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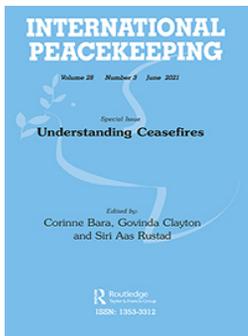
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Ceasefire Success: A Conceptual Framework

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ABSTRACT

The causes and consequences of ceasefires have become a burgeoning area of research. The concept of ceasefire success is integral to this research and plays a key role as either the dependent or independent variable in both qualitative and quantitative work. Despite its importance, it is not clear how ceasefire success should be conceptualized. This critically hampers the progress of theoretical and empirical research on ceasefires. This article offers a conceptual framework based on the central proposition that ceasefire success should be assessed in terms of two inter-related but conceptually distinct criteria: the immediate objective and the underlying purpose. The immediate objective, which is embedded in the definition of a ceasefire, is the cessation of hostilities (either permanently or temporarily). While all ceasefires share this objective, their underlying purpose, which is the reason for establishing the ceasefire, varies widely across cases. The immediate objective and the purpose, while conceptually distinct, are linked since the purpose informs the temporal and geographic scope of the cessation of hostilities. Based on this framework, we argue that researchers interested in ceasefire success need to clearly identify their assumptions and conceptual choices, which should take account of the political context of the ceasefires in question.

KEYWORDS Ceasefires; conflict management; methodology

Introduction

A ceasefire is an arrangement during armed conflict whereby at least one conflict party commits to cease hostilities from a specific point in time.¹ Logically, then, a ceasefire might be considered successful when followed by an immediate cessation of violence. Much conceptual uncertainty remains, however: does this mean that a ceasefire is a failure when it suffers any violations, or a success if it survives despite these violations? Should the determination of success or failure focus only on the conflict

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¹Clayton et al., "Introducing the Civil Conflict Ceasefire Dataset."

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party's subsequent violent behaviour? Is there a particular quantitative threshold – relating, for example, to the number of violations and fatalities or the duration of peace – that justifies a clear distinction between success and failure? Or should an assessment also take account of the underlying purpose of the arrangement?

Prior research offers few answers to these conceptual and methodological questions, and lacks a consensus on benchmarks for measuring ceasefire success. Quantitative studies tend to conceptualize ceasefires as an outcome of a conflict or a peace process, measuring success based on whether, or for how long, battle-related fatalities dropped below some threshold.² This may be appropriate with respect to ceasefires that seek to end violence permanently, but not so for other ceasefires, such as those that focus on temporary purposes (e.g. providing humanitarian relief or supporting an ongoing peace process). Qualitative studies offer a more nuanced assessment of ceasefire outcomes, often based on their effect on the peace process³ or conflict dynamics.⁴ While these studies rarely discuss the concept of success explicitly,⁵ they build on implicit assumptions about desirable outcomes of ceasefires. Underlying criteria are rarely made explicit or justified.

This article extends prior research by developing a conceptual framework for considering ceasefire success. Our central proposition is that ceasefire success can be evaluated according to two closely related but conceptually distinct criteria: the immediate *objective* and the underlying *purpose*. All ceasefires share the same immediate objective: the cessation of hostilities.⁶

The underlying purpose of a ceasefire is the reason for establishing the ceasefire, in essence why the actor(s) stop(s) fighting (e.g. to enable the distribution of aid, or the onset of peace negotiations). The purpose varies across arrangements. The two criteria are linked in that the *scope* of the immediate objective often hinges on the ceasefire purpose, which can shape the geographical (e.g. national or local) and temporal (e.g. temporary or permanent) coverage of an arrangement.

Researchers can advance knowledge about ceasefire success by, first, treating it as a spectrum rather than a success–failure dichotomy and, second,

²Fortna, “Scraps of Paper?”; Fortna, *Peace Time*; Kreutz, “How and When Conflicts End.”

³E.g. Åkebo, *Ceasefire Agreements and Peace Processes*; Höglund, “Violence in Peace Negotiations”; Mahieu, “When Interrupt a Civil War?”

⁴Kolås, “Naga Militancy and Violent Politics.”

⁵See Core, “Burma/Myanmar” for an exception.

⁶Importantly, we draw a distinction between a cessation of hostilities – i.e. a suspension of active hostilities – and a *cessation of hostilities arrangement* – i.e. a class of ceasefire agreement, which includes a general commitment to suspend hostilities, but does not include monitoring, verification or any commitments to disarm or demobilize. All ceasefires share the same immediate objective – a cessation of hostilities – but only a sub-set of ceasefires can be classed as cessation of hostilities arrangements. For a discussion on the logic and importance of this distinction, see Clayton et al., “Ceasefires in Intra-State Peace Processes”; Clayton and Sticher, “The Logic of Ceasefires.”

justifying their choice of indicators in relation to *both* the immediate objective *and* the underlying purpose of a ceasefire. This requires an understanding of the broader political process that gives rise to a ceasefire, rather than interpreting all arrangements as homogenous with the same scope and goal. There may of course be clear instances of ceasefire success (e.g. where long-term peace flows directly from a ceasefire) and clear instances of ceasefire failure (e.g. where a ceasefire immediately breaks down). In most cases, however, the empirical picture is more nuanced. Ceasefires can be successful in terms of certain indicators of the immediate objective but not others, they can succeed in terms of one parties' purpose but fail at others, their success can vary over time, and their success can be judged in both absolute and relative terms. 'Complete success' and 'complete failure' should therefore be seen as the opposite ends of a spectrum, with many possible points in between.⁷ A single indicator will rarely be appropriate to capture this complexity.

The rationale for this article is consistent with the argument by Goertz that clarity on concepts is a necessary precondition for sound theory development, normative analysis, and statistical and empirical investigation of social science phenomena.⁸ Concepts play a core role as dependent and independent variables in both qualitative and quantitative work, in selecting cases and determining scope conditions, and in both descriptive and causal inference.⁹ When scholars fail to sufficiently develop concepts, they risk introducing unconscious theoretical and empirical biases. Therefore, precise concept formation is an important part of making explicit the theoretical assumptions and measurement approaches that underpin research.¹⁰

Goertz' argument can be applied to research on ceasefires. For researchers from both the scholarly and practitioner communities, a more nuanced and comprehensive consideration of the concept of ceasefire success would contribute to a deeper understanding of outcomes. If the concept of ceasefire success is underspecified, it is not possible to identify and analyse in a reliable and rigorous manner the factors that contribute to success and failure. As shown by this special issue of *International Peacekeeping*, the causes, dynamics and consequences of ceasefires have become a burgeoning area of research. The concept of ceasefire success is integral to this research and should be treated critically rather than as a simple or self-evident phenomenon.

The article is structured as follows. We present an overview of ceasefire definitions and approaches to success in the scholarly and practitioner literature; examine success in relation to the objective of ceasefires and

⁷This is in line with Goertz's assertion that complex concepts are better treated as continuous rather than dichotomous variables. Goertz, *Social Science Concepts and Measurement*, 59–62.

⁸Goertz, *Social Science Concepts and Measurement*.

⁹*Ibid.*, 10–11.

¹⁰See Arjona and Castilla, "The Violent Bias in the Study of Civil War."

subsequently in relation to ceasefire purposes; illustrate our framework through a short case study of the ceasefire agreements reached during the 2002–2005 peace process to end the North–South war in Sudan; and end with a synthesis and conclusion.¹¹

What Are Ceasefires and How Has Their Success Been Measured?

We define a ceasefire as an arrangement during armed conflict whereby at least one conflict party commits to cease hostilities from a specific point in time.¹² The requirement that a conflict party commits to a cessation of battle-related violence from a particular point in time distinguishes ceasefires from looser commitments to reduce or stop violence at some point in the future. Ceasefires also require some statement, either verbal or in writing, that commits an actor to suspend violence. This differentiates ceasefires from less intentional breaks in the fighting. This definition captures a variety of arrangements, ranging from loose, informal arrangements to detailed formal documents.¹³ Ceasefires can be unilateral, bilateral or multi-lateral, they can commit parties to either a temporary or permanent end to violence,¹⁴ and, as discussed below, they can have a variety of purposes.

In some cases, the link between a ceasefire and the broader political process is explicit, such as a ceasefire during or in support of political negotiations. In other cases, the link is implicit, such as for ceasefires called to demonstrate command over an armed force. Even ceasefires that are seemingly disconnected from the political process, such as those initiated for humanitarian purposes, can still produce anticipation effects and consequences that ripple across peace and conflict processes.

Ceasefires are distinct from peace agreements. A peace agreement is a ‘formal agreement between at least two opposing primary warring parties, which addresses the disputed incompatibility, either by settling all or part of it, or by clearly outlining a process for how the warring parties plan to regulate the incompatibility’.¹⁵ In contrast, ceasefires are primarily concerned with the regulation of violence, and do not include provisions to address the underlying incompatibility.¹⁶ Although most definitions of a ceasefire naturally concentrate on the commitment to cease direct

¹¹Although the notions of ‘success’ and ‘failure’ have a causal character, this article does not focus on the causal processes by which ceasefires achieve their objective and purpose.

¹²Clayton et al., “Introducing the Civil Conflict Ceasefire Dataset.”

¹³E.g. Bell, “Peace Agreements”; Milton-Edwards, “The ‘Warriors Break’.”

¹⁴Clayton, Mason, and Sticher, “Conceptual Framework.”

¹⁵Högbladh, “Peace Agreements 1975–2011.”

¹⁶E.g. Dukalskis, “Why Do Insurgent Groups Agree?”; Gartner and Bercovitch, “Overcoming Obstacles to Peace”; Kreutz, “How and When Conflicts End”; Tonge, *Comparative Peace Processes*; Winokur, “Before the Peace.”

(so-called battlefield) hostilities, it should be noted that ceasefire agreements can also include additional prohibitions.¹⁷ For example, the ceasefire provisions in the 2005 Sudan Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) prohibit violations of human rights and humanitarian law, hostile propaganda and media warfare, espionage, and recruitment of child soldiers.¹⁸ Ceasefires can occur within, or as an appendix to, peace agreements.¹⁹ In these cases, the ceasefire sets out the military-technical details of a permanent termination of hostilities. An example of such a definitive ceasefire was included within the 2005 Sudan CPA.²⁰

The approaches to ceasefire outcomes and success are similar across practitioners and scholars. Both typically evaluate ceasefires in terms of conflict management and conflict resolution, based on whether the ceasefires reduce violence and positively influence a peace process. While some scholars criticize this ubiquitous link between ceasefires and peacemaking,²¹ it remains the dominant approach to assessing ceasefire success. Consequently, the most common outcomes of interest are peace durability,²² ceasefire stability,²³ ceasefire sustainability,²⁴ and advancing peace building efforts.²⁵ This largely overlooks the significant variation in the underlying goals of ceasefire arrangements. We extend this work to a new conceptual framework based on two conceptually distinct criteria: the immediate *objective* and the underlying *purpose*.

Success in Relation to the Immediate Objective of Ceasefires

All ceasefires, per definition, have the immediate objective of stopping battle-related violence. Thus, the most direct indicator of success is whether this violence ceased from the prescribed onset of a ceasefire. This is obviously a vital consideration and appears relatively straightforward. A diligent operationalization, however, requires determining an appropriate point of commencement, the type and level of violence cessation, and the geographic and

¹⁷Chounet-Cambas, "Negotiating Ceasefires."

¹⁸"Comprehensive Peace Agreement", annexure 1, art. 1.

¹⁹Åkebo, *Ceasefire Agreements and Peace Processes*; Fortna, *Peace Time*; Lane, "Mitigating Humanitarian Crises."

²⁰The three ceasefire classes are "cessation of hostilities" arrangements, which only regulate hostilities, "preliminary ceasefires" that include compliance provisions like monitoring and verification, and "definitive ceasefires" that include disarmament and demobilization provisions – also described as provisions to end the status of war. This last class of agreements usually accompany peace agreements that aim to resolve the conflict incompatibility.

²¹See Greig and Diehl, "The Peacekeeping–Peacemaking Dilemma," 628; Kolås, "Naga Militancy and Violent Politics."

²²E.g. Cunningham, *Barriers to Peace*; Fortna, *Peace Time*; Werner and Yuen, "Making and Keeping Peace"; Winokur, "Before the Peace."

²³Holt-Ivry, Muehlenbeck, and Barsa, "Inclusive Ceasefires"; Karakus and Svensson, "Between the Bombs."

²⁴Haysom and Hottinger, "Do's and Don'ts."

²⁵Chounet-Cambas, "Negotiating Ceasefires," 17; Turkmani et al., "Hungry for Peace."

temporal scope of the arrangement. The scope is shaped by the underlying purpose (discussed in the next section). In this section, we discuss the different ways in which the immediate objective can be conceptualized and assessed.

Commencement of ceasefire. Since all ceasefires have a stipulated commencement date, this may seem like the logical starting point from which to evaluate the cessation of violence. However, the appropriateness of this indicator varies. On the one hand, it makes sense to use the stipulated start date for simple ceasefires that are meant to have a short duration. On the other hand, comprehensive ceasefires with complicated monitoring and verification mechanisms may take weeks or even months until all the provisions are in place.²⁶

Moreover, violations can be expected to occur in the early phase of an arrangement, when trust between the parties is low, military forces have not completely disengaged, and orders have not yet been fully disseminated to all members of the combatant forces.²⁷ In order to accommodate these issues, it may be sound to consider the effectiveness of a ceasefire only after an initial period following its establishment. A possible benchmark is the deployment of the monitoring and verification mechanisms.

Type and level of violent cessation. Although ceasefire arrangements are intended to completely stop battle-related violence, in reality this is a very high bar against which to judge an arrangement. Often the best-case scenario involves a significant reduction, rather than the total cessation, of violence. For example, the 2018 ceasefire in the Yemeni port of Hodeidah is widely considered to have been successful in reducing violence, despite failing to achieve a total cessation of hostilities in the area.²⁸ Researchers could therefore assess the immediate objective in terms of a reduction rather than a total cessation of violence.

There are various indicators available to operationalize and measure the extent of violence reduction: the occurrence of violent incidents; their frequency within a certain time period; the severity of these incidents in terms of combatant and/or civilian fatalities.

Once a measure for violence reduction has been chosen, a relative or absolute approach can be pursued. A relative approach would treat the level of violence before the ceasefire was concluded as the baseline and then determine the extent to which violence decreased thereafter.²⁹ For example, a study might find that battle-related violence in the twelve

²⁶Haysom and Hottinger, "Do's and Don'ts."

²⁷Chounet-Cambas, "Negotiating Ceasefires," 22; Potter, "Ceasefire Monitoring and Verification," 6.

²⁸Matheson, "Hodeidah Ceasefire Accord"; United Nations, "Hodeidah Ceasefire Holding."

²⁹Similar approaches in the mediation literature focus on conflict de-escalation, see Regan and Stam, "In the Nick of Time"; DeRouen and Möller, "The Short-Term Effects of Mediation", and tension reduction Beardsley et al. "Mediation Style and Crisis Outcomes."

months following the conclusion of a ceasefire was 50% lower than during the twelve months prior to the ceasefire. While not a complete success, this reduction may nevertheless be significant from a political as well as a humanitarian perspective. Here, it is crucial to specify this threshold as well as the length of the period before the ceasefire.

Alternatively, researchers can explore the extent to which a ceasefire was associated with a reduction of violence below some absolute threshold. Clayton and Sticher adopt this approach when assessing the duration of different types of ceasefire agreements (i.e. cessation of hostilities, preliminary ceasefires, and definitive ceasefires).³⁰ Relying on fatalities as the measure of violence, they use a series of different thresholds (i.e. 1, 25, 100 fatalities) to underline the robustness of their results. Such a differentiation also allows the researcher to investigate the comparative stability of ceasefires, e.g. by comparing arrangements that totally suspend violence (i.e. <1 fatality) with those that kept violence to a low level (i.e. <25 fatalities).³¹ Including multiple thresholds also helps to overcome issues associated with the relatively arbitrary selection of any single threshold.

Different indicators may yield different determinations of success. For example, a ceasefire can experience a high number of violations, suggesting that it has failed, but the incidents may be limited in severity, indicating relative success. Similarly, a ceasefire may experience a high number of serious violations but at a declining rate, indicating gradual success. This underlines the importance of making the selection of indicators transparent.

Irrespective of the indicator chosen, the geographic scope of a ceasefire needs to be taken into account when assessing the extent of violence reduction. Ceasefires do not necessarily apply to the whole conflict area but can be limited in the area covered. Such partial ceasefires are typically concluded as an initial confidence-building measure³² or because the underlying purpose of the arrangement limits the ceasefire to only parts of the conflict zone. For instance, a partial ceasefire was declared for areas affected by the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the conflict between the government and the Communist Party of the Philippines in 1991.³³ One strategy for dealing with this is to only take the indicators for the respective area into account. This entails the danger, however, of overlooking possible spillover effects of partial ceasefires, e.g. the escalation of violence in areas not covered by the arrangement.

Ceasefire agreements also regulate behaviours other than battle-related violence, including disengagement of forces, arms control and disarmament,

³⁰Clayton and Sticher, "The Logic of Ceasefires."

³¹This is similar to studies of peace agreement durability that often focus on the time span until violence returns to a pre-defined violence threshold. See Gurses and Rost, "Sustaining the Peace."

³²Chounet-Cambas, "Negotiating Ceasefires," 29.

³³Clayton et al., "Introducing the Civil Conflict Ceasefire Dataset."

reduction of sexual violence, and demobilization and reintegration of combatants. Taking this into account, ceasefires can be successful in certain aspects but not in others. By way of illustration, the 2014–2015 Minsk agreements in the Ukraine conflict were able to reduce the level of combat violence³⁴ but the implementation of the agreed troop withdrawal was protracted.³⁵

Duration of violence cessation. Researchers must also consider how long a reduction of violence has to last for a ceasefire to be judged successful. This will depend on the purpose of the ceasefire and any temporal stipulations in the agreement. For example, in June 2014, President Poroshenko of Ukraine declared a ceasefire for seven days, with the stated aim of giving rebels an opportunity to disarm before the implementation of a peace plan.³⁶ Whereas a ‘definitive’ ceasefire embedded in a negotiated settlement is expected to terminate violence permanently, the duration of a ‘preliminary’ ceasefire that supports an ongoing peace process may be contingent on the parties’ ability to conclude a settlement. The purpose is hence relevant in determining ceasefire duration. For example, due to their specific purpose, ceasefires with a humanitarian intention often have clearly defined temporal and geographic limits. These should be considered when assessing the success or failure of the immediate objective of such ceasefires.

Agreement resilience. Violations, whether intentional or not, are the rule rather than the exception for ceasefires.³⁷ Ceasefire agreements that include monitoring, verification and other mechanisms for dealing with violations reflect the conflict parties’ awareness of this. Thus, some agreements might suffer from periods of violence but ultimately lead to a cessation of violent behaviour in the following period. If the ceasefire mechanisms are effective in addressing the violations, thereby averting escalation and a return to violence, the agreement might be regarded as successful in terms of its resilience. This was evident in the Mindanao conflict in the Philippines, for instance, where the conflict parties, with the help of an international monitoring team, were able to resolve their disagreement over an attack and the beheading of government soldiers in 2007; thereafter the ceasefire continued to prevent violent behaviour.³⁸

In conclusion, the immediate objective of a ceasefire is to stop hostilities and this constitutes the most direct indicator of success. Nevertheless, the preceding discussion highlights the choices to make when conceptualizing

³⁴“Ukraine.”

³⁵“Rebels Begin Troop Withdrawal.”

³⁶“Ukraine Leader Declares Ceasefire.”

³⁷Lane, “Mitigating Humanitarian Crises,” 16; Potter, “Ceasefire Monitoring and Verification,” 6.

³⁸Wiehler, “Deciding on the Tit for the Tat.” The resilience of an arrangement is relevant given that violations almost always occur. Hence, it is required to distinguish between those ceasefires that prove resilient from those that fall apart as a result of violations.

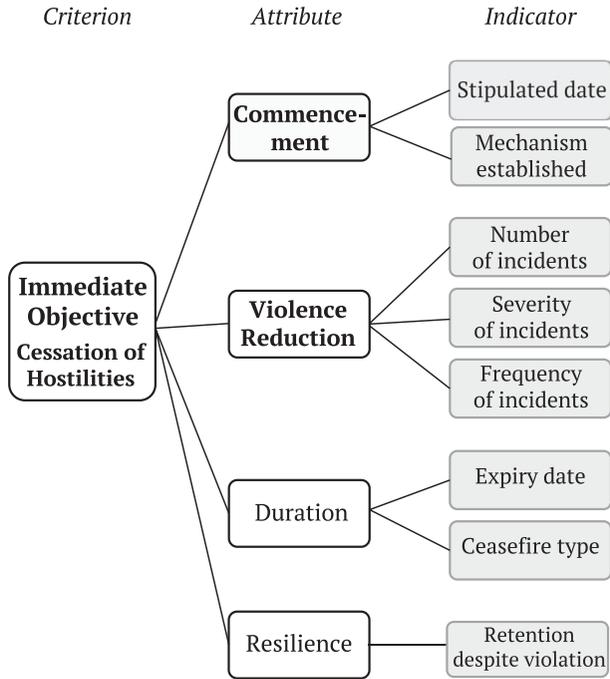


Figure 1. Ceasefire success in relation to the immediate objective.

the immediate objective, and suggests a number of the possible indicators, which we summarize in [Figure 1](#).

Success in Relation to the Underlying Purpose(s) of a Ceasefire

The second criterion of ceasefire success is the fulfilment of the underlying purpose. We define the underlying *purpose* as the reason for establishing a ceasefire arrangement, in essence *why* a ceasefire is concluded. Ceasefires are always a means to an end, and the purpose, quite simply, is the end. Whether or not a ceasefire achieves its purpose is an essential component of success. As a heuristic device, we distinguish four ceasefire purposes: conflict resolution; maintaining the political or military status quo; gaining a military advantage; and providing humanitarian relief. This list is not exhaustive, but we focus on these types as the most commonly discussed purposes in the ceasefire literature.³⁹

In many cases, the conflict parties communicate their motivation for the ceasefire at the moment of declaration. Inferring the purpose from this

³⁹E.g. Åkebo, *Ceasefire Agreements and Peace Processes*; Chounet-Cambas, "Negotiating Ceasefires"; Smith, *Stopping Wars*.

official communication can be problematic, though. The stated purpose and the actual motivation of the conflict parties might diverge, and determining motivation may be challenging. Complicating matters further, the conflict parties might not have the same purpose for entering into an arrangement, a ceasefire may have multiple purposes, and these purposes can change for political or military reasons as the conflict evolves. As discussed below, the purpose may have been provisional or contingent on other developments from the outset.

Conflict Resolution Purpose

Ceasefires have an underlying conflict resolution purpose when the conflict parties intend them to contribute to the non-violent resolution of a conflict. This purpose is typically expressed in the text of the agreement or during the announcement of the ceasefire. In principle, it is therefore generally not difficult to identify when a ceasefire has an underlying conflict resolution purpose.⁴⁰ For example, the 2003 ceasefire agreement in Liberia reaffirmed the conflict parties' determination to establish sustainable peace, stability and security and aimed at creating a conducive environment for negotiations to end the war.⁴¹

Ceasefires with an underlying conflict resolution purpose can be initiated at any stage of a conflict. The timing (or sequencing) of a ceasefire shapes the function it performs to move the parties towards a peaceful resolution of the dispute. Building on prior research, we identify two common ceasefire sub-purposes that fall under the conflict resolution purpose.

Ending the Status of War

The first sub-purpose concerns ending the status of war. This purpose is normally attributed to ceasefires concluded in the context of a comprehensive peace agreement, which are often labelled as definitive ceasefires. An example of a definitive ceasefire is the 2016 ceasefire concluded between the government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) as a part of the final peace agreement.⁴² Success in terms of this sub-purpose is ascertained primarily in terms of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of forces, and the transition from a war footing to a context of peace.

As the name implies, the immediate objective of such ceasefires is unlikely to be limited in geographic and temporal scope. As with assessments of peace agreements, a relevant and observable metric could hence be the duration of

⁴⁰Of course, the parties might sign a ceasefire without any intention of honoring it. We return to these spurious conflict resolution ceasefires in the next section.

⁴¹Bell and Badanjak, "Introducing PA-X."

⁴²UN Security Council, "S/2016/902."

subsequent peace at the national level.⁴³ Quantitative and qualitative methods could also be used to explore relative degrees of success, for example, the implementation of different components of the ceasefire agreement, such as the disbanding of forces and reconfiguration of the military.

Support the Peace Process

The second sub-purpose concerns supporting the peace negotiations. Ceasefires with this underlying sub-purpose are likely to precede, or occur during, negotiations for a settlement, and intend to create a climate that moves the parties in the direction of a political settlement. The logic here is that peace negotiations often struggle to get off the ground and make progress while hostilities are underway, as the violence constantly reinforces the parties' enmity, animosity, and suspicion. To support the conflict resolution process, ceasefire can thus seek to create some political space for substantive negotiations, build confidence between the parties or establish an early basis for security cooperation.

In some instances, a conflict party insists that a ceasefire is a pre-condition for the commencement of negotiations.⁴⁴ This type of ceasefire can be found, for instance, in the Philippines. The 2003 ceasefire between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) was concluded in order to restart negotiations over a settlement of the secessionist conflict.⁴⁵ In other cases, ceasefires can seek to build confidence between the parties before the onset of political negotiations, or demonstrate an ability to control their forces.⁴⁶ This was the case with the US-Taliban ceasefire in February 2020, that was billed as an opportunity for the Taliban to demonstrate control over their affiliate forces.⁴⁷

Ceasefires with this sub-purpose can accordingly show large variation in the geographic or temporal scope of their immediate objective. When intended for initial confidence-building, for instance, ceasefires may be concluded for a short period of time or a specific area only.

Determining success can be more difficult with respect to these ceasefires than with those seeking to permanently cease hostilities. In rare cases, clear criteria can facilitate an assessment of a particular element of the ceasefire, such as whether the conflict parties successfully implemented agreed provisions, like the assembly of forces or creation of areas of control. More often, however, success needs to be determined with respect to the evolution of the peace process of which the ceasefire is part.

⁴³E.g. Derouen, Lea, and Wallensteen, "Duration of Civil War Agreements"; Hartzell, Hoddie, and Rothchild, "Stabilizing Peace After Civil War."

⁴⁴Smith, *Stopping Wars*; Mahieu, "When Interrupt a Civil War?"; Chounet-Cambas, "Negotiating Ceasefires."

⁴⁵"Ceasefire!"

⁴⁶Höglund, "Tactics in Negotiations"; Smith, *Stopping Wars*.

⁴⁷Mashal, "Countdown Begins."

Whether and how a ceasefire contributes to the success or failure of the process is likely to require an in-depth analysis. This might ideally include interviews with the conflict parties and with third-parties such as mediators and ceasefire monitors, and/or a deep engagement with a wide variety of secondary sources. Even when primary sources are available, though, discerning the contribution of a ceasefire to the peace process can be challenging. For example, the 2003 ceasefire between the MILF and the Philippines government broke down in 2008,⁴⁸ suggesting that the agreement was unsuccessful. However, a definitive ceasefire was reached in 2014,⁴⁹ and the earlier ceasefire's contribution to this outcome depends on the researcher's analysis of the relevant causal processes.

Maintain the Political or Military Status Quo

A second common ceasefire purpose is the maintenance of the political or military status quo. In many cases, the costs of violent conflict make the conflict unsustainable, yet the conflict parties are unable to reach a mutually acceptable agreement to end the dispute. When conflict parties prefer the political or military status quo to either continuing hostilities or resolving the conflict, then a ceasefire can offer a means of suspending violence without making permanent concessions. In some cases, this might lead to a short break in the fighting, until one or more parties determines that its interests are better served by either a return to violence, or progressing towards a negotiated settlement.

Yet it is also possible that these agreements remain in place for an indefinite period. Examples include the 1953 Korean Armistice Agreement, which provides for a demilitarized zone between North Korea and South Korea, and the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israel and Syria, where the buffer zone in the Golan Heights is monitored by a UN peacekeeping force. Another prominent example is the 1949 Karachi ceasefire agreement between India and Pakistan. The purpose of this agreement is to maintain the political status quo and so prevent an escalation into full-scale war between the two nuclear powers. To this end, the arrangement has been successful in that a return to full scale war has been prevented.

Fortna, focusing particularly on inter-state ceasefires with this purpose, argues that strong ceasefire design can prevent a resumption of war even in the absence of a negotiated settlement.⁵⁰ There has been no comparable research on intra-state ceasefires, which are presumably more difficult to maintain if the combatant forces are dispersed within a national territory. This type of intra-state ceasefire is not without precedent, however, an

⁴⁸Santos, "War and Peace," 83.

⁴⁹Herbolzheimer, "Peace Process in Mindanao."

⁵⁰Fortna, "Scraps of Paper?"

example being the 1991 agreement between the government of Morocco and the Polisario Front for a ceasefire in Western Sahara, which seems, at least for the Moroccan government, to be motivated by a desire to maintain the political status quo.

Success in the case of this purpose is broadly associated with maintaining the political or military status quo, while limiting the level of violence. This makes it quite different from other ceasefires that might be associated with preparing for future hostilities or moving towards peace. This purpose can provide a good illustration of the distinction between success in terms of a ceasefire's objective and success in terms of its purpose. As in the cases of the India-Pakistan and Western Sahara ceasefires, the purpose is achieved if the political status quo is maintained and a return to full-scale war is prevented, even if the objective of ceasing hostilities completely is not achieved.

Gain a Military Advantage

A third possible ceasefire purpose is gaining a military advantage.⁵¹ In such cases, conflict parties enter into a ceasefire intending to make some military gain.⁵² The military gain might be achieved through rearming, resupplying and recruiting more forces during the break in fighting.⁵³ For example, a faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland used a ceasefire concluded in 1997 to increase its force by approximately 4200 fighters in the subsequent nine years.⁵⁴ In other cases, the intended military gain might be to concentrate and/or relocate a party's means in order to fight another group that is not a party to the ceasefire. For instance, two militias in Liberia in 1990 declared a ceasefire in order to jointly fight against Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPLF).⁵⁵

The military advantage can also be indirect. On occasion, the military advantage is achieved by avoiding reputational costs and the imposition of coercive measures associated with resisting a ceasefire, such as sanctions, or the threat of military intervention. Throughout the Bosnian conflict, for example, the parties entered into ceasefires, under pressure from the international community, in order to mitigate threats of sanction.⁵⁶

This purpose is not likely to be publicly stated but rather cloaked under a more legitimate purpose. For no conflict party would enter into an

⁵¹Normatively, a ceasefire used to gain a military advantage is unlikely to be considered a success by academics or peacemakers. But we are discussing the purpose from the perspective of the conflict parties entering into an agreement, and so it is an important purpose to consider.

⁵²Sticher and Vuković, "From War to Peace."

⁵³Smith, *Stopping Wars*; Crocker, Hampson, and Aall, *Taming Intractable Conflicts*; Gartner and Melin, "Assessing Outcomes"; Toft, "Ending Civil Wars."

⁵⁴Singh, "Ceasefire in Nagaland," 818.

⁵⁵Krauss, "Guerrillas Refuse to Sign"; Clayton et al., "Introducing the Civil Conflict Ceasefire Dataset."

⁵⁶Holbrooke, *To End a War*.

arrangement if its opponent openly declares an intention to utilize it for military gains. Determining motivations is difficult, which makes identifying ceasefires with this purpose quite challenging *ex ante*. Both researchers and investigators (e.g. UN sanctions panels) have attempted to track and predict belligerent intentions using factors such as financial flows, diplomatic cables and behaviours such as arms procurement.⁵⁷ However, the purpose may only be evident from observing the outcome *ex post*. For example, the intentional re-escalation of violence during a ceasefire agreement can be an indication of military motivations. Moreover, conflict parties have an incentive to blame their opponent's disguised motivations when a ceasefire fails. An *ex post* analysis might be strengthened by interviews with conflict parties and knowledgeable observers and by the use of archival material and military-related indicators such as recruitment, arms supplies, the formation of military alliances and changes in the pattern of fighting. There is a dearth of research on ceasefires with this purpose, so we still have much to learn regarding their identification and evaluation.

Provide Humanitarian Relief

Ceasefire purposes can also relate to immediate and short-term humanitarian concerns, not explicitly linked to a larger military or peace making strategy.⁵⁸ Approximately 15% of all ceasefires documented between 1989 and 2018 explicitly served such a purpose.⁵⁹ Concrete examples of a humanitarian purpose are the distribution of humanitarian aid, immunization campaigns, and delivering medical supplies.⁶⁰ A number of ceasefires called in response to the COVID-19 pandemic fall under this category.

These ceasefires are relatively easy to identify and assess since success tends to be relatively clearly demarcated, with clear time limits and aims. For example, in Angola in 1999, a number of 'days of tranquility' allowed three million children to be vaccinated against Polio. Similarly, the exchange of prisoners, as agreed in the ceasefire agreement for Bosnia–Herzegovina in 1995,⁶¹ was a relatively tangible objective that could be evaluated.

Nevertheless, it is possible that the same ceasefire serves different purposes for different actors. While a series of ceasefires in Sudan between 1995 and 1999 was established in order to distribute polio vaccines and humanitarian

⁵⁷United Nations, "Commissions and Investigative Bodies."

⁵⁸Though, as we discuss above, all ceasefires are a response to, and in turn shape, the broader military and political processes.

⁵⁹Clayton et al., "Introducing the Civil Conflict Ceasefire Dataset."

⁶⁰These ceasefires may or may not be explicitly linked to other purposes. It can be assumed that the provision of humanitarian aid often serves a larger strategic function, such as retaining support from domestic constituencies in war-torn areas and reducing pressure from international actors.

⁶¹"Annex II."

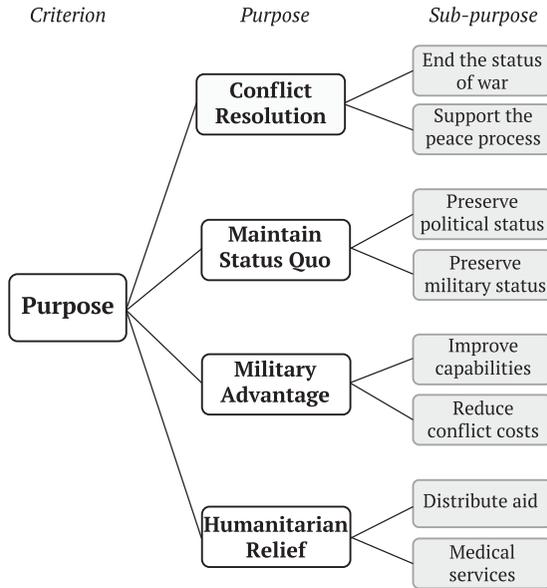


Figure 2. Ceasefire success in relation to the purpose.

aid, it was also used by the conflict parties to rearm and subsequently escalate the conflict.⁶²

We summarize the main points of our discussion of ceasefire purpose in [Figure 2](#). There are likely many more ceasefire purposes than the four discussed here, so this list should not be understood as comprehensive.⁶³ The previous section demonstrated that the heterogeneity of ceasefire purposes is an essential consideration when evaluating success. Overlooking the purpose risks using the same metric to compare all arrangements, even though, for example, some arrangements seek to fully end a war, while others seek only a short humanitarian pause.

Yet there are significant challenges for researchers attempting to evaluate ceasefires based on the purpose, which may be difficult to identify. Firstly, the intentions of the involved actors remain ultimately unobservable. In many cases, it is not clear if the purpose of a ceasefire communicated by the parties is indeed the ‘true’ underlying purpose. Indeed, there are significant incentives to mislead an opponent (as well as observers) if a conflict party intends to gain some military advantage. Secondly, a ceasefire might have multiple purposes, either because the conflict parties pursue different purposes or because the same actor might enter into an agreement with more than one purpose in mind (e.g. humanitarian and maintain the status

⁶²World Health Organization, “Health as a Bridge.”

⁶³Other examples could, for example, include the celebration of holidays or the conduct of elections.

quo). Thirdly, as the dynamics of the conflict evolve, the purpose may change over time. For example, while parties enter the agreement aiming for conflict resolution, they might start using it for military gains if peace negotiations stall.

Despite the difficulties, researchers must strive to incorporate the purpose into their analysis. How this is achieved depends on the approach. In quantitative work, a focus on the *stated* purpose of a ceasefire can help to distinguish between different types of ceasefire. This is the approach used in the ETH/PRIO civil conflict ceasefire dataset and similar studies focusing on mediation.⁶⁴ Yet such an approach would overlook purposes that are never likely to be openly stated (i.e. gain a military advantage). In-depth qualitative analysis is better suited to capture the complexity and nuances associated with ceasefire purpose but the findings tend to be less generalizable. In any case, we encourage researchers to take a systematic approach that is not arbitrary and down to subjective taste but involves transparency about any assumptions that are made.

Applying the Conceptual Framework: The 2002–2005 Ceasefires in Sudan

This section applies our conceptual framework on ceasefire success to the conflict resolution ceasefires that formed part of the 2002–2005 peace process for the North–South war in Sudan. This process culminated in the 2005 CPA, which ended the long-running civil war and paved the way for a referendum that led to the independence of South Sudan. Also known as the Naivasha agreement, the CPA was signed by the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement / Army (SPLM/A).

The Sudan peace process included preliminary and definitive ceasefires and had mixed results. This makes it a rich case to illustrate the key points of this paper: it is important to distinguish between the immediate objective and underlying purpose; ceasefire success / failure is not a simple binary variable but a more complex issue that should be viewed along a spectrum; a ceasefire can be successful or partially successful in terms of certain criteria and indicators but not others; and it can achieve its underlying purpose even if it does not succeed fully in achieving its objective of ceasing hostilities.

In 2002, the parties signed the Machakos Protocol, a framework agreement aimed at ending the civil war. Over the next three years, they negotiated substantive agreements on power-sharing, wealth-sharing and disputed regions, as well as a series of preliminary ceasefire and security agreements.⁶⁵

⁶⁴See Duursma and Svensson, “Measurement of Mediation Success.”

⁶⁵Barltrop, “Negotiation of Security Issues”; Schiff, “Beyond Push and Pull.” Prior to the Machakos Protocol, the parties signed the 2002 Nuba Mountains Cease Fire Agreement. Thereafter, they concluded the 2002 Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Sudan and the SPLM to Protect Non-

The ceasefire mechanisms included a joint military commission, monitoring bodies and international monitors. The purpose was conflict resolution, as the agreements sought to 'create and maintain a conducive atmosphere throughout the negotiations until all the outstanding issues in the conflict are resolved'.⁶⁶ If judged by this criterion, the ceasefire agreements were successful. Although they did not eliminate the enmity and mistrust between the parties,⁶⁷ they helped to maintain the momentum of negotiations towards the conclusion of the CPA.⁶⁸

If, on the other hand, the preliminary ceasefire agreements are judged on the basis of their immediate objective of ending hostilities, they were not completely successful. From 2002 to 2005 hostilities between the government and the SPLM/A continued intermittently, and from late 2003 through much of 2004 the fluctuating level of fatalities and conflict incidents reached pre-ceasefire levels.⁶⁹ Although the parties were receptive to a negotiated settlement, they were not certain that a settlement could be achieved. They remained deeply mistrustful of each other, they repeatedly encountered deadlocks in the negotiations and they wanted to influence the talks through military leverage. They therefore continued to fight while simultaneously pursuing a settlement and incrementally strengthening the ceasefire arrangements.

Assessing the success or failure of the preliminary ceasefires also depends on how the scope of the peace process is understood. While the ceasefires contributed to ending the war between the government and the SPLM/A, they did not achieve the stated aim of 'realizing comprehensive peace in the Sudan'.⁷⁰ On the contrary, in 2003, hostilities broke out in the Darfur region of Sudan and led to massive fatalities, displacement of people and destruction of villages.⁷¹ The exclusionary nature of the Machakos-Naivasha peace process was a proximate cause of the Darfur rebellion and also exacerbated violence in Eastern Sudan.⁷²

The CPA was a compilation of the preceding substantive agreements and ceasefire accords that had been concluded after the Machakos Protocol. The definitive ceasefire arrangement included in the CPA provided for the redeployment of government and SPLM/A forces, the status of other

Combatant Civilians and Civilian Facilities from Military Attack; the 2002 Memorandum of Understanding on Cessation of Hostilities Between the Government of the Sudan and the SPLM/A; the 2003 Addendum to the Memorandum of Understanding on Cessation of Hostilities Between the Government of Sudan and the SPLM/A; the 2003 Agreement on Security Arrangements During the Interim Period; and the 2004 Agreement on Permanent Ceasefire and Security Arrangements.

⁶⁶MoU on Cessation of Hostilities."

⁶⁷Bartrop, "Negotiation of Security Issues."

⁶⁸See Carney, "Some Assembly Required," 8–9; Schiff, "Beyond Push and Pull."

⁶⁹Bello-Schünemann, "Sudan and South Sudan," 7–9.

⁷⁰"Comprehensive Peace Agreement", Machakos Protocol, preamble.

⁷¹De Waal, *War in Darfur*.

⁷²Bartrop, "Negotiation of Security Issues," 10, 39; Bello-Schünemann, "Sudan and South Sudan," 13; Nathan, "No Ownership, No Peace."

armed forces in Sudan, demilitarized zones, a joint commission for dispute resolution, and deployment of a UN peacekeeping force.⁷³ Notwithstanding fears of spoiler moves by Khartoum, the South Sudan referendum went ahead smoothly, the vote was overwhelmingly in favour of independence, and in July 2011 South Sudan became an independent country. In light of this outcome, the overarching conflict resolution purpose of the definitive ceasefire was attained and the ceasefire can thus be regarded as a major success.

As with the preliminary ceasefires, though, the definitive ceasefire's objective of ending hostilities was only partly achieved. The ceasefire was successful in relative terms since violence and conflict incidents declined markedly between 2005 and 2011.⁷⁴ But it was not successful in absolute terms: the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the SPLM/A continued to wage low-intensity war through proxies, including the Lord's Resistance Army; there was heavy fighting in Malakal and Abyei in particular; and, coinciding with the referendum, conflict incidents numbered in the thousands during the first quarter of 2011.⁷⁵

The CPA ceasefire agreements not only failed to achieve a complete cessation of hostilities but also contributed directly to the subsequent violence. Much of the heavy fighting was attributable to the Joint Integrated Units (JIUs) that had been formed as part of the CPA ceasefire and security arrangements.⁷⁶ Comprising members of the SAF and the SPLA, the units were intended to lay the foundation for a future national army and promote confidence and stability. However, they were never properly integrated, were involved in several violent clashes between 2008 and 2011 and thereby posed a serious risk to North–South stability.⁷⁷ The three most serious breaches of the CPA ceasefire resulted directly from the actions of JIU battalions and brigades.⁷⁸ Hence the JIUs were a failure not merely in the sense of being ineffectual but in the more serious sense that they were responsible for violence.

This brief overview of the Sudan case presents a mixed picture regarding the outcomes of the ceasefires concluded between the government and the SPLM/A. There was significant success and significant failure in relation to both the objective and the purpose of the ceasefires. The objective of a complete cessation of hostilities was not achieved, with numerous violent clashes and resultant fatalities and displacements. Yet the ceasefire arrangements proved to be resilient in the face of these clashes, their net effect was a

⁷³"Comprehensive Peace Agreement", ch. 6.

⁷⁴Bello-Schünemann, "Sudan and South Sudan," 7–9.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 10–18.

⁷⁶"Comprehensive Peace Agreement", ch. 6, art. 4.

⁷⁷Verjee, "Sudan's Aspirational Army."

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 4.

reduction of violence and, most importantly, they helped to prevent escalation and a resumption of civil war. The conflict resolution purpose of the ceasefires was achieved in so far as they ended the North–South war and enabled South Sudan to attain independence. But the peace process also contributed to large-scale violence in Darfur and Eastern Sudan. It is evident that this relatively complex picture of the Sudan ceasefires derives from a consideration of several criteria and indicators and that it also depends on the researcher’s judgement.

Although this article has focused on concepts and indicators, and not on causality, the case study offers a cautionary note on causal inference. Any discussion on ceasefire success entails an implicit or explicit assessment of causality. In Sudan as elsewhere, both ceasefire success and ceasefire failure have multiple causes that are not limited to the ceasefire itself. The success or failure of a preliminary ceasefire ultimately depends on progress towards reaching a political settlement, and the success or failure of a definitive ceasefire ultimately depends on the success or failure of that settlement. Consequently, a positive or negative association between a ceasefire and success, or between a set of ceasefires and success, does not in itself imply causality.

Conclusion

Evaluating ceasefire success may appear on the surface to be a relatively straightforward endeavour. We have shown, however, that there are a range of methodological and conceptual challenges associated with determining ceasefire success and failure, impeding research on this topic. We do not advocate any particular strategy for addressing the challenges – the choice should be informed by the research interest of each scholar. We do suggest that scholars acknowledge the related difficulties and motivate their choice of approach.

More specifically, all ceasefires have the immediate objective to stop battle-related violence. A central component of assessing any ceasefire arrangement is therefore its ability to suspend or terminate hostilities. How this is measured requires researchers to make a number of choices, which should be justified, and to be explicit about assumptions that are made. Combining different measures is likely to improve the reliability and robustness of the results but adds complexity to the analysis.

Quantitative approaches are well suited for assessing the immediate objective. Statistical models allow researchers to determine the impact of ceasefires on violence trends, including subsequent peace spells, while accounting for confounding factors and problems associated with endogeneity.⁷⁹ A challenge affecting quantitative analysis, on the other hand, is that the quality

⁷⁹See for example, Clayton, “Relative Rebel Strength” and “Oil, Relative Strength and Civil War.”

of data on battle-related fatalities and ceasefire violations may be poor. A further challenge is that the need for a sufficiently sized sample in quantitative analysis is conflicting with the need to create homogenous ceasefire categories based on the purpose. This is in particular problematic as the variation in purpose often implies a variation in the ceasefire's geographic and temporal scope, which in turn can make a huge difference for the observed trends in violence. Moreover, the achievement of the purpose is an important criterion for success in itself. Depending on the conflict context, the (non)-attainment of the underlying purpose is as important, if not more important, as the (non)attainment of the immediate objective.

For several reasons, identifying and assessing success in terms of the purpose of a ceasefire may be difficult. The parties' motivations may be obscure, they may have different purposes, they may change their mind about the purpose, and a ceasefire may have more than one purpose. Positionality may also be relevant where third party mediators facilitate a ceasefire with a different purpose from that of the conflict parties. Quantitative approaches can still draw a distinction based on the stated purpose of an agreement, or leverage qualitative means for capturing the variation in purpose across arrangements. Through process tracing based on archival research and interviews with relevant actors, researchers can acquire a deep understanding of the purpose of specific ceasefires that can then be incorporated in the quantitative analysis.

We have also highlighted the usefulness of focusing on both the objective and the purpose in the same analysis. Our case study on Sudan indicates that a conflict resolution purpose can be achieved even if the objective of a complete cessation of hostilities is not achieved. Status quo ceasefires, such those between India and Pakistan and between the government of Morocco and the Polisario Front, also appear able to achieve their purpose despite numerous violations.

Future research should investigate the link between the objective and the purpose. Intuitively, we might expect that a ceasefire must reduce violence below a certain threshold in order for the underlying purpose to be achieved but this has not been subject to any empirical testing. Conversely, it is not clear if (non)progress regarding a ceasefire's purpose influences (non)progress regarding the immediate objective. Mixed methods analysis is likely the most promising approach for ceasefire research addressing such questions.

In any event, regardless of the method employed, researchers can only significantly advance knowledge about ceasefire success by paying attention to both the immediate objective and underlying purpose. To do so, researchers need to understand the political context of ceasefires, rather than assuming a homogenous collection of agreements. For research practice, this implies that researchers should more clearly identify the purpose(s) of the ceasefires they are analysing and make their choice of quantitative and/or qualitative indicators explicit.

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