



# Accountability for Atrocities: Evidence Briefs

Given the frequency and extent of human rights abuses and violent conflict, there is an urgent need to develop responses that promote accountability and justice for survivors and other stakeholders. Mechanisms designed to bring justice and accountability, such as trials, truth commissions, memorialization, and others, are continually being refined from past learnings and adapted to new contexts.

An important goal of this work is to prevent similar harms from occurring again, and to build a stable foundation for lasting peace. An equally essential outcome is that the people most affected by atrocities feel that their needs and priorities are reflected in the design and implementation of transitional mechanisms.

This series of evidence briefs explores both streams of inquiry: How can accountability efforts contribute to peace *and* when do accountability efforts align with the needs of survivors? This series supports ongoing inquiry into how these goals relate to one another. Are mechanisms that most strongly link to survivors' priorities also those that are most likely to prevent future cycles of violence?

The six briefs in this series present evidence from published scientific research and from secondary analysis of existing public datasets to identify findings that are relevant to practitioners and policymakers designing justice and accountability initiatives.

## Summary of Briefs

### *1 Literature on non-recurrence*

The first brief reviews scientific studies analyzing how transitional justice (TJ) mechanisms relate to lasting peace and preventing armed conflict reoccurrence. The authors note that there is not yet a robust base of cross-national studies focused on this question. Reviewing the available studies, the brief's authors identify conditions, sequencing, and combinations of TJ mechanisms that the evidence suggests are associated with breaking cycles of armed conflict.

### *2 Guidance on methodology*

The second brief lays out considerations for designing surveys, focus groups, and interviews with survivors, their families, and civil society organizations, customized to understanding their views on justice and accountability. As justice practitioners focus on designing responses, institutions, mechanisms, and projects that are rooted in the priorities of affected populations, this brief provides practical guidance on what methods should be used to gather this information.

### 3 Evaluating reparations

Reparations are a mechanism explicitly designed to meet survivors' needs and facilitate repair of harms. The third brief offers descriptive analysis of the range of reparations mechanisms or policies that have been used in transitional contexts, highlighting that there are many elements that vary in order to customize the design and implementation of reparations. The brief also provides examples of evidence about the outcomes of reparations, but highlights the need for more evidence, through creative research design and careful case studies, to help understand how, when, and in which ways reparations may be linked to peace and stability.

### 4 Retributive justice in MENA

The fourth brief reviews 14 scientific studies, selected for the strength of the empirical evidence they offer. The author compares learnings from MENA, particularly from Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria, about what types of accountability are meaningful in local contexts. The brief specifically explores evidence about desires for retributive justice, and finds the literature suggests broad support for legal accountability, including through the rule of law, fair trials, and punishment of those responsible.

### 5 Forgiveness and retribution in Liberia

In an exploration of one case study, the fifth brief analyzes data collected from Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, demonstrating how information collected through a TJ mechanism can also be used for a secondary purpose. This brief explores how localized patterns of violence connect to community views on justice. The author finds that attitudes of forgiveness are more prevalent than retribution, though there is variation in the prevalence of these views according to the types of violations that occurred in the local area.

### 6 Justice and community effects

Finally, the sixth brief is a high-level review of about 100 empirical studies about the effects of justice and accountability efforts on survivors and others in affected communities. This brief highlights patterns in the empirical literature about how TJ mechanisms align with community desires, and where TJ fails to have an impact or may even have harmful effects. The brief suggests deepening exploration by researchers and practitioners of TJ innovations that prioritize survivor well-being and positive impacts.

#### A Research Project at the Center for Victims of Torture

This series is part of **Accountability for Atrocities**, a research project that addresses how to define accountability in the wake of human rights abuses and how to evaluate progress towards accountability in diverse contexts. The project aims to contribute evidence to identify democracy and human rights programming strategies that are effective in strengthening accountability that is meaningful for victims and survivors of atrocities.

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