

## Effect of transitional or restorative justice & Justice system support and reform on Civic Participation

Transitional and restorative justice reforms show harmful effects on civic participation, despite fostering trust and dispute resolution.

Effect: Harmful effect ( $g = -0.659$ )

Geographic Location: Sub Saharan Africa, Latin America & Caribbean

Confidence in study findings: Low (3 studies with 13 effect sizes)

### Short Summary:

This cell indicates that transitional and restorative justice interventions have a harmful effect on civic participation. While programs like Colombia's ComunPaz, Sierra Leone's Fambul Tok, and justice reforms in Rwanda strengthened trust in institutions and improved dispute resolution, they did not consistently generate new civic engagement channels. Implementation quality, perceived fairness, transparency, and sustained accountability strongly influence whether interventions translate into broader political or civic participation.

### Long Summary:

#### *The Intervention:*

Interventions include efforts to convene victims and perpetrators of historic or ongoing conflict to prevent further violence. This encompasses Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, community-led reconciliation initiatives, and justice system reforms. These may involve acknowledging past harms, reparations, legal reforms, and strengthening equitable access to justice and human rights protections.

#### *How the Intervention was expected to work:*

The interventions aim to promote reconciliation, trust, and social cohesion to encourage civic participation. The Fambul Tok program in Sierra Leone engages victims, perpetrators, and local leaders in community forums for truth-telling and forgiveness, fostering social trust and ownership of the restorative process. Colombia's ComunPaz program strengthens collaboration between state authorities and community organizations, addresses governance gaps, reduces violence, and enhances institutional trust. In Rwanda, justice reforms increased citizens' awareness of rights but did not consistently boost active political engagement. Overall, the effectiveness of these interventions depends on context, implementation, and community perception of fairness and transparency.

#### *The Evidence Base:*

The cell contains 3 studies, 2 of which are impact evaluations utilising experimental designs (RCTs) and 1 self-report survey.

The primary studies are from Colombia (1 study), Sierra Leone (1 study) and Rwanda (1 study).

### *Evidence findings*

The studies show that while justice reforms and formalized victim participation can strengthen trust and institutional engagement, they do not reliably increase sustained civic or political participation. Factors such as persistent distrust in institutions and variable program implementation limit long-term engagement, resulting in a harmful effect on broader civic participation.

### *Included Studies:*

**Blair (2022):** Blair et al. (2022) evaluate the ComunPaz intervention, which aimed to replace rebel governance with state and communal justice mechanisms in rural Colombia, where FARC had historically dominated. The study found that ComunPaz improved local dispute resolution, increased trust in state institutions, and reduced reliance on armed groups. However, it did not significantly increase citizens' engagement with communal institutions for dispute resolution. The intervention fostered civic participation by strengthening trust between state officials. Enhancing coordination between local leaders, and providing clearer governance roles. It also reduced the influence of armed groups, encouraging citizens to engage with institutional dispute resolution mechanisms instead. Additionally, structured meetings and training sessions promoted public involvement in community justice. However, the study notes that while ComunPaz optimised existing civic engagement, it did not create new participation channels, suggesting that strengthening governance structures alone may not necessarily drive greater civic activism. This study is rated low confidence due to partial outcome definitions and no mention of power calculations.

**Cilliers (2018):** This study investigates the impact of reconciliation efforts in post-conflict societies, particularly through the lens of transitional justice and community healing. The study emphasises the role of truth-telling, victim-perpetrator interactions, and community dialogue in shaping civic participation. A key finding is that while reconciliation programs may reduce social tensions and promote coexistence, they do not always translate into increased political or civic engagement. Instead, the study highlights that participants often express greater trust in local institutions but remain hesitant to engage in formal political processes. This study is rated high confidence.

**Nichols-Barrer (2014):** Findings from the evaluation of the Rwanda Threshold Program (RTP) indicate that efforts to strengthen civic participation through justice reform had mixed effects. While these initiatives aimed to enhance citizen involvement in local governance by empowering civil society organisations (CSOs) and fostering government responsiveness, the impact was not consistently positive. The reforms did not significantly improve citizens' perceptions of their ability to engage in civic activities, and in some cases, they even led to greater dissatisfaction with government services. However, a notable outcome was that these initiatives encouraged citizens to voice criticisms more openly, suggesting that while direct engagement metrics may not have improved, citizens became more aware of their rights and the need for government accountability. Additionally, initiatives such as police accountability programs and community radio stations played a role in shaping public awareness and encouraging discourse around civic issues. This study is rated medium confidence due to partial description of intervention and outcome definitions as well as non-experimental design.

**Confidence Assessment:**

Overall Low: The overall confidence is low due to the limited number of studies and the low confidence rating of included studies.

**Other outcomes in the study:**

Social cohesion / Access to justice, rights and public services

Social cohesion / Feelings of trust & Acceptance of diversity

Community and state governance / Government Performance