

Effect of transitional or restorative justice & justice system support and reform on nature and scale of violence or atrocities.

Transitional and restorative justice, combined with justice system reform, has a **small effect** on the nature and scale of violence. However, legitimizing formal justice mechanisms has proven challenging in the contexts studied.

Geographic Location: Latin America & The Caribbean and Sub Saharan Africa

Effect: Small effect ($g=0.016$)

Confidence in study findings: Low (2 studies with 7 effect sizes)

Short Summary:

The cell shows a small effect of transitional and restorative justice reforms on influencing the nature and scale of violence. Evidence from Sierra Leone and Colombia suggests that community-based reconciliation and dispute resolution initiatives can modestly reduce violence and rebuild trust, though formal justice mechanisms remain difficult to legitimise and psychological impacts persist.

Long Summary

The Intervention:

These interventions aim to convene victims and perpetrators of past or ongoing conflicts to prevent further violence. This includes Truth and Reconciliation Commissions or programs like Fambul Tok and ComunPaz. Interventions may involve formal acknowledgment of wrongdoing, apologies, and reparations. Additionally, they seek to improve courts, legal access, human rights integration, and criminal law reform to strengthen equal protection under national law.

How the Intervention is expected to work:

Both programs rely on community participation and collaboration. In Sierra Leone, Fambul Tok engages victims, perpetrators, and local leaders through forums for truth-telling and confession, fostering reconciliation, forgiveness, and social trust. In Colombia, ComunPaz connects state authorities, local organizations, and community members to strengthen dispute resolution mechanisms, reduce violence, and enhance trust in institutions. Both rely on inclusive participation and local leadership to support long-term stability and peace.

The Evidence Base:

The cell includes 5 studies: 2 impact evaluations using experimental designs (RCTs), 1 systematic review, and 2 qualitative studies.

The studies cover Colombia (2), Sierra Leone (1), Liberia (1), and a global systematic review.

Evidence findings:

The evidence shows a **small effect** on reducing the nature and scale of violence. Blair (2022) finds that community dispute resolution in Colombia reduces local conflicts but does not increase reliance on formal justice institutions. Cilliers (2018) shows that top-down justice efforts in Sierra Leone struggled with localised violence, highlighting the importance of community-based reconciliation approaches.

The review evidence:

Cramer (2016) systematically reviews 149 studies on strategies to prevent and mitigate armed violence in developing and middle-income countries. The review covers interventions such as peace operations, mediation, governance and justice reforms, and community-based peacebuilding, with a regional focus on Sub-Saharan Africa. Findings are mixed and context-dependent, with few high-quality studies providing conclusive evidence. While peacekeeping and mediation show some promise in reducing violence, the overall evidence base is fragmented and low confidence, highlighting the need for more rigorous evaluations.

The impact evaluation evidence :

Blair (2022): The study of the ComunPaz program in Colombia illustrates the complexities of violence within the context of transitional and restorative justice. It highlights post-conflict governance gaps caused by the demobilisation of armed groups like the FARC, which often lead to escalated local conflicts and create opportunities for new armed groups to emerge. The study emphasises the critical role of local dispute resolution in preventing violence during transitions from civil war, noting that the quality of such mechanisms directly influences citizens' trust in both state and communal institutions. The ComunPaz program aimed to foster cooperation between state authorities and community organisations, improving dispute resolution and reducing violent disputes. It highlights how community engagement and empowerment can mitigate violence and build more resilient post-conflict societies. However, while the program increased trust in state institutions for some citizens, it did not significantly enhance reliance on either state or communal authorities for resolving disputes. This reflects the lingering complexities of violence, where trust must be rebuilt over time, and formal justice systems may still struggle to gain legitimacy. The study also points to challenges in security provision, as reliance on armed groups remained low but trust in formal mechanisms like police and JACs did not increase significantly. This suggests that communities may continue to rely on alternative methods for resolving conflicts, complicating restorative justice efforts. Furthermore, the findings highlight that violence is deeply embedded in social structures and relationships, transforming into more localised and manageable forms when communities engage in direct dialogue and informal conflict resolution. Overall, the study demonstrates that restorative justice interventions like ComunPaz must consider the social and historical dynamics of violence. This study is rated low confidence due to the lack of power calculations and partial intervention description.

Cilliers (2018): This study highlights the deeply personal and community-driven nature of violence in Sierra Leone, where grievances often stemmed from local abuses of power in a gerontocratic society. The violence, largely committed by neighbors against neighbors, reflected longstanding tensions over resource allocation and disenfranchisement, particularly among youths. The scale of atrocities and their deeply rooted local dynamics posed significant challenges for transitional and restorative justice mechanisms. Centralised efforts, such as the Special Court and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, were limited in scope. The Special

Court addressed only a small number of high-profile cases, while the Truth and Reconciliation Commission failed to engage rural communities where much of the violence occurred. These gaps reveal the difficulties of addressing widespread, localised violence through top-down mechanisms alone, highlighting the need for community-focused interventions like Fambul Tok to address unresolved grievances and rebuild social cohesion. This highlights how nature and scale of violence directly impact the design, reach, and effectiveness of transitional and restorative justice efforts. This study is rated high confidence.

Confidence Assessment:

Overall Low: the overall rating is low due to limited number of studies in the cell.

Other outcomes in the study:

Social cohesion / Feelings of trust and acceptance in diversity

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

Link to review:

Cramer (2016)