

## Effect of transitional or restorative justice & Justice system support and reform on Feelings of trust and Acceptance of diversity

Transitional and restorative justice interventions aim to rebuild trust in institutions and foster acceptance of diversity. However, in this cell, they show a **harmful effect** as some interventions increased distress, reinforced divisions, or failed to meet community expectations.

Geographic Location: Sub Saharan Africa, Europe & Central Asia and Latin America & Caribbean

Effect: Harmful effect ( $g = -0.398$ )

Confidence in study findings: Low (7 studies with 20 effect sizes)

### Short Summary:

The cell shows that interventions can both strengthen and harm social cohesion, but the evidence shows harmful effects on feelings of trust and acceptance of diversity. Programs like Sierra Leone's Fambul Tok and Rwanda's Gacaca courts sometimes improved trust and understanding but also heightened survivors' distress. Reparations in Colombia and reconciliation initiatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina occasionally reinforced social divisions. Overall, success depends on context, implementation, and community readiness, with some interventions strengthening trust while others risk deepening divisions.

### Long Summary

#### *The Intervention:*

Any efforts made to convene a meeting between victims and the perpetrators of historic or current conflict in order to prevent further violent conflict. This could include the role and use of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission but also any other organisations, states or entities seeking to convene victims and perpetrators. These efforts could result in the formal acknowledgement of, or apologies for acts, as well as agreement to repair harm or damages caused. Any effort made to improve the rule of law and justice system in a country through improvements to courts and their equitable access and use. This can include integrating human rights into the legal framework, capacity building for courts and lawyers, and reforming the criminal penal code to strengthen equal protection for human rights under national laws.

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

Programs engage community leaders, victims, ex-combatants, and local institutions to facilitate reconciliation. Examples include truth-telling and forgiveness ceremonies (Fambul Tok), local trials with community service (Gacaca courts), reparations programs (Colombia), and interethnic dialogue initiatives (PRO-Future, Bosnia). Success depends on fairness, context, psychological support, and community readiness.

#### *The Evidence Base:*

The cell contains 12 studies: 8 impact evaluations and 3 qualitative studies by Brehm (2021), Herbiet (2014) and Honeyman (2004).

The primary studies are from Rwanda (9 studies), Sierra Leone (1 study), Colombia (1 study) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (1 study)

*Evidence findings:*

The evidence shows harmful effects alongside positive outcomes. While some programs strengthened trust in marginalised groups, they also increased psychological distress, reinforced divisions, and did not always lead to reconciliation. Outcomes depended heavily on context, implementation quality, and community engagement.

*Included Studies:*

**Bazuin (2013):** This study illustrates how restorative approaches in post-genocide Rwanda contributed not only to individual healing but also to rebuilding societal trust and embracing diversity. He observes that “after the genocide, churches and mosques began working to help their members and the country to recover,” a move that reflects a shift from punitive justice toward reconciliation and healing. This transformation in the justice system, bolstered by religious reform, fostered an environment where survivors could engage in processes of forgiveness and dialogue, as seen when survivors like Clémentine “made remarkable strides toward personal healing through religiously-influenced reconciliation”. In doing so, these interventions helped reforge fractured community bonds, enabling a renewed sense of trust and encouraging the acceptance of diverse identities within a society striving to overcome its violent past. This study is rated low due to its non-experimental design and little to no description of intervention and outcomes.

**Cilliers (2018):** The reconciliation program studied in Sierra Leone showed that transitional justice efforts significantly increased trust toward previously marginalised groups, particularly ex-combatants and migrants. Trust in ex-combatants rose by 9%, while trust in migrants increased by 4%. However, these effects were specific to the groups involved in reconciliation and did not extend to a broader sense of generalised trust across the community. The process also improved social capital, strengthening community networks and participation in communal activities such as parent-teacher associations (PTAs) and women’s groups. Increased engagement in these organisations indicated a broader willingness to work together despite past divisions. This study is rated high confidence.

**Caparos (2020):** This study examines the long-term psychological correlates of transitional justice in Rwanda, particularly in relation to trust and acceptance of diversity. The research reviews the impact of the Gacaca tribunals, a large-scale transitional justice initiative implemented after the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, and evaluates how participation in these trials influenced individuals’ psychological well-being, attitudes toward justice, and social cohesion. A key finding of the study is that individuals who attended the Gacaca trials, whether as observers or testifiers, generally expressed more positive opinions about the justice process than those who did not participate. “A large majority of participants (87%) had a generally positive opinion of the Gacaca”, suggesting that engagement with transitional justice mechanisms fosters trust in the legal system and government efforts to promote reconciliation. Moreover, survivors and non-survivors alike who attended the trials reported higher openness to reconciliation, indicating that such justice mechanisms can play a role in restoring trust between former adversaries. Despite the emotional challenges faced by some participants, the study provides evidence that Gacaca trials positively impacted social cohesion and acceptance of diversity, particularly among survivors. Results find that those who attended the trials were more

open to reconciliation and social reintegration of former adversaries. However, they also note that “Reconstructing social cohesion may be more costly for victims of the violence, and so they may benefit more from the justice process”, suggesting that structured justice interventions can help rebuild intergroup trust, even in deeply divided societies. This study is rated low confidence due to little to no description of evaluation questions and no mention of power calculations.

**IMPAQ International (2017):** This study evaluates the impact of transitional justice and justice system reforms on interethnic trust and acceptance of diversity in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) through the PRO-Future initiative. This initiative aimed to rebuild trust among different ethnic communities by fostering understanding and reconciliation through various local and national interventions. One of the key findings of the study is that efforts to increase interethnic trust must be long-term and deeply embedded in local realities. While the PRO-Future initiative successfully engaged certain groups, the overall impact on broad social attitudes was mixed. The study states that “reconciliation is a long-term process, indicating that PRO-Future’s final expected results were too ambitious to have been achieved by PRO-Future implementation alone”. The research also emphasises that structured reconciliation efforts can be effective in transforming personal attitudes, even if they struggle to create large-scale societal shifts. This suggests that justice system support and reform initiatives, when targeted effectively, can foster trust at the community level. However, the study also highlights that certain ethnic groups responded differently to these interventions. For instance, “there was a positive and significant impact on Croats’ and Serbs’ attitudes, but a negative and significant impact on Bosniaks’ attitudes and trust”. This finding suggests that transitional justice mechanisms need to be tailored to address the specific concerns and histories of different ethnic communities. The study also highlights the importance of youth engagement in building a foundation for long-term trust. Activities such as youth peace camps, speaking-out events, and interethnic interaction programs happened to be highly effective in changing participants’ personal perceptions of diversity. The study notes that “youth participants, in particular, believed that the most effective reconciliation activities for youth need to include activities of interest and relevance beyond just peace and reconciliation”. This suggests that combining justice system reforms with community-driven and interactive programs can have a stronger impact on younger generations, who play a crucial role in the future of interethnic relations. This study is rated low confidence due to its non-experimental design and lack of power calculations. Effect sizes could not be extracted from this study due to insufficient data throughout the study.

**Kanyangara (2014):** The Gacaca courts in Rwanda offered a complex insight on trust and acceptance of diversity. In Rwanda, the Gacaca process was designed to foster reconciliation by allowing survivors and perpetrators of genocide to confront each other in community-based trials. While it successfully reduced survivors’ personal and collective guilt, it also increased their skepticism toward the sincerity of perpetrators’ apologies. Survivors reported higher feelings of revenge, lower willingness to forgive, and reduced trust in those who confessed. However, the process did lead to increased social cohesion by encouraging group identity and shared emotional experiences, even if it did not directly improve interpersonal trust between survivors and former perpetrators. This study is rated low confidence due to partial description of evaluation questions and intervention outcomes and no mention of power calculations.

**O’Reilly (2018):** The Gacaca courts, a modern adaptation of a traditional dispute resolution system, were introduced to address the overwhelming backlog of genocide cases and promote reconciliation. The study finds that these courts significantly improved access to justice by trying nearly two million cases at a lower cost than formal alternatives. This increased access facilitated the reintegration of former perpetrators and victims into the community, contributing to

a gradual rebuilding of social trust. However, the reconciliation process was not without challenges. While some Rwandans felt the Gacaca courts strengthened unity, others expressed concerns about fairness, truthfulness, and the emotional burden of revisiting traumatic events. Surveys indicated that trust between individuals improved over time, with the percentage of Rwandans believing "most people can be trusted" rising from 5% in 2007 to 17% in 2011, suggesting a growing sense of social cohesion. In terms of justice system support and reform, the study emphasises that the Gacaca courts played a role in stabilising the broader legal system. By handling a vast number of cases, they alleviate pressure on the formal judiciary, allowing it to function more efficiently. Additionally, the courts' community-based structure encouraged inclusive participation, helping marginalised groups gain a voice in justice processes. However, there were critiques regarding the courts' ability to promote genuine reconciliation. Some participants felt that the process reinforced divisions rather than healing them, and there were instances where corruption and political influence undermined fairness. Nonetheless, empirical data suggests that overall perceptions of the courts improved over time. This study is rated medium confidence due to no power calculations and partial description of definition of intervention and outcomes.

**Rime (2011):** The findings in this study suggest that while participation in truth and reconciliation processes like Gacaca can facilitate social integration, it also intensifies negative emotions. Victims and perpetrators who took part in the trials experienced a surge in sadness, fear, and anxiety, countering the assumption that truth-telling inherently promotes healing. However, the process contributed to an increase in positive stereotypes about the opposing group and a decrease in perceived outgroup homogeneity, which are key indicators of improved intergroup relations. Additionally, participation in Gacaca led to a reduction in ethnic self-identification, supporting the idea that such justice mechanisms can help build a more unified national identity. The study also highlights how justice system support and reform influenced social cohesion and trust. While victims initially expected reconciliation to foster positive emotional climates, their post-trial experiences often led to heightened distress and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms. In contrast, perpetrators generally benefited from the process, reporting reduced feelings of uncertainty about their fate and a greater sense of reintegration into the community. These findings indicate that while restorative justice mechanisms promote intergroup understanding and reduce prejudice, they do not necessarily enhance trust in a uniform manner. This study is rated low confidence due to no mention of power calculations.

**Rime (2012):** This study showed the impact of transitional justice, particularly Rwanda's Gacaca tribunals, on social trust and acceptance of diversity in post-genocide communities. The findings reveal both positive and negative effects on intergroup relations. While, restorative justice mechanisms contributed to increased social cohesion and trust by fostering dialogue and emotional expression. Participation in the Gacaca process helped reduce negative stereotypes and enhance positive perceptions of out-group members, with survivors and perpetrators alike developing a more individualised, less prejudiced view of one another. As the study notes, "participation in Gacaca reduced negative stereotypes about the out-group, enhanced positive stereotypes about them, strengthened participants' self-definition in non-ethnic terms, and favored an individuated perception of members of the out-group." This shift suggests that structured justice reforms can diminish ethnic divisions and encourage a more inclusive national identity. However, the process also reactivated negative emotions such as fear, sadness, and anger, particularly among survivors. While public truth-telling was expected to be cathartic,

results suggested that "participation in Gacaca systematically provoked and renewed feelings of sadness, anger, and fear among participants of both sides." This emotional distress sometimes strained trust in the reconciliation process, particularly for victims reliving their trauma. Despite these challenges, the study highlights that the justice process also contributed to the restoration of dignity for victims and moral accountability for perpetrators, fostering long-term reconciliation. This study is rated low confidence due to its non-experimental design, partial intervention description and no mention of power calculations. Effect sizes could not be extracted from this study due to insufficient data across the cell.

**Rincon-Unigarro (2022):** Reparations policy for victims of political violence in Colombia, provides an understanding of the impact on trust and acceptance of diversity. Contrary to expectations, results showed that victims who received reparations exhibited lower levels of reconciliation than those who had not received any reparations. This finding suggests that while reparations aim to restore victims' rights and facilitate reconciliation, their implementation may not always meet the victims' psychological needs for agency and status. As a result, rather than fostering trust, reparations can sometimes reinforce existing social divisions and dissatisfaction. Moreover, the study highlights that justice system support and reform, particularly the mechanisms of victim reparation, do not automatically lead to greater social cohesion. While exposure to violence was expected to negatively impact reconciliation, results suggest that victims who had experienced more violence sometimes reported higher levels of "mere coexistence" and rebuilding trust. This counterintuitive finding suggests that prolonged exposure to conflict might lead to the development of coping mechanisms that facilitate reconciliation. Additionally, the victims' understanding of justice played a crucial role, with those who viewed justice as retributive demonstrating lower levels of reconciliation, whereas those with a restorative perspective showed greater openness to trust and coexistence. This study is rated low confidence due to no mention of power calculations and little to no description of the intervention.

*Confidence Assessment:*

Overall Low: The overall confidence is low because most of the studies included in this cell are rated as low confidence.

**Other outcomes in this study:**

Social cohesion / Willingness to participate or help

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

Human security / Intermediate social cohesion outcomes