

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

Transitional and restorative justice reforms, combined with broader justice system reform, have a **moderate effect** on improving accountability and trust in post-conflict justice systems.

Geographic Location: East Asia & Pacific, Latin America & Caribbean, Sub Saharan Africa and Global

Effect: Moderate effect ( $g = 0.172$ )

Confidence in study findings: Low confidence (3 studies with 7 effect sizes)

### Short Summary:

The cell indicates that integrating transitional or restorative justice mechanisms with broader justice system reforms can moderately improve accountability and trust in post-conflict settings. Evidence from Rwanda, Colombia, and other contexts shows that community-driven initiatives, truth and reconciliation commissions, and prosecutions of past regime officials help restore public confidence, expedite trials, and enhance access to justice. However, confidence is low due to the limited number of studies and some inconsistencies in findings across contexts.

### Long Summary

#### *The Intervention:*

Interventions in this cell involve convening victims and perpetrators of historic or current conflict to prevent further violence, through mechanisms like Truth and Reconciliation Commissions or other restorative processes. They also include broader justice system reforms aimed at improving court accessibility, integrating human rights into legal frameworks, building capacity among courts and lawyers, and strengthening penal codes to ensure equal protection under the law.

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

The interventions aim to address legacies of mass human rights violations by combining systemic justice reforms with reconciliation efforts. In Rwanda, for instance, community-driven approaches led by religious institutions and NGOs helped expedite trials, reduce wrongful detentions, and improve public access to justice, thereby rebuilding trust (Bazuin, 2013). Broader reforms, such as prosecuting former regime officials and revising criminal codes, reorient the system toward rehabilitation and societal reintegration while aligning domestic justice practices with international norms (Berlin, 2015). Truth and reconciliation commissions uncover and acknowledge past abuses, triggering accountability reforms that strengthen the rule of law and overall justice system responsiveness (Keil, 2015).

#### *The evidence base:*

The cell contains 7 studies: 3 impact evaluations, 1 protocol (Vargas, 2018), 2 qualitative studies (Guthrey, 2014; Lang, 2019), and 1 systematic review (Holder, 2023). Studies are from Rwanda, Colombia, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Liberia, Mozambique, and three with global focus.

#### *Evidence Findings:*

These interventions work by replacing failing formal justice systems with community-driven and restorative processes, producing a moderate effect on accountability and trust in post-conflict justice systems. In Rwanda, religious groups and NGOs stepped in to expedite trials and rebuild public trust using indigenous dispute resolution methods (Bazuin 2013). Broad reforms—such as prosecuting former regime officials and overhauling criminal codes—shifted the focus from punishment to rehabilitation and reintegration (Berlin 2015). Truth and reconciliation commissions uncovered past abuses and triggered accountability reforms that strengthened the rule of law (Keil 2015). These strategies aim to break cycles of impunity and reestablish a fair, trusted justice system in post-conflict societies.

#### *The review evidence:*

The review examines the role of victim participation in criminal justice, showing that transitional and restorative justice can improve perceptions of justice. Participatory mechanisms, such as victim impact statements, enhance victim satisfaction, procedural fairness, and offender accountability. However, systemic support—like legal representation, advocacy, and accessible communication—is essential for meaningful participation. Without such structural improvements, victim involvement may lead to frustration rather than better justice outcomes. The study is rated low confidence due to the absence of formal risk of bias assessment, limited grey literature, and lack of publication bias analysis.

#### *The impact evaluation evidence:*

**Bazuin (2013):** This study argues that in post-genocide Rwanda, the imperative to "promote justice and reconciliation" spurred innovative, community-driven reforms that reconstituted the nation's shattered legal framework. With the formal justice system decimated—leaving only a handful of legal professionals to handle over 100,000 cases—religious institutions and NGOs stepped in to create alternative mechanisms that expedited trials, reduced wrongful detentions, and increased public access to justice. By decentralizing legal processes and drawing on indigenous dispute resolution traditions, these interventions not only reformed the justice system but also rebuilt public trust and accountability, establishing a participatory model of rights protection crucial for Rwanda's recovery. This study is rated low confidence due to its non-experimental design and little or no description of outcomes and interventions.

**Berlin (2015):** The study shows how reforming justice systems—whether through transitional justice measures or broader support for domestic legal reform—can fundamentally reshape the practice and perception of justice. Berlin argues that as states undertake wholesale reforms of their criminal codes, they not only implement international legal norms but also reorient their justice systems toward accountability and rehabilitation. For instance, he notes that "a handful of transitional countries decided to prosecute former regime officials for human rights abuses" during the late 1980s and early 1990s, an action emblematic of transitional justice in action that helps societies confront past abuses while fostering reconciliation. Furthermore, Berlin critiques traditional retributive approaches by emphasizing that punishment should "be made to fit the criminal and not the crime," thereby advocating for a justice system that prioritizes tailored rehabilitation and restorative practices

over mere retribution. Through these insights, Berlin illustrates that justice system support and reform not only facilitate the domestic implementation of international legal norms but also promote a more humane and adaptive form of justice that can address both the legacies of past atrocities and the ongoing need for societal reintegration. This study is rated medium confidence due to its non-experimental design, partial description of interventions and finally no mention of power calculations.

**Keil (2015):** This study shows that transitional justice mechanisms—especially truth and reconciliation commissions (TRCs)—can play a transformative role in restoring justice by addressing past abuses while laying the groundwork for systemic reform. According to Keil, TRCs are designed not only to “discover, clarify and formally acknowledge past abuses” but also to set in motion reforms that bolster accountability and enhance the rule of law. By fostering an environment where victims’ voices are heard and perpetrators are exposed, these processes help rebuild public trust in legal institutions and create a more equitable framework for future governance. Keil further emphasizes that robust justice system support is essential for sustaining these reforms, noting in the preface that “freedom under law is like the air we breathe,” a reminder of how fundamental transparent and accountable institutions are to securing lasting peace and democracy. This study is rated low confidence, due to non-experimental design, partial description of intervention, outcome and evaluation questions. This study also has little to no mentions of power calculations

*Confidence Assessment:*

Overall Low: the included studies are rated as low confidence.

*Link to review summaries:*

Holder (2023)

**Other outcomes in the study:**

Community and state governance / Civic Participation

Human security / Economic security

Human security / Intermediate social cohesion outcomes

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