

Effect of transitional or restorative justice & Justice system support and reform on Economic Security.

Transitional and restorative justice, along with justice system reform show harmful effects on economic security.

Geographic Area: Sub Saharan Africa, Latin America & Caribbean and Global

Effect: Harmful effect (g= -0.073)

Confidence in study findings: Low confidence (2 studies with 13 effect sizes)

Short Summary:

This cell suggests that transitional and restorative justice interventions have a harmful effect on economic security. While programs like Rwanda's gacaca courts and Sierra Leone's Fambul Tok initiative help rebuild social cohesion, strengthen trust, and promote fairness, they may also reactivate trauma and increase psychological distress, limiting economic benefits. The evidence indicates that pairing top-down justice reforms with reparations

Long Summary

The Intervention:

The interventions in this cell include any efforts to bring together victims and perpetrators of past or ongoing conflicts, such as Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, local justice initiatives, or NGO-led reconciliation programs. These interventions may involve formal acknowledgments of past harms, apologies, or agreements to repair damages. They can also include broader justice system reforms, such as improving court access, integrating human rights protections into legal frameworks, building capacity for courts and lawyers, and reforming criminal codes to strengthen equitable access to justice.

How the Intervention is expected to work:

These interventions aim to address both societal and psychological impacts of conflict. Top-down mechanisms like truth commissions seek to uncover past abuses, promote accountability, and strengthen democratic institutions. Pairing these mechanisms with reparations or tribunals is expected to redress grievances and create conditions for societal and economic recovery. Bottom-up approaches, such as Rwanda's gacaca courts and Sierra Leone's Fambul Tok program, rely on community participation to rebuild trust, promote forgiveness, and restore social networks. Together, these interventions aim to rebuild communal ties and foster environments that support long-term peace, stability, and economic activity.

The Evidence Base:

This cell includes 3 studies: 2 randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and 1 observational study with mixed methods. One study (Vargas, 2018) is a protocol for an ongoing RCT. Primary studies are from Sierra Leone (1), Colombia (1), and Rwanda (1).

Evidence Findings:

The studies suggest that while transitional and restorative justice mechanisms can foster social cohesion and stability, they do not directly improve economic security. Psychological distress triggered by participation in justice processes can limit individuals' ability to engage in economic activities. Overall, these interventions have a small harmful effect on economic outcomes, highlighting the need to integrate mental health support alongside justice reforms to ensure long-term societal and economic resilience.

Included Studies:

Cilliers (2018): This study assessed the Fambul Tok project which aimed to establish reconciliation in communities affected by the Civil War. Direct economic outcomes are limited. However, the study's findings on social capital – offer major insight on how programs that prioritise reconciliation can have an impact on the economic climate of states after conflict. For instance, despite the improvements in social capital, the findings suggest that there were no systemic increases in economic activity or outcomes directly related to the reconciliation process. Measures of economic activity, such as labour devoted to agricultural work or the overall perception of economic well-being, did not show significant positive changes either. The reconciliation efforts did not lead to a measurable improvement in economic indicators like household assets or income levels, suggesting that while social ties may strengthen, they do not automatically translate into economic benefits in the short term. Cilliers et al., suggests that perhaps the psychological impacts of the Civil War could potentially point to why there is stagnation in economic security. For example, within participants involved in the programme there was a measured increase in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These psychological burdens can create barriers to participating fully in economic activities and can lead to decreased productivity – the deterioration of psychological well-being highlights the challenges faced when addressing past traumas, indicating that psychological recovery is a critical component to consider when measuring economic security in post-conflict contexts. This study is rated high confidence.

Royer (2017): Royer's dissertation examines the role of truth commissions as transitional justice mechanisms in post-conflict countries, assessing their impact on democracy, human rights, economic development, and communal peace. A key theme throughout the study is the emphasis on economic security. Restorative justice, when centering reconciliation and repairing community relationships, is shown to improve relations among groups affected by conflict. This, in turn, strengthens community ties, fostering a stable economic environment where social capital plays a vital role in economic activities. While transitional or restorative justice mechanisms alone may not guarantee economic security, their effective implementation, especially when integrated with broader support and reforms, such as locally tailored truth commissions—can significantly contribute to stability and prosperity. This dual approach not only addresses past injustices but also establishes a foundation for long-term economic growth and stability. This study is rated medium confidence due to non-experimental design.

Confidence Assessment:

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

Other outcomes within the study:

Violence / Social norms regarding violence

Social cohesion / Feelings of trust and acceptance in diversity

Community and state governance / Access to justice, rights and public services