
Small-Scale Agreements, Large-Scale Impacts: The Impact of Local Ceasefires on Conflict-Wide Ceasefires

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Abstract When do local ceasefires lead to the onset and success of conflict-wide ceasefires? Drawing on the literature on ceasefires, mediation, and bargaining, I explore the understudied influence of local ceasefire agreements on broader processes of peace and conflict resolution. I argue that internal mediation provides unique advantages in local ceasefire negotiations that allow it to more effectively reveal information and contribute to confidence building, thus leading to the onset and success of a subsequent conflict-wide ceasefire. External mediation, however, undermines the ability of a local ceasefire to resolve commitment problems and contribute to gradual confidence building. International pressure combines with the limited scope and lower compliance costs of local ceasefires to create false incentives to comply with the ceasefire. This harms the ceasefires' ability to contribute to the resolution of bargaining problems and makes external mediation less likely to lead to the onset and success of a conflict-wide ceasefire. I test my argument using an extension of the Civil Conflict CeaseFire (CF) Dataset, which covers all ceasefires conducted globally from 1989 to 2020. This article presents important implications for the potential negative impact of external mediation beyond simply ceasefire failure.

Introduction

Despite recent research investigating ceasefires, local ceasefires, which only apply to a portion of the battlefield of a conflict, remain understudied (Lundgren et al., 2023). Although all local ceasefires are meant to limit conflict in a specific area, they do not all impact progress toward lasting peace in the same way. This can be seen in the contrast between the local ceasefire in Wunlit, Sudan, mediated by the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC), and the local ceasefire in Homs, Syria, mediated by the UN.

The Wunlit Peace and Reconciliation Conference in Sudan contributed greatly to the process of peace. The conference, held from February 27 to March 8, 1999, was intended to address escalating violence between the Dinka and Nuer communities in the area. This escalation was sparked by a split along ethnic lines in the SPLM/A, one of the major rebel groups fighting the Sudanese government. In 1991, Riek Machar, an ethnic Nuer, split from the mainstream SPLM/A, which was led by John Garang, an ethnic Dinka. The conflict between the mainstream SPLM/A and the faction led by Machar spilled over into local communities, fueling conflict between the Dinka and

Nuer communities near the village of Wunlit. Fighting continued to escalate, sparking concerns about famine, until 1999, when the NSCC mediated the Wunlit Peace and Reconciliation Conference in an attempt to de-escalate the conflict and improve the humanitarian situation. Although the focus of the conference was building peace between local chiefs and villages, the NSCC still sought the approval of the rebel groups and included both local SPLM/A representatives and Machar faction observers in the negotiations. The conference was ultimately successful, resulting in a ceasefire agreement for the Nuer and Dinka communities in the area (Bradbury et al., 2006).

The Wunlit ceasefire ultimately contributed directly to de-escalating conflict between the mainstream SPLM/A and the group led by Machar. The NSCC replicated this ceasefire in several other areas experiencing similar ethnic conflicts sparked by conflicts between rebel groups, including in Waat and Liliir. These efforts by the NSCC continued to de-escalate the conflict between the two rebel groups. This culminated in the NSCC mediating a meeting explicitly intended to link their local efforts to national peace processes (Bradbury et al., 2006). Shortly after this meeting, the mainstream SPLM/A and Machar's faction signed an agreement to cease fire and reunite into one group under Garang (Sudan's Peace Process, 2002). This conflict-wide ceasefire was clearly facilitated by the local Wunlit ceasefire and its successors in Waat and Liliir.

The UN-mediated local ceasefire in Homs, Syria, presents a contrast with the Wunlit ceasefire. In early 2013 parts of the city of Homs, which housed several rebel groups and many civilians, fell under siege by the National Defense Force and the Syrian National Army. By early 2014, the situation had generated humanitarian concerns, with over 2,000 civilians trapped without sufficient food, water, or medical care. Several attempts had already been made to address the situation in the old city, with varying degrees of success; however, none managed to produce a ceasefire that was comprehensive enough to alleviate the situation. This time, several local groups in Homs formed a committee and reached out to the UN to request mediation. The UN was able to broker a ceasefire in the old city to allow for the evacuation of civilians and distribution of humanitarian aid from February 7 to 12, 2014. The ceasefire was largely successful in facilitating evacuations but did not ultimately lead to significant progress toward peace. After the ceasefire elapsed, fighting resumed (Turkmani et al., 2014). The ceasefire also failed to spark any progress towards peace on the national level, with the next major attempt at conflict-wide peace, mediated by the UN in Geneva in 2016, failing to produce any agreement (Collin, 2018).

Although the ceasefires in Wunlit and Homs share many similar characteristics, one contributed to broader peace processes while the other did not. The existing literature does not specifically discuss when local ceasefires may or may not contribute to broader processes of peace, but other relevant findings suggest that both ceasefires should have had similar impacts. Both ceasefires were pursued to alleviate humanitarian concerns in the areas they applied to, so neither was pursued for a purpose that would make one more likely to contribute to peace than the other (Clayton & Sticher, 2021; Sticher and Vukovic, 2021). Both Homs and Wunlit were part of a larger process of peace in their local areas, and both of these larger processes involved repeated attempts at local

ceasefires between the relevant parties with varying levels of success. As such, both contexts should have had similar likelihoods of producing a successful conflict-wide ceasefire (Lundgren et al., 2023; Clayton, 2013; Clayton, Nygård, Rustad, et al., 2023). The ceasefire in Homs included monitoring by the UN, which should have made it even more likely to be successful and contribute to confidence building between the parties (Fortna, 2003). Yet, this was the local ceasefire that failed to contribute to a conflict-wide ceasefire. Finally, local ceasefires, in general, are found to contribute to confidence-building between the parties (Lundgren et al., 2023). It is reasonable to expect this confidence building, if it occurs, to contribute to advancing broader peace processes and thus increase the likelihood of a conflict-wide ceasefire occurring. Wunlit was noted to have this expected effect, but Homs did not appear to contribute to confidence-building (Bradbury et al., 2006; Turkmani et al., 2014).

The most significant difference between the local ceasefires in Wunlit and Homs is their mediation. The Homs ceasefire was mediated by the UN, a mediator that is clearly external to the conflict (Turkmani et al., 2014). The Wunlit ceasefire, in contrast, was mediated by the NSCC, which was a coalition of local Sudanese churches. This coalition was an internal mediator coming from within the country (Bradbury et al., 2006). However, the existing literature implies that this difference should not lead to their different outcomes either. Although internal mediation is found to improve the success of local ceasefires, external mediation has no significant effect on the success of local ceasefires (Karakus & Svensson, 2020). This is despite contradictory findings that external mediation harms the success of conflict-wide ceasefires as it imposes false incentives to enter an agreement before bargaining problems have been resolved (Werner & Yuen, 2005). If externally mediated local ceasefires are no less likely to succeed, then it could be assumed that they are also no less likely to contribute to the resolution of bargaining problems and thus advance progress toward a conflict-wide ceasefire. However, if that is the case, why did the ceasefire in Wunlit lead to a successful conflict-wide ceasefire while the ceasefire in Homs did not? This puzzle leads to the question motivating my research: why do some local ceasefires lead to the onset and success of a conflict-wide ceasefire while others do not?

Literature Review

Ceasefires have received significant attention in past literature, particularly in recent years, however several gaps remain. Existing literature considers the role of conflict-wide ceasefires in broader peace processes but has yet to consider how local ceasefires contribute to these processes. This gap persists despite acknowledgment of the influence of contextual factors surrounding the ceasefire on its onset and success. Finally, the minimal literature that addresses local ceasefires presents several contradictions, with literature investigating conflict-wide ceasefires suggesting that local ceasefires may function differently from conflict-wide ones.

One portion of the past research is largely theoretical, attempting to illustrate the role of ceasefires within broader conflict dynamics. However, this research fails to consider local ceasefires. Rather than consistently serving the same purpose or

occurring during the same stage of conflicts, ceasefires can arise across a range of bargaining contexts and are designed to address the information or commitment problems that are present at that stage (Clayton & Sticher, 2021; Sticher and Vukovic 2021; Sticher, 2022). These works emphasize that ceasefires are not just motivated by a genuine desire for peace but are also pursued as a strategic tool for combatants to advance their military goals (Clayton & Sticher, 2021; Sticher and Vukovic, 2021; Richmond, 1998). Despite their potential to undermine the progression of conflict, Sticher (2022) argues that ceasefires can play a role in advancing progress toward peace by providing information and building trust between combatants. This section of the literature largely focuses on conflict-wide ceasefires and fails to consider how the role of local ceasefires may differ.

Previous research has identified many factors that influence ceasefire onset. The characteristics of a rebel group, such as their relative strength or international support, can impact their likelihood of entering an agreement (Clayton, 2013; Clayton, Nygård, Rustad, et al., 2023). Additionally, the involvement of a mediator can increase the likelihood that a ceasefire will occur as they can provide political cover for the leader (Clayton, Nygård, Rustad, et al., 2023). Insider-partial mediators specifically can increase the likelihood of a ceasefire through their existing knowledge about the parties and incentive to act honestly due to their potential for continued interactions with the parties (Svensson & Lindgren, 2013). The costs of the conflict and potential ceasefire also influence the likelihood of ceasefire onset. Like continuing conflict, agreeing to a ceasefire imposes costs on combatants (Clayton, Nygård, Rustad, et al., 2023). High costs of conflict, such as high civilian victimization and conflict intensity, increase the likelihood of a ceasefire as combatants attempt to minimize these costs (Clayton, Nygård, Rustad, et al., 2023). However, the audience costs leaders may face for agreeing to a ceasefire with unpopular concessions can lead them to continue the conflict instead, even if they prefer the ceasefire (Sticher, 2021). This research centers almost exclusively on conflict-wide ceasefires, failing to consider local ceasefires. This is especially relevant given that the limited nature of local ceasefires may impact their costs.

Finally, a combatant's past interactions may impact its likelihood of entering a ceasefire. In an investigation of rebels in Myanmar, Dukalskis (2015) found that older rebel groups were less likely to enter a ceasefire with the government in part due to their longer history of negative interactions with the government. States can also build a reputation for upholding ceasefires. A state that upholds a ceasefire with one rebel group demonstrates to others that it is committed to cooperation, making other groups more likely to enter a ceasefire (Bara & Clayton, 2023). Despite this acceptance that the past interactions preceding conflict-wide ceasefire agreements matter, researchers have yet to consider the impact of local ceasefires as one such interaction.

Ceasefire success has also been widely investigated in the existing literature. The provisions of a ceasefire agreement have been widely considered. Fortna (2003) finds that the specific measures in a ceasefire agreement, such as the establishment of a demilitarized zone, peacekeeping, and dispute resolution procedures, impact the

agreement's success. Agreements with stronger, more specific, and more detailed provisions are more likely to be successful in minimizing incentives to break the ceasefire and reducing uncertainty (Fortna, 2003). Regarding local ceasefires, Lundgren et al. (2023) find that stepwise implementation measures increase the likelihood that the ceasefire will lead to de-escalation. Karakus and Svensson (2020) find that confidence-building measures improve the success of local ceasefires. However, they also find that other measures of agreement quality, including specificity and separation of troops, have no impact on the success of local ceasefire agreements, contrasting with the findings of Fortna (2003) (Karakus & Svensson, 2020). This presents a contradiction between the findings on local and conflict-wide ceasefires. This indicates that the two kinds of ceasefires may function differently, demonstrating the importance of further research.

A second contradiction between past findings on the success of conflict-wide and local ceasefires is the impact of mediation. Although 3rd party mediation can make a ceasefire more likely to occur, it can also make it more likely to fail. Werner and Yuen (2005) find that conflict-wide peace agreements prompted by external pressure are more likely to fail since the combatants have not yet become certain about the consequences of continuing to fight, and the agreement is less likely to reflect the true military situation. Karakus and Svensson (2020) investigate local ceasefires specifically and find, similar to Svensson and Lindgren (2013), that insider mediators lead to more successful ceasefires. However, in contrast to Werner and Yuen (2005), they find that external mediation has no significant effect on ceasefire success (Karakus & Svensson, 2020). This contrast further indicates the need to explore the differences in dynamics between conflict-wide and local ceasefires.

Finally, the influence of the context surrounding a ceasefire has also been found to impact its success. A ceasefire between parties with a history of past ceasefires together is more likely to lead to a decrease in conflict intensity, as repeated local ceasefires can encourage gradual trust-building between the parties (Lundgren et al., 2023). Contextual factors outside of the dyad in question can also impact ceasefire success. Braithwaite and Butcher (2023) find that non-rebel resistance to a government can make rebel groups more likely to break their ceasefire with the government as the resistance changes the balance of power. This literature clearly acknowledges the importance of the context surrounding ceasefire agreements and has begun to uncover contradictions between the dynamics of conflict-wide and local ceasefires but has yet to investigate how local ceasefires fit into broader processes of conflict.

Theory and Hypotheses

I argue that the type of mediation used in a local ceasefire influences its likelihood of leading to the onset and success of a subsequent conflict-wide ceasefire. I first establish my expectations of how non-mediated local ceasefires lead to the onset and success of conflict-wide ceasefires. I then discuss internally mediated ceasefires, which are mediated by actors that come from within the conflict in question and externally mediated ceasefires, which are mediated by actors from outside of the

conflict in question (Svensson & Lindgren, 2013).

I argue that non-mediated local ceasefires, like conflict-wide ceasefires, contribute to the resolution of bargaining problems, thus advancing progress toward peace. Conflict-wide ceasefires are found to reveal information, such as the strength of the parties' leadership and intention to keep fighting and contribute to the resolution of commitment problems, including by signaling a credible commitment to the peace process (Sticher & Vuković, 2021; Sticher, 2022; Clayton & Sticher, 2021). Local ceasefires still involve negotiations and concessions between the parties, and so are also capable of revealing information and signaling credible commitment. However, since local ceasefires cannot end a conflict on their own, this resolution of bargaining problems increases the likelihood that the conflict parties will pursue a conflict-wide ceasefire.

The limited nature of local ceasefires also leads to functions distinct from those of conflict-wide ceasefires. Local ceasefires are particularly noted for their ability to contribute to gradual trust-building between conflict parties. They serve as smaller steps in the peace process, allowing parties to gradually build confidence in one another and de-escalate their conflict (Karakus & Svensson, 2020; Lundgren et al., 2023). I argue that the limited nature of local ceasefires aids in this gradual trust-building process. Since local ceasefires do not completely suspend a conflict, the parties face lower costs for complying with a local ceasefire than a conflict-wide one. A limited agreement entails fewer concessions to an opponent, so a local ceasefire is less likely to generate backlash from a leader's constituents (Sticher, 2021). The explicit limits of local ceasefires also allow leaders to avoid seeming weak to their opponents while still engaging in the ceasefire (Sticher & Vuković, 2021). Finally, it is possible for local ceasefires to present a less costly commitment problem than conflict-wide ceasefires as they do not fully tie their participants' hands, allowing them to continue fighting elsewhere. These dynamics allow local ceasefires to begin addressing bargaining problems and building trust even in contexts where a conflict-wide ceasefire is unlikely.

Internal and external mediation have diverging impacts on the ability of local ceasefires to resolve bargaining problems. Internal mediation improves a local ceasefire's ability to resolve information problems, while external mediation worsens it. Internal mediators are more likely to have a preference on the issue of the conflict, allowing them to reveal information more credibly to the involved parties as they do not have an incentive to misrepresent information to get the parties to sign an agreement (Kydd, 2006; Svensson & Lindgren, 2013). External mediators are unconnected with the conflict outside their role as mediators, so are unlikely to have such a preference. Given that local ceasefires have limited ability to resolve the underlying issues of a conflict, it is even more likely that an external mediator pursuing a local ceasefire rather than a conflict-wide one will be neutral or have the sole goal of ending the conflict, making it unlikely that they will benefit from bias. Even when internal mediators have a largely humanitarian purpose, they are still likely to have some bias. Their connections to the situation allow them to present themselves as representatives of the civilians in harm's way, showing bias towards the specific actions desired by

the civilians rather than any outcome that will produce an agreement. For example, a team of local professionals in Aleppo, Syria, convinced the government and rebel forces fighting over a power plant of their credibility as mediators by emphasizing that their goal was the restoration of power to the city for civilians (Turkmani et al., 2014).

Internal mediators are also better able to reveal information that the parties have an incentive to misrepresent. To do this, the mediator must have significant knowledge of the conflict and the parties involved (Wiegand et al., 2021; Svensson & Lindgren, 2013). Insiders are likely to have or be able to obtain information about the parties' capabilities and resolve through their personal connections and experiences in the conflict, while external mediators lack these advantages (Svensson & Lindgren, 2013; Karakus & Svensson, 2020). In local ceasefires, mediators also need significant information about the local context to guide parties to an optimal agreement and provide new relevant information. First, local ceasefires are frequently highly concrete, including provisions such as the reopening of specific roads or joint use of utilities such as water (Pospisil, 2022; Bradbury et al., 2006). Second, knowledge about the needs of local civilians and the local roots of conflict can be leveraged to produce more sustainable agreements (Turkmani et al., 2014). Internal mediators are much more likely to have access to this kind of information, allowing them to effectively facilitate deals and contribute to trust building. External mediators, in contrast, are more likely to lack this local knowledge, making them less able to effectively guide the parties to an optimal agreement.

The reputation of mediators also plays a role in the resolution of bargaining problems. Mediators can build reputations through repeated interactions with conflicting parties, incentivizing honesty and improving their credibility (Svensson & Lindgren, 2013; Karakus & Svensson, 2020; Kydd, 2006). Insiders will have repeated future interactions with the conflict parties and so have the possibility of facing reputation costs (Svensson & Lindgren, 2013; Karakus & Svensson, 2020). However, external mediators are not likely to interact with the conflict parties after negotiations, so they do not have the same level of credibility (Svensson & Lindgren, 2013). Additionally, internal mediation teams in local ceasefires frequently include local professionals or religious leaders who can leverage an existing reputation within the area to enhance their credibility (Pospisil et al., 2020). For example, mediation teams in Syrian local ceasefires included medical professionals who leveraged their reputations for objectivity to build trust between themselves and the conflict parties (Turkmani et al., 2014). This makes internally mediated local ceasefires more able to resolve information problems and so more likely to advance progress toward peace. External mediators, however, lack existing local reputations and knowledge, making them less able to produce agreements that make such progress.

External mediation is at a disadvantage compared to internal mediation but also falls short in resolving commitment problems and undermines the gradual trust-building of local ceasefires. International pressure can lead conflict parties to accept an agreement that does not actually reflect their expectations of how the conflict may end (Werner & Yuen, 2005). These false incentives have a distinct effect on local

ceasefires. As previously discussed, external mediation does not impact the success of local ceasefires but harms that of conflict-wide ones (Werner & Yuen, 2005; Karakus & Svensson, 2020). I argue that this is because international pressure from external mediation combined with the limited scope and compliance costs of local ceasefires create incentives for the parties to comply with the local ceasefire even when it may not reflect their true expectations. Since the parties face lower compliance costs and can continue the conflict elsewhere, they are incentivized to comply with the ceasefire to alleviate the international pressure. This effect is further worsened by the use of leverage. The use of leverage by a mediator to induce an agreement is effective in bringing agreements about but worsens its long-term impacts (Beardsley, 2011). As local ceasefires are limited, external mediators are less likely to pursue them with a primary goal of creating a lasting peace, but rather with a goal such as humanitarian action. As such, the mediators will be more likely to rely on leverage to induce a quick agreement, sacrificing the improvement of commitment problems. The external imposition of a local ceasefire undermines its role in gradual trust building between the parties, turning the lower costs that allow it to be pursued in more fraught bargaining contexts into a facilitator of insincere compliance. This leads externally mediated local ceasefires to be less likely to contribute to advancing progress toward peace.

Overall, internal mediators have specific biases, knowledge, and reputations that allow local ceasefires to better resolve information problems and enhance gradual trust building. These advantages in resolving bargaining problems make it more likely that the involved parties will be willing and able to pursue a subsequent conflict-wide ceasefire. As more progress has been made in resolving bargaining problems, a subsequent conflict-wide ceasefire is also more likely to be successful. External mediation, however, lacks the information revealing the benefits of internal mediation and undermines key functions of local ceasefires. It creates false incentives to comply which undermine the resolution of commitment problems and gradual trust building. These disadvantages in resolving bargaining problems make externally mediated local ceasefires less likely to lead to a subsequent successful conflict-wide ceasefire. This leads to my hypotheses:

H1a: *Local ceasefires with internal third-party mediation are less likely to lead to a subsequent conflict-wide ceasefire than non-mediated local ceasefires.*

H1b: *Local ceasefires with internal third-party mediation are less likely to lead to a subsequent successful conflict-wide ceasefire than non-mediated local ceasefires.*

H2a: *Local ceasefires with external third-party mediation are more likely to lead to a subsequent conflict-wide ceasefire than non-mediated local ceasefires.*

H2b: *Local ceasefires with external third-party mediation are more likely to lead to a subsequent successful conflict-wide ceasefire than non-mediated local ceasefires.*

Research Design

To test my hypotheses, I will conduct an analysis investigating the onset and success of subsequent conflict-wide ceasefires. To begin this section, I will discuss the data utilized, the variables included, and then the models utilized. The data I

utilize in this analysis is an extension of the Civil Conflict CeaseFire (CF) Dataset introduced by Clayton, Nygård, Strand, et al. (2023). The original dataset includes a global set of ceasefires in civil conflicts from 1989 to 2020. An arrangement qualifies as a ceasefire when it includes a written or verbal commitment from at least one actor to stop, not simply reduce, violence and a concrete time when the cessation will begin. The original dataset emphasizes conflict-wide ceasefires, but also includes 286 local ceasefires (Clayton, Nygård, Strand, et al., 2023).

I build upon this data for my analysis. The original dataset utilizes the Factiva news database, which includes both major news networks and local reports, to gather its data. The authors used the search terms “cease-fire”, “ceasefire”, “cessation of hostilities”, “suspension of hostilities”, and “truce” (Clayton, Nygård, Strand, et al., 2023). The database includes reporting in local languages, but the CF dataset was only able to include reports already in English (Clayton, Nygård, Strand, et al., 2023). I extend this dataset, following their initial method, by including any relevant reports in several other languages, including Spanish, French, and Arabic.

There are potential issues with the use of news reports as a data source. News reports may not reflect every ceasefire that occurs in a conflict. Ceasefires in particularly dangerous or remote areas, with a particularly short time span, and with a limited geographic range, are less likely to be reported on by journalists, and so may be missing from the data. However, conflict parties do place significant importance on announcing their ceasefires, minimizing this effect somewhat (Lundgren et al., 2023; Clayton, Nygård, Strand, et al., 2023). I expect this effect to be minimized even further by my inclusion of sources in languages other than English. Highly limited, local ceasefires may be more likely to only receive reporting in local language news while being overlooked in international English-language reporting, compared to conflict-wide ceasefires, which have a broader impact.

Independent Variable

The independent variable in both of my analyses is the presence of external or internal mediation in local ceasefires. I define external mediation based on the works of Svensson and Lindgren (2013) and Karakus and Svensson (2020). A mediator is external when they come from outside of the state in conflict and internal when they come from within the state. Common examples of external mediators include IOs such as the UN and other states, while common internal mediators include religious leaders and local NGOs. For each ceasefire, I code a 0 if there is no mediation, 1 if there is external mediation, and 2 if there is internal mediation. I utilize data from the CF Dataset (Clayton, Nygård, Strand, et al., 2023) on which actors served as mediators in each conflict and then classify them according to the above definition.

Dependent Variables

My investigation has two dependent variables. The first concerns the subsequent occurrence of a conflict-wide ceasefire following the local ceasefire in question. I obtain this data from the original CF Dataset and my extension. Using the dataset, I determine if each local ceasefire is followed by a conflict-wide ceasefire between the

same dyad. In order to distinguish between conflict-wide ceasefires that are related to the local ceasefire and those that are not, I only consider conflict-wide ceasefires that occur within one year of the beginning of a given local ceasefire to be “subsequent”. This limit accounts for the possibility of longer negotiation processes while avoiding associating unrelated ceasefires. However, I also include a six-month standard and a two-year standard for use in robustness checks to account for the possibilities that the one-year standard may allow for the influence of unrelated factors or may not allow for all indirect influences of mediation type in local ceasefires to play out. I include a binary variable indicating if each local ceasefire had a subsequent conflict-wide ceasefire at each standard.

My second dependent variable is the success of subsequent conflict-wide ceasefires. For each subsequent conflict-wide ceasefire identified, I indicate in a binary variable if it was successful or failed. The initial dataset bases its measure of ceasefire success on statements from the ceasefire parties and international actors. A ceasefire is coded as failed if there were reports from the ceasefire parties or international actors of failure. If these are absent, it is coded as successful. The CF dataset emphasizes reports of ceasefire failure rather than the number of battle deaths, as it is possible for a ceasefire to fail before battle deaths rise or continue to be pursued by the parties despite violations. However, limitations in reporting mean this method limits the number of ceasefires in the original dataset with a clear end that can be coded (Clayton, Nygård, Strand, et al., 2023).

To account for these issues, I utilize a different standard for ceasefire success. Drawing on the dataset on local ceasefires in the Syrian civil war introduced by Karakus and Svensson (2020), I include a measure of success that accounts for both the observed behavior and publicized statements of the ceasefire parties. A ceasefire is coded as failed if there are reports from the parties or international actors of failure or if a 25-battle death threshold is met while the ceasefire is meant to be active. If none of these conditions are met, then the ceasefire is coded as successful. Battle death data is obtained from the UCDP Georeferenced Event Dataset, which is geocoded and attributed to specific dyads, minimizing the chance that a ceasefire will be coded as failed incorrectly (Sundberg & Melander, 2013). This measure accounts for both reporting gaps and failure prior to a resurgence of battle deaths while increasing the sample size.

Controls

I include several controls in my analyses. First, I control past ceasefire interactions between the parties, both in terms of local ceasefires and conflict-wide ones. A history of ceasefires has been acknowledged in the literature to potentially influence the onset and success of subsequent ceasefires (Lundgren et al., 2023; Clayton, 2013; Clayton, Nygård, Rustad, et al., 2023). Using data from the original CF Dataset and by extension, I include both a control for past local ceasefires and a control for past conflict-wide ceasefires for each ceasefire examined. Additionally, I include several country-level controls that are standard in the literature studying conflict, including the regime type from the V-Dem dataset, the GDP per capita from the World Bank,

and the population from the World Bank (Svensson & Lindgren, 2013; Clayton & Sticher, 2021; Coppedge et al., 2024; The World Bank, 2024).

I also include several controls to attempt to address the nonrandom selection of external mediation. Drawing on Clayton (2013), I include several controls to account for the possibility that external mediation is more likely in more difficult contexts with more severe conflicts. A binary variable indicating if the incompatibility of the conflict is territorial, from UCDP data, is included as external mediators may be more likely to intervene in such conflicts (Clayton, 2013; Svensson & Lindgren, 2013). Conflict intensity, measured in battle deaths, and conflict duration prior to the ceasefire are also included to address the selection effect using data from UCDP. Additionally, conflict intensity and duration can also impact the likelihood that a ceasefire will occur and be successful (Karakus & Svensson, 2020; Clayton, Nygård, Rustad, et al., 2023).

Model

To investigate my hypotheses, I analyze the impact of mediation type in a local ceasefire on subsequent conflict-wide ceasefire occurrence and success. This sample includes all local ceasefires that are available in the data. Drawing on Clayton (2013), I utilize a Sartori selection estimator model. Conflict-wide ceasefires may be more likely to occur in contexts where they are also more likely to succeed. Past literature investigating subjects with similar issues with selection effects frequently uses a Heckman selection model, but this model requires an additional variable that is expected to impact the first phase but not the second (Clayton, 2013). However, it is difficult to find such a variable that impacts the onset of conflict-wide ceasefires but not their success. A Sartori selection estimator model, however, does not require this variable, thus making it more appropriate for this analysis (Clayton, 2013). The occurrence of a subsequent conflict-wide ceasefire represents the first phase within the model, and the success of subsequent conflict-wide ceasefires represents the second phase. I run this model using the one-year standard for subsequent conflict-wide ceasefires in my main analysis, and I use the same model with the six-month and two-year standards for robustness checks.

Although I attempt to account for a number of factors that may influence this research, there are additional issues that must be acknowledged. Despite my controls to address the possible selection effect of external mediation, it should still be kept in mind when interpreting these results. There is also a possibility that local ceasefire occurrence is nonrandom as well and could be more likely in contexts where a successful conflict-wide ceasefire is more or less likely. For example, they may be more likely to be used as a strategic tool and thus be used before both parties want to pursue a lasting peace. This effect should be considered when interpreting these findings.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research provides a number of implications that can inform both academic research and real-world policy. First, this paper elaborates on the role of local ceasefires in broader processes of peace and conflict resolution. It demonstrates that local ceasefires can play a very important role in progress toward more comprehensive and lasting peace and thus should not be overlooked by academics or policymakers. Local ceasefires are not isolated phenomena that rarely have impacts beyond their region but rather can greatly contribute to the resolution of bargaining problems and building of trust between conflict parties, contributing to progress towards peace on the conflict level.

This research also addresses an important contradiction in the existing literature and highlights the differences in dynamics and functions between local and conflict-wide ceasefires. By clarifying why external mediation is harmful to the success of conflict-wide ceasefires but not that of local ceasefires, this article begins to clarify when local ceasefires can be expected to function similarly to conflict-wide ones and when they warrant their own dedicated investigation.

The argument and findings of this paper also emphasize the potential for ceasefire efforts to have a negative impact on progress toward peace independent of their failure. Just because a local ceasefire was upheld does not mean that it can be assumed to have a positive or even neutral impact on the broader progress toward peace. This is particularly relevant to policymakers, emphasizing the need to consider the broader impacts of localized conflict resolution efforts in addition to determining if they are upheld in order to gain a full understanding of their impact and success.

The failure of externally mediated local ceasefires to drive the onset and success of conflict-wide ceasefires demonstrates to policymakers that external mediation is a tool that must be used with care. However, these findings do not mean that external mediation should never be used in local ceasefires. External mediation can play an important role in quickly facilitating local ceasefires for humanitarian responses, but policymakers should keep the potential negative impacts in mind when deciding if external mediation should be pursued. If facilitating a lasting peace is the immediate goal, external mediation can be detrimental.

Finally, the argument presented in this paper can provide guidance for policymakers on how to minimize the negative impacts of external mediation. By avoiding the detrimental characteristics of external mediation while emulating the advantageous qualities of internal mediation, policymakers could improve their ability to contribute to broader peace processes through external mediation efforts. For example, an external mediation effort could attempt to minimize its use of leverage over the parties while emphasizing building local connections to increase their credibility in order to produce a more successful long-term impact.

This paper additionally presents several avenues for future research. It is important to investigate what other characteristics or contexts may influence how local ceasefires contribute to broader peace processes, as this is an impact of local ceasefires that have been neglected in the past literature prior to this investigation. It may also be useful to

investigate the other ways in which the dynamics of local ceasefires differ from those of conflict-wide ceasefires to further inform their use as a tool for conflict resolution.

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