ceasefire and largely complied with it. An increase in public support

¹¹¹ Under the Pastrana administration, peace talks were held in a demilitarized zone that is largely seen to have benefitted the FARC (see chapter three, *Conflict background*).

ensued. However, the FARC leadership struggled to keep its rank and file on board with the ceasefire in light of continued government offensives. It was in this context that in March 2015, Santos announced the suspension of air strikes, despite the military's skepticism toward such a move. After the announcement, the president personally toured the military barracks to reassure members of the logic of the peace talks (Colombia Reports 2016, sec. 2015). Land offensives against the FARC continued.

In mid-April 2015, the FARC committed the only major ceasefire violation during the talks. President Santos immediately ordered the resumption of air strikes, "to manage both the angry military and highly skeptical public opinion" (ICG 2015, 1). The FARC initially maintained the ceasefire but suspended it after a largescale government offensive in May 2015.

Peace talks continued, indicating a high level of commitment by leaders on both sides to find a negotiated settlement. Yet, the resumption of hostilities provided a toxic political environment and public support dropped to a record low (ICG 2015; Gallup 2016, 103). It became increasingly clear that battlefield violence threatened to unravel the progress in Havana. In early July 2015, the FARC announced a unilateral ceasefire for a month. Days later, the parties signed an agreement to de-escalate conflict violence and expedite the talks. The FARC declared that it would maintain the ceasefire beyond the one-month period and the government committed to de-escalation measures consistent with the FARC ceasefire.

Both sides complied with their promises, and there were only a handful of lethal incidents. As part of the peace agreement, the parties agreed on a definite bilateral ceasefire that came into effect at the end of August 2016, after the parties had signed a peace agreement. When the agreement was rejected in the plebiscite, the government and the FARC independently declared that the ceasefire would hold and later signed a new ceasefire protocol to formalize the new arrangement.

2.2. Battlefield and negotiation dynamics

Coupled with the theoretical insights of chapters four to seven, the bird's-eye perspective on the Colombian case helps us understand why and when battlefield dynamics affect peace negotiations. Interactions between various actor sub-groups directly and indirectly affected President Santos' decision-making processes and his willingness and ability to engage in a

ceasefire or to make specific concessions. To enable progress towards a negotiated settlement, Santos had to ensure public support and buy-in from the military against the backdrop of continued opposition from the Uribe camp.

Battlefield dynamics conditioned the context in which these interactions took place. Continued hostilities provided munition for the war narrative, helping the Uribe camp fuel perceptions that continued fighting was preferable to conflict settlement. A successful ceasefire and other positive changes in conflict behavior led to a decrease in the salience of social preferences for punishment and provided space for the peace narrative.

These dynamics suggest that, in the context of elite competition and citizen constraints, ongoing hostilities tip the scales in favor of political competitors, while successful ceasefires may help an incumbent pro-settlement government turn the scales to their advantage.¹¹² However, the Colombian case also demonstrates the long shadow of the past, as social preferences for out-group punishment may continue to undermine public support even after hostilities have stopped.

Based on the discussion of the Colombian case, battlefield dynamics would most likely not have shaped the trajectory of the conflict in such a way, had it not been for the interactions between the various government sub-groups, and in particular the need of President Santos to maintain public support for the peace talks in the context of an elite power struggle. A comparison between dynamics during the secret and the public phase of the process offers support for this argument. During the secret phase, public opinion and political competitors did not influence the negotiation *process*, as citizens and competitors had no knowledge of the efforts that took place.¹¹³ Public opinion and elite competition only started influencing events at the negotiation table once the talks became public. Efforts to connect battlefield dynamics to the peace talks began from the moment the talks were

¹¹² Intragroup dynamics differ for authoritarian regimes: authoritarian leaders are less constrained by public opinion and are not subjected to the same degree of public counter-framing as their peers in democratic states. At the same time, authoritarian leaders face internal challengers that vie for the leadership position. Such challengers may seek to mobilize key constituents, such as the military leadership circle, against the incumbent leader by connecting battlefield dynamics to the peace negotiations.

¹¹³ The anticipation by the government of what conditions are acceptable to the public and the military presumably did shape the outcome of the exploratory talks.

publicly confirmed, with Uribe and his followers criticizing the government's decision to negotiate in the absence of a FARC ceasefire.

Non-state actor perspective

These dynamics have important implications for non-state actors. Once they are genuinely interested in securing a political settlement of the conflict, non-state actor leaders will want to make sure that their negotiating partner has the necessary maneuvering space to make concessions. Leaders will thus have to anticipate the effects of their conflict behavior on the opponent's ability to make such concessions. By engaging in a ceasefire, a non-state actor may seek to actively create space for concessions, particularly if public support for a process is low. At the same time, leaders need to keep their own constituents on board. This is true for the peace process more generally, but also more specifically for the implementation of a ceasefire declaration, as a ceasefire provides ample opportunities for spoiling behavior.

In the Colombian case, the upcoming plebiscite accentuated the need for the FARC to ensure that the peace process and the resulting agreement enjoyed public support. With the government unwilling (or unable) to engage in a bilateral ceasefire, a unilateral ceasefire offered an instrument to increase public support when public patience with the process was wearing thin. But such a unilateral ceasefire is challenging to implement and likely unsustainable if not replicated by the opponent. Mid-level commanders and rank and file soldiers may stop complying with a unilateral ceasefire in the long-run if military operations against them continue, particularly if there is no real progress in the peace negotiations.

Consequently, when hostilities inhibit progress towards a negotiated settlement, a bilateral ceasefire, an informal agreement to mutually suspend violence or – as in Colombia – an informally replicated unilateral ceasefire appears necessary to reach a peace agreement.

2.3. Overcoming constituent constraints

The rejection of the peace agreement in the plebiscite was a major setback to the peace process. The events that followed – the re-negotiation of the deal and approval through Congress – may convey the impression that the plebiscite was simply ignored and did not have a major impact on the peace progress. However, the change in the ratification mechanism had important consequences in the implementation phase. It created a sentiment that the will of the people had been betrayed (Nussio 2020, 2). Such sentiments were fueled

by the Uribe camp, which continued to oppose the peace deal and cast doubt on the legitimacy of the government's move.

Consequently, the incoming administration under (Uribe protégé) President Duque did not feel fully bound by the peace agreement. The implementation of the peace agreement slowed down considerably when he took office (Nussio 2020, 2; Janetsky 2019). In August 2019, three years after the signing of the original peace agreement, former FARC chief negotiator Iván Márquez and other former senior commanders called on former FARC combatants to take up arms and enter into a new phase of conflict. Márquez cited a failure by the government to implement the peace agreement as a key reason to return to the armed struggle (BBC 2019).

In most intrastate conflicts, a change in the ratification mechanism may not be a feasible means to overcoming constituent constraints. However, the lessons of the Colombian case also apply if the *process* of reaching an agreement is perceived as illegitimate or if popular support for an agreement is lacking (even in the absence of a formal ratification requirement). In democracies, where the implementation phase usually extends beyond the term of an incumbent administration, an illegitimate process or unpopular agreement may result in a situation where a new administration does not feel bound by an agreement. In cases where a government is involved in multiple armed conflicts, implementation failures by a new administration can have a ripple effect on negotiations with other armed actors, accentuating the problem of credible commitment.¹¹⁴

3. Contributions and implications of the findings

This section ties the theoretical, conceptual and empirical findings of this thesis back to bargaining theory, ceasefire literature and other relevant strands of academic research and the scholar-practitioner literature. Doing so clarifies the contributions and implications of this thesis on our understanding of the transition from war to negotiated peace.

¹¹⁴ In the Colombian case, the implementation phase was likely closely observed by the smaller guerilla group ELN, which had been engaged in on-off peace talks with the government.

3.1. Main contributions

The main theoretical contribution of this thesis is to merge insights from different bodies of literature to form a coherent theory of the role of ceasefires in intrastate bargaining processes. Previous studies of the role of ceasefires in intrastate conflicts (e.g. Akebo 2013; 2016; 2019; Brickhill 2018; Chounet-Cambas 2011; Höglund 2011; Mahieu 2007) show how ceasefires affect conflict dynamics, but these studies do not systematically link the use of ceasefires to wider decision-making processes. Bargaining theory (e.g. Fearon 1995; Powell 1999; Reiter 2003; 2009; Wagner 2000; Walter 1997; 2009) provides a rationalist framework to systematically embed an analysis of ceasefires in the context of wider political and military approaches to a conflict. Yet bargaining scholars fail to consider the negative socio-psychological effects of fighting and how they may shape the space for a negotiated agreement. Consequently, they tend to disregard the role of ceasefires in bargaining processes or define ceasefires in opposition to fighting. This ignores the specific, and shifting, role ceasefires play over the course of a peace process.

The integration of constituent constraints and social preferences in a bargaining framework allows merging insights from bargaining theory, which is located squarely in a rationalist school of thought, and socio-psychologically oriented peace and conflict studies, which are more commonly associated with a constructivist worldview. Doing so illustrates how, contrary to popular perceptions (see Greig and Diehl 2005, 624–29), insights from these two separate bodies of work are complementary rather than contradictory. At a theoretical level, this provides a prime example of a fruitful synthesis between rationalist and constructivist approaches (see Adler 2012; Fearon and Wendt 2002), bringing agency into the otherwise strongly structure-focused bargaining theory. At a conceptual level, this provides the basis to dissect the manifold functions of ceasefires in intrastate bargaining processes.

The theoretical and empirical findings challenge the assumption of extant bargaining theory that, over time, fighting always reveals a bargaining range. For while fighting reveals information, it also fuels or entrenches mutual hatred and by extension creates or engrains the problem of costly concessions. This demonstrates how one bargaining problem (imperfect information) may result in conflict behavior (fighting) that creates, accentuates or entrenches another bargaining problem (costly concessions). Appreciating such dynamics contributes to our understanding of why conflicts become intractable.

Integrating the use of conflict narratives into the analysis of bargaining processes, this thesis further builds on and enriches bargaining theory in an unconventional way. It demonstrates how conflict party leaders may seek to deliberately shape perceptions about the bargaining space, and how ongoing battlefield dynamics condition their ability to do so in the context of elite competition. This points to a previously understudied function of ceasefires: their ability to provide a space for a peace narrative to take hold.

The conceptualization of ceasefires as bargaining instruments builds on these insights. By relating the use of ceasefires to the shifting strategic goal of conflict party leaders in three specific bargaining contexts, the thesis provides a nuanced answer to the main research question of what the role of ceasefires as bargaining instruments is. It also answers parts of the primary research sub-question, theorizing *when* and *why* conflict party leaders use ceasefires as part of a larger bargaining process.

To answer the remaining part of the primary research sub-question (*what types of ceasefires* leaders use in these specific bargaining contexts), the analysis then applies the bargaining contexts to the study of ceasefire design. The analysis suggests that leaders use cessations of hostilities arrangements in the Diminishing Opponent and Forcing Concessions contexts, preliminary ceasefires in the Enabling Agreement context, and definitive ceasefires only once they agree on how to address the main contested issues. The theoretical and empirical findings clarify our understanding of how compliance mechanisms lead to longer-lasting ceasefire agreements. Ceasefires with certain provisions hold longer both because of the logic driving the adoption of compliance mechanisms, and because of the independent effect of such mechanisms. The implications – that provisions tend to occur in specific strategic situations but are not merely epiphenomenal – contribute to a key debate in international relations about the ability of conflict parties to self-enforce agreements.

More generally, conceiving of ceasefires as strategic bargaining instruments provides the foundation to anchor future ceasefire research in bargaining theory. Such research not only systematizes our understanding of ceasefires, but also ensures that insights from ceasefire research feed back into our understanding of wider intrastate bargaining processes. The multi-method research design of this thesis provides an example on how to corroborate and test such research empirically. Drawing observable implications and testing them through quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods, the theory-testing parts of the thesis are

particularly valuable for other scholars seeking to operationalize and test theories involving abstract concepts such as perceptions, information and good faith.

3.2. Ceasefires and progress in peace negotiations

As this thesis demonstrates, bargaining processes shape the use of ceasefires and vice versa. The thesis focuses on the former, but its implications extend to the latter: as the strategic use of ceasefires shifts over the course of a bargaining process, the effect of a ceasefire on the bargaining process also shifts. This is because leaders' reasons to engage in a ceasefire have a bearing on how they behave during the ceasefire, and by extension, conditions the effect of a ceasefire on the conflict and on peace negotiations.

Leaders who pursue a ceasefire to create a military advantage have an incentive to misrepresent their reason for entering into a ceasefire. The actions that follow will likely betray the stated purpose of the ceasefire, increasing mistrust between belligerents and making it less likely that belligerents engage in genuine negotiation efforts.

Leaders who want to strengthen their bargaining position may use a ceasefire to convey information about their fighting capabilities and resolve, or to signal good faith to start or revive peace negotiations. Compliance with a ceasefire provides information about the coherence of a conflict party and leadership control and enables leaders to send a costly signal about the intent to explore negotiated settlement. Consequently, a successful ceasefire may enable progress towards settlement, while major violations of a ceasefire impede such progress.

Finally, leaders who engage in a ceasefire to facilitate progress towards a peace agreement may seek to build up trust or increase public support for a negotiated settlement. Ceasefire compliance helps them demonstrate commitment and create space for a peace narrative to take hold. The threat of violence or an alternation between ceasefires and battlefield violence, meanwhile, are not conducive towards reaching such objectives.

This implies that ceasefire compliance *facilitates* progress in peace negotiations once conflict party leaders see the benefits of a negotiated settlement, i.e., once they have moved beyond the Diminishing Opponent context. By contrast, ceasefire violations threaten to undermine such progress, particularly before conflict party leaders have established that the

opponent is acting in good faith (that is, has also moved beyond the Diminishing Opponent context).

Clarifying the strategic situations in which ceasefires take place also provides important information about different types of ceasefire violations that may occur. As long as conflict party leaders pursue a military advantage through a ceasefire, leaders have no vested interest in ceasefire compliance. On the contrary, ceasefire violations may form part of the cost-benefit analysis of engaging in a ceasefire in the first place. This changes once conflict party leaders recognize the benefits of conflict settlement over a military outcome to the conflict. For when ceasefires serve to demonstrate strength or increase the chances of settlement, leaders have a vested interest in ceasefire compliance, as ceasefire violations undermine the projection of strength, increase distrust and undermine public support for negotiations. This in turn offers an incentive for internal challengers to engage in ceasefire violations, to undermine the efforts of the conflict party leadership.

In short, the shifting functions of a ceasefire over the course of a bargaining process suggest that we may see different types of ceasefire violations at different moments during a peace process. Future research could build on the bargaining contexts provided in chapter six to develop a typology of ceasefire violations and discuss their prevalence, interpretation and responses, which would further sharpen our understanding of the different trajectories of conflict in the aftermath of ceasefire violations.

3.3. Contributions to other strands of literature

Multiple findings of this thesis speak to issues in related strands of literature that are not at the center of this thesis. These findings put a theoretical and empirical fundament under some often repeated arguments in policy and academia, while challenging or clarifying others.

One such issue is the effect of civil conflict on liberal democracies. The argument that wars tend to increase authoritarian tendencies (at least in the short term) is widely accepted, yet the mechanisms that lead to these tendencies are not fully understood (Krebs 2009, 187). A common explanation is that in times of insecurity, the executive acts with less constraints and scrutiny, as citizens are more willing to accept a reduction of civil liberties if they feel under threat (Davis and Silver 2004; Hutchison and Gibler 2007; Krebs 2009). This thesis offers an additional reason as to why we may see authoritarian tendencies in the context of

civil wars: leaders may partially overcome the problem of costly concessions by decreasing their sensitivity to constituent preferences, providing them with an incentive to explore such possibilities as they seek to settle conflicts. Future research on the effects of civil conflict on liberal democracies should therefore not limit its analyses to military approaches to conflicts, and instead focus on the intersection of military and political approaches.

The thesis further contributes to the study of conflict ripeness. Zartman famously proposed that a ‘mutually hurting stalemate’ is a necessary condition for conflict ripeness (Zartman 1989; 2000; 2001; 2005). This led to a common perception that the costs of war needed to be high for a conflict to be ripe for settlement. However, the concept of mutually hurting stalemates – as originally conceived – relates to a ripe moment to start negotiations, rather than ripeness to fully settle a conflict (see also Greig 2005). Indeed, as Zartman acknowledges, hostilities may at times increase rather than reduce resistance to settlement (Zartman 2001, 12), thus potentially undermining progress in negotiations (see also Coleman 1997; Greig and Diehl 2005, 625–26; Mahieu 2007, 9–10). This thesis clarifies the complex relationship between ceasefires and progress towards conflict settlement: while it may be necessary for warring parties to experience a mutually hurting stalemate to enter into negotiations, a ceasefire or other forms of violence reductions during negotiations are often necessary to enable leaders to move towards a final settlement.

Relatedly, the thesis clarifies the relationship between ceasefires and so-called frozen conflicts, i.e. conflicts that remain unresolved for decades without a resumption of hostilities. Scholars have noted that a ceasefire introduces a pro–status quo bias, arguing that this may lead to situations of ‘no war and no peace’ (see Chounet-Cambas 2011, 15–16; Mahieu 2007, 211, 217). This thesis suggests that under certain scope conditions – in particular, if an agreement is not imposed nor has any party surrendered – conflict parties will escalate back to violence if there is no progress towards a negotiated settlement. Actors who challenge the status quo will not voluntarily accept provisions that disable a return to open hostilities before the main contested issues are addressed. In the absence of external enforcement, actors thus retain the ability to return to fighting during negotiations if a process remains stalled. This suggests that the problem of frozen conflicts is linked to imposed and externally enforced ceasefires, and not to ceasefires that are negotiated and implemented on the basis of shared consent.

Finally, the thesis makes an important contribution to the debate about the role of inclusivity in peace processes, a principle promoted by the UN Guidance on Mediation. The debate around inclusivity tends to be “prescriptive and binary” (Hellmüller, Pring, and Richmond 2020, 346) between those promoting inclusivity and those advocating a pragmatic approach that prioritizes the efficiency of a process. Yet, as this thesis shows, inclusivity and efficiency are not contradictory. Indeed, some form of inclusivity (although not necessarily direct participation in a process) may often be necessary to reach a sustainable agreement. Without the support of constituents, it may simply be too costly for leaders to make concessions that are necessary to reach a conflict settlement. And even if reaching an agreement is feasible, a settlement reached in a purely elite-driven process risks being overthrown by an incoming administration. This provides a rationalist argument to diffuse the inclusivity norm in peace processes.

At the same time, the theoretical and empirical findings point to the risk of exposing a peace process to multiple constituent groups too early in the process. As the theory in this thesis suggests and the Colombia case clearly demonstrates, intragroup dynamics tend to amplify the negative impact of conflict violence on peace negotiations. In the fog of war, it is difficult to implement a ceasefire as long as conflict party leaders are uncertain about the opponent’s intent, and it is difficult to establish trust in the opponent’s good faith if political competitors use continued hostilities to mobilize public opinion against peace talks. This suggests that it may often make sense to start peace talks, or talks about the talks, in a confidential, elite-based setting. Once leaders establish that their opponent is acting in good faith, they may broaden participation and include actor sub-groups to ensure broader support of an eventual agreement. Such sequencing strategies constitute an important avenue for future research.

4. Implications for third party engagement

The main motivation for this thesis was a desire to understand how we can most effectively support conflict parties in reaching conflict settlement. The thesis focuses on the conflict party perspective, based on the assumption that effective strategies to promote progress towards settlement require a thorough understanding of parties’ incentive structures and constraints. By increasing our understanding of the shifting role and effects of ceasefires over the course of a conflict, the findings help identify what types of third party engagement at

what moments in the bargaining process support progress towards a peace agreement, and when and why some (well-intended) initiatives may impede rather than facilitate such progress.

The role of third parties and process design

Established bargaining theory implies three key roles for third party actors who seek to promote conflict settlement: providing information, increasing the expected future costs of war or the benefits of settlement, and helping conflict parties overcome the problem of credible commitment (Beardsley et al. 2006; Kydd 2003; 2010; Savun 2008; Walter 1997). The problem of costly concessions demonstrates the perils of implementing third-party assistance solely at the leadership level, at which these interventions are usually targeted. Constituents shape their leader's decisions, even if they are not present at the negotiation table. When social preferences for the punishment of the opponent are salient, negotiating a deal may not be politically feasible for their leaders. Third parties interested in promoting conflict settlement should therefore consider support for initiatives on multiple levels.

At the same time, the theoretical and empirical findings raise questions about the recent push for inclusivity at all stages of a peace process. Policy makers should carefully consider intragroup dynamics when advising conflict parties or third parties on negotiation process design, as exposing leaders too early to such dynamics risks undermining the early confidence building phase. Third parties may also engage in 'softer' initiatives that seek to promote the peace narrative and humanize the opponent, rather than only supporting initiatives directly linked to negotiations.

The impact of fighting on bargaining dynamics also highlights the importance of conflict prevention. As fighting increases the saliency of social preferences, more information is needed to settle a conflict after the onset of war. And as the thesis demonstrates, negotiating conflict settlement with a sworn enemy may be politically unfeasible even under the assumption of perfect information. Investing resources in third-party engagement is therefore most effective before war breaks out.

An analysis of elite narratives can provide an early warning signal about the potential of violence eruption and inform preventive engagement. Importantly, a war narrative does not need to include a call to war. The discussion of the Colombian case demonstrates that elites may claim to support conflict settlement, while presenting conflict dynamics in a way that

impedes the search for such a settlement. Understanding these dynamics allows an early identification of, and engagement with, narratives that potentially fuel violent conflict, even if the proponents of such narratives hide behind a stated wish to settle a conflict peacefully.

Negotiating and implementing ceasefire arrangements

Beyond these broader implications for third-party engagement, the thesis offers specific insights for third parties that support the negotiation and implementation of ceasefire agreements. Examples of such actors are the UNDPPA Mediation Support Unit, the UN Standby Team of Senior Mediation Advisors, mediation support units of regional organizations and peacekeeping missions. These actors should be aware that, as conflict party leaders' use of ceasefires shifts over the course of a conflict, the same third-party intervention may lead to different outcomes at different times of a conflict. Continued pressure on conflict parties to comply with a ceasefire may, in some cases, make sense in the Diminishing Opponent context, if it saves lives (see also Mahieu 2007) or ensures that neither side gains militarily from the arrangement. However, in the Forcing Concessions context, imposed ceasefires will likely fail to reveal information about capabilities, resolve and genuine interest in negotiations, and in the Enabling Agreement context, external enforcement may undermine important trust building functions. This demonstrates the importance of a context sensitive engagement by actors seeking to facilitate the transition from war to peace.

It also points to a potential tension between the mandates of different international actors, in particular between actors that seek to maintain a ceasefire (such as UN peacekeeping missions) and actors that seek to foster progress in peace negotiations (such as the UNDPPA Mediation Support Unit). Future research could clarify this potential tension and devise strategies to mitigate a tradeoff between different third party goals. This thesis provides the theoretical and conceptual foundation to conduct such research.

The link between ceasefire objectives and ceasefire design points to the important, if limited, agency of third-party actors in helping parties design ceasefires that hold. If conflict parties use ceasefires and their provisions to address specific bargaining challenges, this limits the extent to which ceasefires can be optimized. Demobilization and incompatibility mechanisms combined are associated with the longest periods of violence suspension, but these provisions are the main outcome of political negotiations rather than technical add-ons. In many cases, if conflict party leaders have not yet established confidence in the good faith

of the opponent, it may make sense to implement a less comprehensive ceasefire to silence the guns while the parties negotiate over the contested issues and a potentially more comprehensive ceasefire. Similarly, in high risk contexts, where parties do not have a history of cooperation, calling for compliance mechanisms may add an additional barrier to putting an immediate halt to the violence. The risk that cessations of hostilities break down is higher, but they are put in place more easily and more quickly than preliminary ceasefires. And if they hold, they send a strong signal that parties are genuinely interested in exploring political negotiations.

The analysis of the logics of ceasefire design suggests that conflict parties, and actors offering technical support to them, should seek to devise arrangements that are as comprehensive as possible, while ensuring that provisions align with the bargaining context in which a ceasefire takes place. If and when conflict parties agree to the use of monitoring mechanisms, third parties may contribute resources and offer to participate in them. If they are seen as an impartial, legitimate actor, they may help parties differentiate between different types of ceasefire violations, making a ceasefire more resilient to incidents and spoiling behavior.

5. Conclusion

Ceasefires form an integral part of the transition from war to peace. Existing studies undertheorize the strategic use of ceasefires in relationship to larger military or political approaches, a gap that this thesis addresses by conceptualizing ceasefires as strategic instruments in intrastate bargaining processes. The contributions of this thesis demonstrate how – far from stopping the flow of information – ceasefires can provide new information about relative strength and help conflict party leaders overcome other bargaining problems. Ceasefires are not the converse of fighting: they are more challenging to manage than fighting, as they are declared *ex ante* and create opportunities for spoiling behavior. As a result, their impact is more nuanced and multifaceted. Much like fighting, ceasefires can affect the relative strength of conflict parties and may fuel hatred if violated in letter or in spirit. They may provide additional information about the relative strength of conflict parties, including information that is difficult to convey through fighting alone. Finally, ceasefires can fulfill functions in the bargaining process that fighting undermines, such as demonstrating commitment to a political solution and creating space for a peace narrative to

take hold. Appropriate third party engagement helps parties make ceasefires more resilient to non-strategic violations, but imposed ceasefires may undermine important bargaining functions that can help parties move towards a negotiated settlement.