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**Humanizing Transitional Justice:
Reflections on the Role of Survey Research in Studying Violent
Conflict and its Aftermath**

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Abstract

An emergent priority in the field of transitional justice is gathering and analyzing empirical data to advance understanding of violent conflicts and responses to the transgressions committed during such events. A major segment of this research focuses on countries, policies, processes, and institutions as the units of observation. Among the limitations of such research, however, is the lack of direct, in-depth attention to relevant individual actors and their roles in these settings. Our article highlights a methodological approach that captures this perspective: surveys. Over recent years, scholars, NGOs, international organizations, and justice institutions have completed surveys of various scales with an assortment of populations, including those implicated in and/or exposed to violent conflict. Such surveys help to illuminate the circumstances and repercussions of conflict for individuals and their families and communities, their expectations about transitional justice, their assessments of contemplated and actual policies, processes and institutions, and the resulting impact on their attitudes, agency, and actions. In the process, these empirical data present a distinctive lens that we argue is integral to appreciating moral

and pragmatic motivations for transitional justice, gauging responsiveness to the needs and interests of key constituencies, and evaluating consequences. We reflect on the merits, shortcomings, mechanics, challenges, and trade-offs of conducting surveys related to transitional justice in conflicted-affected societies. As part of the discussion, we cite examples of key studies from countries around the world, drawing on our own significant first-hand experience as well as research carried out by others.

Introduction

An emergent priority in the field of transitional justice is gathering and analyzing empirical data to improve responses to violent conflicts and associated transgressions. A major segment of this research focuses on countries, policies, processes, and institutions as units of observation.¹ A limitation of such research is the lack of direct, in-depth attention to individuals in these settings. Transitional justice measures aim to serve interests of people in conflict-affected societies—or are frequently justified by such claims. Therefore, collecting data from and about individuals ought to be fundamental to advancing knowledge, developing policy, and honing practice in this field.

Surveys are a key method that emphasizes individuals as a unit of observation and analysis. Scholars, NGOs, international organizations, and justice institutions have undertaken surveys of various scales in conflict-affected societies, focusing on either general publics or specific population segments implicated in and/or exposed to violent conflict. The resulting data present a distinctive individual-level lens that is integral to appreciating moral and pragmatic motivations for transitional justice, gauging responsiveness to needs and interests of key constituencies, and evaluating consequences of violent conflict and post-violence measures. The surveys illuminate the

¹ Oskar Thoms, James Ron, and Roland Paris, “State-Level Effects of Transitional Justice: What Do We Know?” *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 4.3 (2010): 329-54.

circumstances and repercussions of conflict for individuals and their families and communities; their expectations about transitional justice; their assessments of contemplated and actual policies, processes and institutions; and the impact on their attitudes, agency, and actions. The number and geographic coverage of surveys in the field remain relatively modest, however, as does the aggregation of knowledge from the work to date.²

Our article reflects on the role and contributions of surveys related to transitional justice in conflicted-affected societies. We start by examining the utility of conducting surveys in this domain. Next, we discuss related methodological, practical, and ethical considerations. This is followed by an overview of survey research in existing transitional justice scholarship. We then identify limitations of this work. Finally, we conclude with recommendations for the future. Throughout the discussion, we cite examples of studies conducted around the world, drawing on first-hand experience and research carried out by others.

Merits of Conducting Survey Research on Transitional Justice

How are surveys—and the data that they yield—appropriate given the context that is being studied and the topics that are germane in the field of transitional justice? Surveys are one possible method for gathering essential micro-level data. Like every method, surveys have strengths and weaknesses. Here, we contemplate the value of using surveys to study transitional justice themes.

² We view a survey as related to transitional justice if the subject matter on the questionnaire pertains to any of the range of formal and informal measures that can be employed to address legacies of conflict.

Bringing the Individual (Back) In

The emergence of transitional justice as a field of policy, practice, and scholarship is a recent phenomenon.³ Early literature was dominated by historical description, normative prescription, discussions of legal and institutional concerns, and theorizing about paths to favorable, sustainable post-conflict trajectories.⁴ Others have elaborated tensions inherent in pursuing large-order goals (e.g., truth, justice, and societal peace), drawing connections between the realization of these ambitions and transforming systems and cultures in ways that consolidate democracy and mitigate risks of recurring upheaval.⁵ The insights from this work tended to be thin with regard to the suitability, effectiveness, and consequences of transitional justice from an individual vantage point. Some studies highlight elite actors (e.g., members of the political leadership, security forces, and privileged groups deemed prone to resistance) or reference public sentiment. Yet such individual-level perspectives were rarely captured via robust

³ Ruti Teitel, "Transitional Justice Genealogy," *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 16 (2003): 69-94.

⁴ John Herz (ed.), *From Dictatorship to Democracy: Coping with the Legacies of Authoritarianism and Totalitarianism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1982); Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); David Pion-Berlin, "To Prosecute or to Pardon? Human Rights Decisions in the Latin American Southern Cone," *Human Rights Quarterly* 16.1 (1994): 105-30.

⁵ José Zalaquett, "Confronting Human Rights Violations Committed by Former Governments: Principles Applicable and Political Constraints," *Hamline Law Review* 13.3 (1990): 623-60; Neil Kritz (ed.), *Transitional Justice: How Emerging Democracies Reckon with Former Regimes* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1995); Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998); Teitel, *Transitional Justice*; Alexandra Barahona De Brito, Carmen González Enríquez, and Paloma Aquilar (eds.), *The Politics of Memory: Transitional Justice in Democratizing Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Priscilla Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths: Confronting State Terror and Atrocity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000); Gary Bass, *Stay the Hand of Vengeance: The Politics of War Crimes Tribunals* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

primary research. More often, officials, practitioners, and scholars relied on cursory, anecdotal evidence or simplistic assumptions about the needs and interests of different populations when developing transitional justice measures and assessing their impact.

These approaches were increasingly questioned, particularly as accumulated experience revealed complexities, disparities, and nuances, even as gaps persisted in the understanding of people in conflict-affected societies.⁶ In the past 15 years, a growing number of contributors to the field have recognized the necessity of individual-level research. As a result, a foundation of quantitative and qualitative micro-level data is accruing that can be used to generate and test theories, as well as evaluate concepts and applications, with improved credibility, clarity, and specificity. Surveys have played an integral role. This method, when thoughtfully implemented, affords several benefits to the field of transitional justice,⁷ which would not otherwise be attained.

Potential for Substantive Insights with Theoretical, Policy, and Practical Relevance

Many fundamental questions about transitional justice invoke attributes, experiences, thoughts, and behaviors of individuals and populations. Surveys are equipped to address all these angles, supplying an individual-level perspective and an ability to characterize populations constructively. The method need not only collapse populations of diverse individuals into aggregate quantities, even if

⁶ Naomi Roht-Arriaza and Javier Mariezcurrena (eds.), *Transitional Justice in the Twenty-First Century: Beyond Truth versus Justice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁷ Hugo van der Merwe, Victoria Baxter and Audrey Chapman (eds.), *Assessing the Impact of Transitional Justice: Challenges for Empirical Research* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2009); United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Rule-of-Law Tools for Post-Conflict States: National Consultations for Transitional Justice* (New York and Geneva: United Nations, 2009); Nicola Palmer, Julia Viebach, Briony Jones, Zoe Norridge, Andrea Grant, Alisha Patel, Leila Ullrich, Djeyoun Ostowar, and Phyllis Ferguson, *Transitional Justice Methods Manual: An Exchange on Researching and Assessing Transitional Justice* (Bern: Swisspeace, 2013).

some reduction is unavoidable and desirable. Survey data collection and analysis ought to envision and reveal heterogeneity naturally present within a population. Recognizing that variation exists and has implications is superior to operating with crude, monolithic assumptions.

Resulting data can provide a systematic, refined, granular understanding of features of a conflict, describing who was affected, how, to what extent, when, and where, and offering avenues for examining why. A vital aspect is the prevalence, composition, and diversity of exposures to violence and associated physical and emotional trauma. Survey research can also encompass a broader assortment of consequences and causes of conflict and their links to individual and societal trajectories, including displacement, disruption of families, health effects, interruption of education, economic losses (property, employment, benefits, etc.), intra-community and inter-group relations (e.g., trust, tolerance, antagonism), and the nature of governance, institutions, and leadership (e.g., legitimacy, corruption, impunity). Surveys are an adept method to explore respondents' needs, priorities, and preferences about transitional justice and other salient concerns. The agency of individuals is equally vital to study. Surveys can examine respondents' actions and interactions, within families, communities, and social, political, and economic domains. Relationships between those behaviors and individuals' situations, experiences, beliefs, and attributes can be evaluated.

To accomplish this analysis, survey designs can overlay additional dimensions. A natural step is to gather data required to measure variation by individual characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity/race, marital status, educational attainment, socio-economic status, religion, political affinity, and organizational affiliations. Geographic details open up multiple angles of analysis. One angle is differences in responses by individuals' locations. Another angle is integrating information about those places, permitting assessments of how surrounding contexts relate to observations at an individual level.

Using new techniques and technologies of survey research, together with tools of Geographic Information Systems software, responses can be mapped and associations across layers of data analyzed.⁸

Furthermore, survey data are useful to gather and mobilize at multiple points of transitional justice processes. Prospective research, ahead of a transition or a decision about justice measures, can establish a baseline of knowledge. Contemporaneous research, while measures are unfolding, serves as a means of monitoring and generating a progress report. Retrospective research, once measures are completed (or have collapsed), enables assessments of impact. The timing may be immediate, to mitigate effects of confounding factors that arise subsequently, or with a lag, for a longer-term retrospective. Surveys can also document longitudinal changes, through repeated data collection and even within cross-sectional research, using sets of time-stamped questions. The method is capable of gauging effects of specific interventions, by measuring how people respond, preferably using experimental or quasi-experimental designs of data collection and analysis.⁹

Covering an expanse of topics exceeds the feasible scope of most surveys and may not be commensurate with the purposes of particular studies. Instead, evidence aggregated from separate surveys can supply desired breadth and depth. Reaching this point, with an ability to make valid claims that have useful generality and complexity, requires enough surveys about the same things, in many places, plus enough surveys about many things, in the same place(s).

High-quality survey research that is insightful and well disseminated should result in learning that fosters better, more tailored transitional justice policies, processes, programs, and services. Ideally,

⁸ Patrick Vinck and Phuong Pham, "Localizing Peace, Reconstruction, and the Effects of Mass Violence," in *Peace and Conflict 2014*, ed. David Backer, Jonathan Wilkenfeld, and Paul Huth, (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2014).

⁹ Giovanni Capoccia and Grigore Pop-Eleches, "Transitional Justice and Democratic Attitudes. Evidence from West Germany," unpublished working paper.

these outcomes simultaneously serve the needs of entire populations and sub-populations.

Relative Methodological Advantages

Among the primary advantages of surveys are the systematic collection of data on a significant scale, which enables analyses that establish frequencies and distributions, identify patterns and trends, and assess relationships among variables in ways that can have wide validity. Achieving such generalizability hinges on intrinsic characteristics of the method and how a survey is implemented in a given instance. A survey is ideally administered to a sizeable, representative sample. With sufficient observations from employing a structured survey protocol in which defined sets of questions are posed consistently to all respondents, even across research sites and over time, statistical techniques of description and inference can be applied.¹⁰ Generating results with this sort of rigor is essential to the types of insights discussed above—characterizing populations of conflict-affected societies, including in terms of central tendencies and distributions.

Other methods of individual-level data collection that are distinctively intensive (e.g., in-depth interviews), interactive (e.g., focus groups) and immersive (e.g., participant observation) have also proven effective in obtaining information that is valuable to the field. This information typically differs from what a standard survey gathers, in useful ways—arguably richer and more intricate, unfiltered, and authentic. Yet, the other methods have consequential limitations too. Intensive methods usually necessitate smaller numbers of respondents. Data collection via open-ended engagement can diminish the consistency of research inquiry, even with a common framework.

¹⁰ Phuong Pham, Patrick Vinck, Eric Stover, Andrew Moss, and Marieke Wierda, “When the War Ends: A Population-Based Survey on Attitudes about Peace, Justice and Social Reconstruction in Northern Uganda,” Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley; Payson Center for International Development, Tulane University; International Center for Transitional Justice, New York, 2007.

Settings where respondents interact can be affected by interpersonal relationships and group dynamics. Immersive methods can provide deep understandings, but what is learned may be influenced by the specific context, as well as access and the extent of exposure. Admittedly, survey research is subject to analogous issues, though these are attenuated by applications of the method that emphasize design features such as scale, comparability, and independence of respondents.

While something of a trade-off exists between methods like surveys that leverage scalability and other methods that leverage depth, we see fruitful opportunities for the field in the middle ground. An avenue we have pursued is mixed-method approaches that combine surveys with one or more of the other methods. In addition, we employ lengthy, detailed survey questionnaires that have been structured with a natural, coherent narrative arc, include both close- and open-ended questions, and are intended to be administered akin to a conversation. These approaches and tools are capable of supplying the blend of reliable structure and fuller context, revealing tendencies that resonate in regards to important questions for the field.

Why Not Surveys?

Surveys are not necessarily recommended in every instance of research on transitional justice. As with any method, relevant expertise is required. Absent the skill of designing and implementing survey data collection and analysis, the results are likely to follow the maxim: garbage in, garbage out. Survey research could then yield misleading or even inaccurate findings about populations in conflict-affected settings, which may distort policy and practice. High quality is not always easy to achieve. Surveys are difficult. They can be especially hard in conflict-affected settings, in so far as topics of interest are sensitive, key actors are inhospitable, conditions are risky, places are inaccessible, and infrastructure and support systems are lacking. At the extreme, embarking on any research could prove to be a mistake. Both

respondents and the research team could be endangered by their involvement in a survey. These and other circumstances may undermine the completeness, depth, and accuracy of data that can realistically be gathered and the validity of analytical results. Surveys are also expensive to mount, due to requirements of the method: anything less than a sufficiently representative sample of hundreds of respondents is usually inadequate to provide the statistical power needed to arrive at reliable conclusions. Add challenging logistics into the mix and the costs can multiply. Moreover, because surveys entail substantial forward planning with respect to protocols, questionnaires, sampling strategies, and logistics of administration, time-sensitive data collection is not simple.

These factors can weigh against conducting surveys. In some instances, no primary research is viable, or other data collection methods are more realistic. Those circumstances presumably diminish the extent of survey research related to transitional justice. Yet, they do not foreclose the use of this method or eliminate the value of the data. To the contrary: they are hurdles to overcome. Indeed, numerous important surveys have been conducted effectively and safely within the field, as we will explain later in this article.

Mechanics of Survey Data Collection in the Transitional Justice Context

Next, we amplify crucial methodological, practical, and ethical considerations that arise when undertaking survey research on transitional justice. As illustration, we intersperse examples from our own West Africa Transitional Justice (WATJ) Project. This project, ongoing since 2006, focuses on victims in relation to transitional justice processes in four West African countries: Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. For the study, we have designed and conducted extensive individual-level research, including large-sample surveys. We reflect on a number of decisions and challenges faced while implementing this sort of study.

In using surveys as a main mode of data collection, we were motivated to build a more extensive evidentiary foundation with which to test theoretical hypotheses regarding issues of concern to the field (and others), including claims articulated in the literature. When we first proposed the study, in 2005, scant empirical research on individuals had been undertaken, a gap that we sought to rectify.

Methodological Considerations

Case Selection and Sampling

One basic design parameter for any individual-level study is where will the research be conducted and with whom? Most studies about transitional justice—including those relying on surveys, as we detail later—have been confined to single countries and collectively concentrated in a small set of countries. Given that the choices of cases are far from random or representative and cross-national studies are rare, the knowledge base is skewed toward select settings and extending inferences beyond the cases on which particular studies focus should be done with caution.

Our study design and choice of the country cases was consciously intended to be novel, motivated by the prospect of findings with greater generalizability. The countries varied along many attributes: the types of conflict; exposures to trauma; timelines of transitions and political development; nature of economic and social development; political and cultural divisions; and scale. When we first proposed the study, transitional justice in these countries had rarely been a topic of research. Measures were completed, ongoing or pending when our research commenced, or else were introduced or exhibited notable developments thereafter. All four countries implemented truth commissions referencing the South African model, but with differences. A central aim of the

study has been to investigate whether findings of research each of us carried out previously about the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission,¹¹ the surrounding transitional justice process, and responses of sub-populations, held true in a diverse group of other settings. Thus, the cross-national component of the project was integral to the design, in addition to having a bearing on the policy and practical relevance. We committed to three layers of comparison: within each study country, across the countries, and over time. This unparalleled design placed a premium on maximizing direct comparability of survey data along these layers.

Another basic design parameter is with whom will the research be conducted? The study population of interest could be the general public. In this event, the extent of selection in sampling may be limited to stratification to ensure adequate distribution of population characteristics. Alternatively, research can focus on sub-populations that share a salient characteristic, such as (ex-)combatants, victims of conflict-related violence, those with particular exposures (e.g., displaced persons), and participants in transitional justice processes. Each of these sub-populations presents concerns about access, representativeness, and the resulting rigor of sampling and analysis.

We opted to devote our study to victims. In part, this choice was motivated by research interests about this sub-population, including the sources, nature, and impact of victims' agency within transitional justice processes.

¹¹ David Backer, *The Human Face of Justice: Victims' Responses to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Process*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2004; Anupma Kulkarni, *Demons and Demos: Violence, Memory and Citizenship in Post-Conflict States*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 2005.

The gold standard of a representative sample of respondents is plausible to attain in the abstract, but can be tricky in practice, even for general population surveys. Most conflicts over the recent decades have occurred in developing countries. In these settings, information to facilitate survey research is usually wanting. Some developed countries have formal mechanisms to access representative sampling frames. Short of this, one can usually obtain detailed, current information about population characteristics of administrative units, as well as maps of residences. Such resources are the exception in conflict-affected settings, especially those in developing countries. Census data and maps may be outdated and unreliable. Conflict can displace substantial segments of a population. Economic and other demands induce significant mobility and migration. Emerging technologies and tools (e.g., GIS, remote sensing) are helping to mitigate these issues by providing fine-grained information about terrain, administrative units, and population settlements. Yet information alone is not enough. Infrastructure needed to access people (e.g., roads, communications) may be in bad shape. Also, access may hinge on the political situation, including conflict conditions, and on navigating authorities and cultural norms at the national and local levels.

In each study country, we opted to partner with local human rights NGOs, which had valuable experience, information, and contacts that could be leveraged to organize and implement sampling strategies.

Studies focusing on sub-populations present distinct complexities. If a sub-population comprises a small share of the general population (e.g., witnesses in trials conducted by the Special Court for Sierra Leone), targeted sampling is essential for implementation of the survey data collection to be efficient. Assembling a sampling frame can be difficult, however, when required

information is lacking. Legacies of violence complicate matters. Record keeping is often disrupted. People may be unwilling to talk and divulge information. It may be that little information is public. Or names of individuals could be known, with no readily available information about where to locate them. Or full details are available just for some people. These leads may be sourced from a particular agency or organization that works closely with affected populations, whether as a matter of necessity or convenience, raising the possibility of selection bias in the absence of a broader sampling frame. In addition, sub-populations can be defined by self-selection that influences the sampling frame and analysis. Comparison to a baseline “control” sample from the general population can help to evaluate self-selection and establish the differences associated with belonging to a sub-population. An alternative is to limit the research, describing the characteristics of and examining variation within a sub-population. Regardless, access can be a challenge. The ability to reach conflict protagonists may require building relationships with trusted representatives. Similarly, reaching victims or entering areas in which refugees or internally displaced persons reside may require working with local organizations and networks.

Achieving a sufficient sample of victims in Ghana and Nigeria would have been difficult to achieve via general population surveys within the scope of our budget, given the relatively modest extent of recent conflict exposures. We relied on existing lists compiled by our NGO partners, complemented by advance “scoping” efforts. To mitigate the potential of bias, we also implemented techniques of cluster sampling that introduced randomized searches for eligible respondents within the vicinity of respondents drawn from the lists.

Ultimately, there is a balance to strike between sampling strategies that need to be rigorous and representative, as well as

adapted to the context, recognizing that the entire process will be shaped by realities on the ground. Identifying, accessing, and building effective rapport with individuals to obtain quality data remains a human endeavor that combines discipline, objectivity, sensitivity, and compassionate engagement and depends greatly on the training and abilities of the research team in the field. Therefore, researchers conducting surveys on transitional justice topics may have to undertake original foundational work by hand and view what they do as providing only a rough, imperfect snapshot of a disrupted, distorted, dynamic landscape.

In addition to the partner NGOs, we relied on local personnel in each of the countries, while involving ourselves in most aspects of design and implementation, including the training and oversight of survey enumerators. This structure balanced the needs for know-how, sensitivities, skills, and access that were country- and area-specific, against the requirements of comparability and quality control.

Measurement

Measurement is another fundamental concern for any survey. Empirical analysis requires observable indicators. A big challenge is expressing central concepts to be consistently intelligible to respondents. Concepts may be viewed in objective terms, according to an externally imposed definition, or subjectively, according to individual perceptions. Certain terms may not be widely used, or used at all, depending on the person, population, context, and place. Terms used in academic circles and among educated classes can be absent in common vernacular. A term can be unsettling or offensive. The same term may encompass many distinct meanings, even ones that are seemingly incompatible, and different people can invoke these different meanings under different circumstances. Examples include terms like victim, justice, and reconciliation, which are regularly at the

core of research in the field. Also, translations across languages can be inexact or altogether unavailable. Some languages have voluminous vocabularies, while others are spare. Some languages rely heavily on discrete terms, while others rely on idiomatic expressions.

With expertise and sensitivity, these concerns can be navigated. An aim should be to meet respondents on their own ground, while acknowledging diversity. Surveys favor structure, but can accommodate measurement and interpretation reflecting differences in individual understandings. Still, one must be cautious in making inferences, recognizing that assumptions are made in the research process and allowing for possible flaws in measurement.

We developed the survey instrumentation with reference to our previous research in South Africa, as well as the local settings of the study countries. In particular, we thought conscientiously about how a person with exposure to conflict-related trauma would experience both the substance and the process of the interview. The content of the questionnaire reflected a combination of issues of theoretical relevance and of interest to these conflict-affected populations. The structure, style, language, and administration of the survey was designed to maximize the comfort and security of the respondent, to encourage openness, comprehension, and accuracy. We compiled a base questionnaire, tailoring certain relevant details to each country, then worked closely with translators to produce equivalent versions in 20 languages across the four countries. Each respondent was engaged in his/her preferred language. The questionnaire was carefully designed to flow like an extended conversation and embedded a number of open-ended items that invited the respondent to reflect and elaborate on their experiences, understandings, and sentiments. In this way, we were able to derive some insights into the meaning of certain key concepts, such as justice and reconciliation, thereby giving further orientation to the study.

Timing

Time is a key, but underappreciated, dimension of transitional justice research. If a study's purpose is to evaluate individual-level effects of transitional justice, several options exist. A baseline survey conducted prior to exposure to measures of interest, when paired with data collected afterwards and controlling for other factors, can be used to draw inferences based on the presumption that changes over time are attributable to the exposure. Depending on circumstances, undertaking research in advance of particular measures may be infeasible, which limits direct measurement of changes. An alternative is to resort to techniques of observational research and analysis. By differentiating respondents with respect to exposure, while matching on other salient factors, a quasi-experimental design can be approximated. Another approach to overcome the constraints of retrospective research is to pose questions that recreate data for various time points. This approach is not always highly reliable, given recall bias, but can be satisfactory if used judiciously for items that are realistically memorable within the surveyed (sub-) population.

The research conducted in Liberia comprised multiple waves of a survey, including a panel component: a substantial set of respondents was interviewed at the early stages of the truth commission process and then re-interviewed after the process was completed. This design enables us to examine changes over time, which may be influenced by these respondents' exposure to the process.

Practical Considerations

We have already discussed several key practical considerations (e.g., cost; personnel; logistics). Let us expand briefly on a set of challenges that remain even when basic arrangements are in place: navigating local conditions, gaining access to communities and respondents, and ultimately collecting good, reliable data.

To cultivate a hospitable environment for individual-level research, it is generally important that a respondent interact with someone to whom they can relate. One instinct is to favor assigning an interviewer from the respondents' own country, if not their community, on the grounds of cultural and linguistic compatibility. Yet, determinations about who should administer a survey need to be approached carefully, as dynamics of interaction are highly contingent. In some places, conflict has left a legacy of deep distrust down to the local level, due to the involvement of neighbors, friends, and relatives in violence. An interviewer drawn from the community may therefore be distrusted. By contrast, an outsider might be treated as independent and neutral. Likewise, cultural attitudes with respect to gender, age, and other characteristics can affect interactions between respondents and interviewers—and the quality of information gathered.

Our teams of survey enumerators included both men and women. We opted against assigning them to interview only respondents of the same gender. Of note, no consistent relationship to gender pairings was found in the prevalence of reporting sexual violations, which runs against a conventional wisdom.

Ethical Considerations

Whether survey data collection is appropriate should be guided by an appreciation of the prospective setting. When risks are present, the researcher must consider whether such risks can be mitigated—and, if so, how. Transitional justice contexts can exhibit numerous sensitivities, associated with contours of conflict, exposures to violence, dynamics of post-conflict recovery, and the broader political environment. These sensitivities heighten requirements of vigilance, diligence, and discretion. No data is important enough to put study participants or the research team in jeopardy. At the same time, information that can be gathered concerns serious real-life issues and may be put to good use in practice, which potentially offers redeeming

value to respondents. With the right procedures and protections, information can be accessible and reasonable to collect. Not everyone will be equally willing to participate or forthcoming in their answers. Sincere empathy and serious commitment to the interests of the respondent—to their basic security and to honoring their information—goes a long way toward putting the research on solid footing. Ethics thereby work hand in hand with practicality and methodology.

We submitted the survey protocol and questionnaire to human subjects review at multiple academic institutions in advance of conducting the data collection, then revised according to feedback until securing approval, which was subsequently renewed on an annual basis. During multi-day training sessions we ran with the local teams of research managers and survey enumerators in each of the countries, ethical issues were a central topic of discussion. Enumerators were explicitly instructed about the responsibilities to respect the rights and protect the safety and privacy of the respondents, as well as to ensure their own welfare in the course of administering the survey. We also identified resources to provide psycho-social support to the respondents and enumerators, as needed.

Contributions of Survey Research to Transitional Justice Scholarship

The merits, trade-offs, and challenges of surveys help explain why this method has contributed meaningfully to advancing knowledge in this field, but also why the extent of the contributions remains limited. Here, we adopt a multifaceted approach to evaluating influence and isolating gaps by reflecting on several dimensions of contributions: coverage, insights, and applications. We derive the conclusions in this section from a systematic examination of the use of surveys in the

transitional justice literature, an exercise that we outline in the Appendix.

Coverage

Although employed with growing frequency in recent years, surveys have long been an underutilized method in transitional justice research. Among the earliest instances of survey data collection explicitly on transitional justice issues pertained to South Africa's political transition and the TRC process in the 1990s.¹² At roughly the same time, surveys began to be used in the Eastern European context by the Central European University and the Center for Public Opinion Research.¹³ We assembled an extensive list of studies conducted by scholars and NGOs that are based significantly on the collection and/or analysis of survey data. Table 1 (see pages 207-215) summarizes this work, indicating the coverage of countries and populations in each of the cited studies and grouping clusters of studies that were conducted by particular research teams, including those affiliated with specific organizations and academic centres.¹⁴

¹² Gunnar Theissen, "Common Past, Divided Truth: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South African Public Opinion," paper presented at the Workshop on "Legal Institutions and Collective Memories," International Institute for the Sociology of Law, Oñati, Spain, September 22-24, 1999.

¹³ Natalia Letki, "Lustration and Democratisation in East-Central Europe," *Europe-Asia Studies* 54.4 (2002): 529-52; Aleks Szczerbiak, "Dealing with the Communist Past or the Politics of the Present? Lustration in Post-Communist Poland," *Europe-Asia Studies* 54.4 (2002): 553-72.

¹⁴ The list does not include instances of opinion polls conducted by centers and the media, except when those data are used as the basis of research publications.

Country	Study Population
<i>ICTJ Cluster</i>	
Afghanistan ¹⁵	General public
Colombia ¹⁶	General public
Iraq ¹⁷	General public
Nepal ¹⁸	Victims
Sierra Leone ¹⁹	Ex-combatants
Timor-Leste ²⁰	Victims

Table 1. Coverage of Select Transitional Justice-Related Surveys

¹⁵ Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, “A Call for Justice: A National Consultation on Past Human Rights Violations in Afghanistan,” Kabul: Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2005.

¹⁶ International Center for Transitional Justice, “Colombian Perceptions and Opinions on Justice, Truth, Reparations, and Reconciliation,” New York, NY: International Center for Transitional Justice, 2006.

¹⁷ International Center for Transitional Justice, “Iraqi Voices: Attitudes toward Transitional Justice and Social Reconstruction,” New York, NY: International Center for Transitional Justice, 2004.

¹⁸ International Center for Transitional Justice and the Advocacy Forum, “Nepal Voices: Perceptions of Truth, Justice, Reconciliation, Reparations and the Transition in Nepal,” New York, NY: International Center for Transitional Justice, 2008; International Center for Transitional Justice, “From Relief to Reparations: Listening to the Voices of Victims,” New York, NY: International Center for Transitional Justice, 2011.

¹⁹ Post-Conflict Reintegration Initiative for Development and Empowerment and the International Center for Transitional Justice, “Ex-Combatant Views of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Court in Sierra Leone,” Freetown: PRIDE, 2002.

²⁰ International Center for Transitional Justice, “Unfulfilled Expectations: Victims’ Perceptions of Justice and Reparations in Timor-Leste,” New York, NY: International Center for Transitional Justice, 2010.

Country	Study Population
<i>ICTJ/UC-Berkeley Human Rights Center Cluster</i>	
(Northern) Uganda ²¹	General public
Dem. Rep. of the Congo ²²	General public

Table 1. Coverage of Select Transitional Justice-Related Surveys

²¹ Phuong Pham, Patrick Vinck, Marieke Wierda, Eric Stover, and Adrian di Giovanni, "Forgotten Voices: A Population-Based Survey of Attitudes about Peace and Justice in Northern Uganda," International Center for Transitional Justice and Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley, 2005; Pham, et al., "When the War Ends"; Phuong Pham, Patrick Vinck, and Eric Stover, "Returning Home: Forced Conscription, Reintegration, and Mental Health Status of Former Abductees of the Lord's Resistance Army in Northern Uganda," *BMC Psychiatry* 9.1 (2009): 23; Patrick Vinck and Phuong Pham, "Peace-Building and Displacement in Northern Uganda: A Cross-Sectional Study of Intentions to Move and Attitudes towards Former Combatants," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28.1 (2009): 59-77; Phuong Pham and Patrick Vinck, "Transitioning to Peace: A Population-Based Survey on Attitudes about Social Reconstruction and Justice in Northern Uganda," Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley, 2010.

²² Patrick Vinck and Phuong Pham, "Ownership and Participation in Transitional Justice Mechanisms: A Sustainable Human Development Perspective from Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 2.3 (2008): 398-411; Patrick Vinck, Phuong Pham, Suliman Baldo, and Rachel Shigekane, "Living with Fear: A Population-Based Survey on Attitudes about Peace, Justice and Social Reconstruction in Eastern Congo," Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley; Payson Center for International Development, Tulane University; International Center for Transitional Justice, New York, 2008; Phuong Pham, Patrick Vinck, and Harvey Weinstein, "Sense of Cohesion and Its Association with Exposure to Traumatic Events, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and Depression in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 23.3 (2010): 313-21.

Country	Study Population
<i>UC-Berkeley Human Rights Center Cluster</i>	
Rwanda ²³	General public
Former Yugoslavia, Rwanda ²⁴	General public
Uganda ²⁵	General public

Table 1. Coverage of Select Transitional Justice-Related Surveys

²³ Phuong Pham, Harvey Weinstein, and Timothy Longman, "Trauma and PTSD Symptoms in Rwanda." *JAMA: Journal of the American Medical Association* 292.5 (2004): 602-12.

²⁴ Eric Stover and Harvey Weinstein (eds.), *My Neighbor, My Enemy: Justice and Community in the Aftermath of Mass Atrocity* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

²⁵ Patrick Vinck, Phuong Pham, Eric Stover, and Harvey Weinstein, "Exposure to War Crimes and Implications for Peacebuilding in Northern Uganda," *JAMA: Journal of the American Medical Association* 298.5 (2007): 543-54.

Country	Study Population
<i>Pham & Vinck Cluster</i>	
Cambodia ²⁶	General public
Central African Republic ²⁷	General public
Liberia ²⁸	General public
Philippines ²⁹	General public
Cote d'Ivoire ³⁰	General public

²⁶ Phuong Pham, Patrick Vinck, Mychelle Balthazard, Sokhom Hean, and Eric Stover, "So We Will Never Forget: A Population-Based Survey on Attitudes about Social Reconstruction and the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia," Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley, 2009; Phuong Pham, Patrick Vinck, Mychelle Balthazard, and Sokhom Hean, "After the First Trial: A Population-Based Survey on Knowledge and Perceptions of Justice and the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia," Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley, 2011.

²⁷ Patrick Vinck and Phuong Pham, "Association of Exposure to Violence and Potential Traumatic Events with Self- Reported Physical and Mental Health Status in the Central African Republic," *JAMA: Journal of the American Medical Association* 304.5 (2010): 544-52; Patrick Vinck and Phuong Pham, "Building Peace, Seeking Justice: A Population-Based Survey on Attitudes about Accountability and Social Reconstruction in the Central African Republic," Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley, 2010; Patrick Vinck and Phuong Pham, "Outreach Evaluation: The International Criminal Court in the Central African Republic," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 4.3 (2010): 421-42.

²⁸ Patrick Vinck, Phuong Pham, and Tino Kreutzer, "Talking Peace: A Population-Based Survey on Attitudes about Security, Dispute Resolution, and Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Liberia," Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley, 2011; Patrick Vinck and Phuong Pham, "Association of Exposure to Intimate-Partner Physical Violence and Potentially Traumatic War-Related Events with Mental Health in Liberia," *Social Science and Medicine* 77 (2013): 41-49.

²⁹ World Food Programme and the World Bank Group, "Violent Conflicts and Displacement in Central Mindanao: Challenges to Recovery and Development," Rome: World Food Programme and Washington, DC: The World Bank Group, 2011.

³⁰ Phuong Pham and Patrick Vinck, "Fragile Peace, Elusive Justice: Population-Based Survey on Perceptions and Attitudes about Security and Justice in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire," Cambridge, MA: Harvard Humanitarian Initiative Series on Peace, Justice and Reconciliation, 2014.

Country	Study Population
<i>David-Choi Cluster</i>	
Czech Republic ³¹	Political prisoners
Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland ³²	General public
Czech Republic ³³	General public
Croatia ³⁴	General public
<i>Nalepa Cluster</i>	
Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland ³⁵	General public

Table 1. Coverage of Select Transitional Justice-Related Surveys

³¹ Roman David and Susanne Choi, "Victims on Transitional Justice: Lessons from the Reparation of Human Rights Abuses in the Czech Republic," *Human Rights Quarterly* 27:2 (2005): 392-435; Roman David and Susanne Choi, "Getting Even or Getting Equal? Retributive Desires and Transitional Justice," *Political Psychology* 30.2 (2009): 161-92.

³² Susanne Choi and Roman David, "Lustration Systems and Trust: Evidence from Survey Experiments in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland," *American Journal of Sociology* 117.4 (2012): 1172-1201.

³³ Roman David, "Twenty Years of Transitional Justice in the Czech Lands," *Europe-Asia Studies* 64.4 (2012): 761-84.

³⁴ Roman David, "International Criminal Tribunals and the Perception of Justice: The Effect of the ICTY in Croatia," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 8.3 (2014): 478-95.

³⁵ Monika Nalepa, "The Power of Secret Information: Transitional Justice after communism," PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 2005; Monika Nalepa, "Lustration and Survival of Parliamentary Parties," *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 5.2 (2009): 45-68; Monika Napela, *Skeletons in the Closet: Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Monika Nalepa, "Tolerating Mistakes: How do Popular Perceptions of Procedural Fairness Affect Demand for Transitional Justice?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56.3 (2012): 490-515.

Country	Study Population
<i>Gibson-IJR Cluster</i>	
South Africa ³⁶	General public
South Africa ³⁷	General public
Cambodia ³⁸	General public
<i>Backer-Kulkarni Cluster</i>	
South Africa ³⁹	Victims
Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone ⁴⁰	Victims
<i>Samii-Gilligan Cluster</i>	
Burundi ⁴¹	Ex-combatants
Burundi ⁴²	General public

³⁶ Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, "Reconciliation Barometer Survey," Cape Town: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, 2003-2014.

³⁷ James Gibson, *Overcoming Apartheid: Can Truth Reconcile a Divided Nation?* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004); James Gibson, "The Truth about Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa," *International Political Science Review* 26.4 (2005): 341-61; James Gibson, "'Truth' and 'Reconciliation' As Social Indicators," *Social Indicators Research* 81.2 (2007): 257-81; James Gibson, "Group Identities and Theories of Justice: An Experimental Investigation into the Justice and Injustice of Land Squatting in South Africa," *Journal of Politics* 70.3 (2008): 700-16; James L. Gibson, *Overcoming Historical Injustices: Land Reconciliation in South Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); James Gibson, "Land Redistribution/Restitution in South Africa: A Model of Multiple Values, as the Past Meets the Present," *British Journal of Political Science* 40.1 (2010): 135-69.

³⁸ James Gibson, Jeffrey Sonis, and Sokhom Hean, "Cambodians' Support for the Rule of Law on the Eve of the Khmer Rouge Trials," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 4.3 (2010): 377-96.

³⁹ Backer, *The Human Face of Justice*; David Backer, "Watching a Bargain Unravel? A Panel Study of Victims' Attitudes about Transitional Justice in Cape Town, South Africa," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 4.3 (2010): 443-56.

⁴⁰ David Backer, "The Layers of Amnesty: Evidence from Surveys of Victims in Five African Countries," *Global Studies Review* 5.2 (2009). Other publications are pending from the West Africa Transitional Justice Project.

⁴¹ Michael Gilligan, Cyrus Samii, and Eric Mvukiyeye, "Reintegrating Rebels into Civilian Life: Quasi-Experimental Evidence from Burundi," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 57.4 (2012): 598-626.

⁴² Cyrus Samii, "Who Wants to Forgive and Forget? Transitional Justice Preferences in Postwar Burundi," *Journal of Peace Research* 50.2 (2013): 219-33.

Country	Study Population
<i>Ingelaere Cluster</i>	
Rwanda ⁴³	Mixture of households
<i>Brounéus Cluster</i>	
Rwanda ⁴⁴	Genocide survivors, neighbors, gacaca judges

Table 1. Coverage of Select Transitional Justice-Related Surveys

⁴³ Bert Ingelaere, “Does the Truth Pass across the Fire without Burning?’ Locating the Short Circuit in Rwanda’s Gacaca Courts,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 47.4 (2009): 507-28; Bert Ingelaere, “Living Together Again: The Expectation of Transitional Justice in Burundi - A View From Below,” Working Paper 2009.06, Institute of Development Policy and Management, University of Antwerp, 2009.

⁴⁴ Karen Brounéus, “The Trauma of Truth Telling: Effects of Witnessing in the Rwandan Gacaca Courts on Psychological Health,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54.3 (2010): 408-37; Karen Brounéus, “The Women and Peace Hypothesis in Peacebuilding Settings: Attitudes of Women in the Wake of the Rwandan Genocide,” *Signs* 40.1 (2014): 125-51.

Country	Study Population
Central and Eastern Europe ⁴⁵	General public
Bosnia ⁴⁶	General public
Bosnia & Herzegovina ⁴⁷	Soldiers
Rwanda ⁴⁸	General public
Rwanda ⁴⁹	General public
Rwanda ⁵⁰	General public (one commune)
Zimbabwe ⁵¹	General public
Nepal ⁵²	General public
Timor-Leste ⁵³	General public

Table 1. Coverage of Select Transitional Justice-Related Surveys

⁴⁵ Cynthia Horne, "Assessing the Impact of Lustration on Trust in Public Institutions and National Government in Central and Eastern Europe," *Comparative Political Studies* 45.4 (2012): 412-46.

⁴⁶ Nicholas Jones, Stephan Parmentier, and Elmar Weitekamp, "Dealing with International Crimes in Post-War Bosnia: A Look through the Lens of the Affected Population," *European Journal of Criminology* 8.5 (2012): 553-64.

⁴⁷ Lara Nettelfield, "From the Battlefield to the Barracks: The ICTY and the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 4.1 (2010): 87-109.

⁴⁸ Max Rettig, "Gacaca: Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation in Postconflict Rwanda?" *African Studies Review* 51.3 (2008): 25-50.

⁴⁹ National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, Republic of Rwanda, "Rwanda Reconciliation Barometer," Kigali: National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, Republic of Rwanda, 2010.

⁵⁰ Joanna Pozen, Richard Neugebauer, and Joseph Ntaganira, "Assessing the Rwanda Experiment: Popular Perceptions of Gacaca in Its Final Phase," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 8.1 (2014): 31-52.

⁵¹ Michael Bratton, "Violence, Partisanship and Transitional Justice in Zimbabwe," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 49.3 (2011): 353-80.

⁵² Prakash Adhikari, Wendy Hansen, and Kathy Powers, "The Demand for Reparations: Grievance, Risk, and the Pursuit of Justice in Civil War Settlement," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56.2 (2012): 183-205.

⁵³ John Roosa, "How Does a Truth Commission Find out What the Truth Is? The Case of East Timor's CAVR," *Pacific Affairs* 80.4 (2007): 569-80.

Country	Study Population
Uruguay ⁵⁴	Human rights leaders
Northern Ireland ⁵⁵	General public
Northern Ireland ⁵⁶	Former political prisoners
Spain ⁵⁷	General public

Table 1. Coverage of Select Transitional Justice-Related Surveys

Some interesting patterns emerge. All the research was published since 2003. The vast majority of the studies draw on general population surveys. Only a small number rely on surveys with types of protagonists or segments of affected populations. Surveys have been conducted in at least 28 countries around the world; an exhaustive inventory would likely reveal more cases. The largest share relates to countries in Africa, followed by Europe, then Asia, with Latin America bringing up the rear. Most of the research focuses on a single country; cross-national studies are rare. Even the latter do not always involve directly comparable questionnaires. Several clusters of work conducted by the same researchers across multiple countries are evident. In most instances, the studies on different countries within a cluster are independent of one another, rather than components of a comparative project. To the extent that the subject matter of the research and

⁵⁴ Jo-Marie Burt, Gabriela Fried Amilivia, and Francesca Lessa, "Civil Society and the Resurgent Struggle against Impunity in Uruguay (1986–2012)," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 7.2 (2013): 306-27.

⁵⁵ Patricia Lundy and Mark McGovern, "A Trojan Horse? Unionism, Trust and Truth-telling in Northern Ireland," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 2.1 (2008): 42-62.

⁵⁶ Clare Dwyer, "Expanding DDR: The Transformative Role of Former Prisoners in Community-Based Reintegration in Northern Ireland," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 6.2 (2012): 274-95.

⁵⁷ Paloma Aguilar, Laia Balcells, and Héctor Cebolla-Boado, "Determinants of Attitudes toward Transitional Justice: An Empirical Analysis of the Spanish Case," *Comparative Political Studies* 44.10 (2011): 1397-1430.

content of survey questionnaires overlap, such comparison is feasible in principle. As yet, however, the responsible researchers have made limited efforts to consolidate findings from any of these clusters.⁵⁸

A full accounting of topics covered in each study is beyond the scope of this article. Several themes are addressed regularly:

- *Exposures to violence*—describing the range and prevalence of harms suffered in conflicts, as well as variation in distributions with respect to geography, demographics, etc.;
- *Effects of violence*—documenting micro-level impacts of experiences during conflict, such as psychological trauma, economic losses, educational disruptions, and displacement;
- *Perceived causes of violence*—identification of factors that contributed to conflicts and remain concerns, as well as attributions of blame towards those considered responsible;
- *Needs and priorities*—reflections about current circumstances and how they could be remediated and improved;
- *Views about transitional justice*—expressions of hopes, preferences, and expectations in relation to various concepts, options, institutions, and actors;
- *Transitional justice engagement*—detailing the extent of knowledge about and interactions with policies and institutions;
- *Impact of transitional justice*—measurement of responses to and the effectiveness of specific interventions and broader processes; and
- *Influences*—capturing factors at the individual level and in their surrounding environment that affect the above aspects.

All these themes represent central concerns of the field, in terms of theory, policy, and practice.

⁵⁸ Vinck and Pham, “Localizing Peace.”

Insights

A natural follow-up question is: What has been learned from the survey-based research to date? Do the studies generate important, generalizable, actionable lessons at the sub-national, national and cross-national levels, as well as about particular sub-populations and topics? We would highlight several sets of insights with profound implications.

To start, populations in conflict-affected settings are hardly monolithic. This insight is deceptively simple—some might say, too obvious to require confirmation or deserve mention. Yet, understanding of the point is not universal. People in conflict-affected settings are often stereotyped and treated as homogenous. As more empirical data are collected, including from surveys, the fact that the experiences and effects of conflict can vary greatly and be incredibly complex becomes apparent. Even within a country, experiences and effects are not uniform. Individual-level information, when aggregated, reveals differences across regions, localities, and segments of society defined by which community individuals belong to, as well as their gender, age, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc. Most survey-based research has shown that exposures, needs, expectations, engagement, and assessments vary across—and within—segments. While distinctions among victims, perpetrators, bystanders, beneficiaries, and innocents remain evident, survey data also indicate these categorizations could be simultaneously both apt and misleading in some cases. How individuals think of themselves in relation to the past and present can be subtle and surprising. What might appear to be inconsistencies are indicative of circumstances that resist reduction to sharp categories. Surveys can pick up on these nuances as part of providing a rich empirical picture of variation in a population.

In principle, the capacity to hone understanding of the variation can provide a basis for tailoring transitional justice to serve

the needs of populations and societies.⁵⁹ Not all tailoring options may be equally or ever feasible. Also, not all the tailoring that could happen does in practice. Nonetheless, information about circumstances and preferences within a population can logically and feasibly be used to design measures responsive to needs. Policy take-up of empirical research actually plays out in countless policy domains, yet is hardly guaranteed and always contingent on political processes. Examining these dynamics, however, is beyond the scope of the article.

Meanwhile, evolution at the individual level can be observed and even traced to the unfolding of transitional justice amid an evolving context in which there may be changes in leadership and policy direction and other new influences. The few instances where comparable survey data have been collected over time reveal marked shifts in needs and priorities,⁶⁰ as well as evaluations.⁶¹ This finding may again seem obvious, inasmuch as transitions are dynamic, which should be expected to have effects at an individual level. Yet, that presumption has not supplied sufficient impetus to study change as a matter of habit in the field. Additional survey data collection would help to reveal whether individuals' circumstances are stable, attitudes are staunch, and actions are static—or instead fluctuate. Available evidence of variability should give pause to thinking about timelines

⁵⁹ Shana Swiss, Peggy Jennings, Gladys Aryee, Grace Brown, Ruth Jappah-Samukai, Mary Kamara, Rosana Schaack, and Rojatu Turay-Kanneh, "Violence against Women during the Liberian Civil Conflict," *JAMA: Journal of the American Medical Association* 279.8 (1998): 625-29; Vincent Iacopino, Martina Frank, Heidi Bauer, Allen Keller, Sheri Fink, Doug Ford, Daniel Pallin, and Ronald Waldman, "A Population-Based Assessment of Human Rights Abuses Committed against Ethnic Albanian Refugees from Kosovo," *American Journal of Public Health* 91.12 (2001): 2013-18; Vinck and Pham, "Ownership and Participation"; Phuong N. Pham, Patrick Vinck, and Eric Stover, "The Lord's Resistance Army and Forced Conscription in Northern Uganda," *Human Rights Quarterly* 30.2 (2008): 404-11; Pham et al. "Returning Home"; Pham et al., "Sense of Cohesion"; Gibson, "Land Redistribution/Restitution in South Africa."

⁶⁰ Pham et al., "When the War Ends."

⁶¹ Backer, "Watching a Bargain Unravel?"

for the design and implementation of transitional justice policies and the challenges of managing expectations and addressing responses.

Survey research has also generated a more encompassing panorama of the effects of conflict. We now know with certainty that these effects are not isolated. Rather, individuals usually suffer an accumulation of multiple harms, which further emanate within families and communities. Nor are the harms merely physical and temporary; they can extend everywhere in life and have enduring consequences. This breadth of impact reinforces just how difficult facing the challenges of post-conflict transitions can be. Specific survey items highlight the pervasiveness of severe exposures, the seriousness of problems that individuals face in every-day life, and the issues that confront states and societies. The extent of the impact bolsters the rationale for a holistic approach to transitional justice, which integrates various disciplines and professions. At the same time, individuals do not all suffer the same exposures or effects, though typical clusters of experiences can be observed.⁶² This means that the holistic approach to transitional justice should not be about providing everything for everyone, but rather a far-reaching agenda with flexibility to customize to individuals' needs in the short and long term.

Another area where survey research has made valuable strides is evaluation. A critical advance has been the specification of observable implications of heretofore vague, amorphous concepts that are fundamental to transitional justice.⁶³ More precise formulations enhance the ability to measure progress toward realizing these aims and to explain the mechanisms of influence. The steps of specification, refinement, and validation required as part of survey research, complementing a wealth of qualitative research, have prompted development of proxies, indicators, and scales. These research tools contribute to assessments about the impact of certain policies,

⁶² Vinck and Pham, "Localizing Peace."

⁶³ Gibson, "'Truth' and 'Reconciliation' As Social Indicators."

programs, institutions, interventions, and other components of transitional justice processes, as well as to testing theories and hypotheses that underpin discourses in this field.

An important early example is an edited volume resulting from a project based at the UC-Berkeley Human Rights Center (UCBHRC) that focused on post-conflict reconstruction in both the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.⁶⁴ Survey data provided overall pictures of perceptions of the international war crimes tribunals and other justice measures (e.g., gacaca in Rwanda) in each of the settings. The research also unpacked concepts of justice and reconciliation and set forth propositions for how they could be linked. Survey data were used to assess “readiness” for reconciliation, suggesting factors underlying the likelihood that reconciliation could or would take place. Of note, the analysis of the former Yugoslavia showed a negative relationship among authoritarianism, nationalism and ethnocentrism that hindered the process of reconciliation among national groups in the Balkans.⁶⁵

Surveys with similar content were subsequently conducted in several countries by researchers at UCBHRC, at times in collaboration with the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ). Phuong Pham and Patrick Vinck helped spearhead this work and have since continued to study additional countries after joining the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (see Table 1). Together, these studies reveal clear variation in experiences of conflict, fine-grained understandings of what key concepts in transitional justice mean, and diverse views about what can and should be done in response to the past.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Stover and Weinstein, *My Neighbor, My Enemy*.

⁶⁵ Miklos Biro, Dean Ajdukovic, Dinka Corkalo, Dina Djipa, Petar Milin, and Harvey Weinstein, “Attitudes Toward Justice and Social Reconstruction in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” in *My Neighbor, My Enemy: Justice and Community in the Aftermath of Mass Atrocity*, ed. Eric Stover and Harvey M. Weinstein, 183-205 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁶⁶ Vinck and Pham, “Localizing Peace.”

At one end of the spectrum is the concept of retributive justice, i.e., those responsible for harms should face criminal or civil consequences, which has been a cornerstone of the dilemma faced by post-war, post-authoritarian, and post-genocide societies.⁶⁷ Surveys gathering information on justice preferences and attitudes towards trade-offs (e.g., peace vs. justice, justice vs. truth) have tapped into sources of variation in retributive desires. For example, one study found that, among former political prisoners in the Czech Republic, the desire for retribution could be reduced by policies that restored respondents' social and economic status.⁶⁸ Another study in Zimbabwe finds prevailing support for peace over justice, but partisanship is as important an influence as exposure to violence in explaining individual preferences for retributive justice.⁶⁹ By contrast, a study in Burundi found that partisan motivations are associated with the desire to forgive and forget.⁷⁰

At the other end of the justice spectrum are measures that eschew accountability for perpetrators of violence. On this topic, surveys have generated intriguing results. Our research in South Africa and West Africa reveals that support for amnesty is surprisingly robust, influenced by a pragmatic desire for peace. This does not mean people think that amnesty is fair or reject criminal prosecutions—quite the opposite. Instead, they see amnesty as a bargain that could be improved by attaching conditions, resulting in a hybrid approach that also encompasses accountability.⁷¹

Truth commissions present an intermediate alternative along the transitional justice spectrum. Research in South Africa found that

⁶⁷ Jon Elster, *Closing the Books: Transitional Justice in Historical Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Jon Elster (ed.), *Retribution and Reparation in the Transition to Democracy* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁶⁸ David and Choi, "Getting Even or Getting Equal?"

⁶⁹ Bratton, "Violence, Partisanship and Transitional Justice."

⁷⁰ Samii, "Who Wants to Forgive and Forget?"

⁷¹ Backer, "The Layers of Amnesty."

the TRC process contributed to reconciliation, at least within segments of the population.⁷² Questions have been raised, however, about the durability of this impact, given subsequent developments, which survey evidence suggests have severely diminished the acceptability of the negotiated compromise to victims.⁷³

The further option of reparations poses thorny ethical, legal, and practical challenges. Surveys can capture the spectrum of what constitutes reparations, as well as examine variation in preferences, which may be contingent on several factors. For example, analysis indicates that the nature of losses influence whether reparations are desired and what types are sought.⁷⁴ A close association exists between land issues and historical injustices, as well as support for land redistribution as a corrective measure, in South Africa.⁷⁵

A final front to highlight is analysis about specific sub-populations. Survey research challenges claims that truth-telling processes are generally helpful to participants. The effects can be conditional on the design of the process, which can differ within the same country, and the quality of the experience for the individual, which can also vary. In certain contexts, greater direct participation by victims in South Africa's TRC process was actually associated with a diminished sense of justice relative to non-participation.⁷⁶ Likewise, gacaca witnesses suffer from higher levels of psychological distress than non-witnesses.⁷⁷ These results favor careful thought about the causal relationship between participation in transitional justice processes and well-being for those involved, as well as factors that

⁷² Gibson, *Overcoming Apartheid*; Gibson, "The Truth about Truth and Reconciliation"; Gibson, "'Truth' and 'Reconciliation' As Social Indicators"; Gibson, "Group Identities and Theories of Justice."

⁷³ Backer, "Watching a Bargain Unravel?"

⁷⁴ Adhikari et al., "The Demand for Reparations."

⁷⁵ Gibson, *Overcoming Historical Injustices*; Gibson, "Land Redistribution/Restitution in South Africa."

⁷⁶ Backer, *The Human Face of Justice*.

⁷⁷ Brounéus, "The Trauma of Truth Telling."

induce better or worse outcomes. Survey research has also explored the conventional wisdom that women are more likely to accept compromises on questions of justice for the sake of peace, relative to men in the same setting. Instead, women report more negative attitudes with respect to gacaca and to issues of trust and coexistence in Rwanda.⁷⁸ This result cautions against assumptions about what certain groups are likely to feel, expect, or think in the aftermath of deeply traumatic events.

Applications

An interplay between policy, practice, and scholarship is evident in the survey-based research in the transitional justice field. Institutions responsible for undertaking measures and organizations involved in advising the design and implementation of these measures have employed the method. Independent and collaborative research is observed, including partnerships with academics. Surveys have been used to take stock of circumstances, inform or support policy recommendations, gather information as a means of investigation, and conduct assessments. Encouraged by influential intergovernmental agencies,⁷⁹ international organizations,⁸⁰ and academic networks,⁸¹ the method has become part of standard toolkits of recommendations for conflict-affected settings. While not yet standard practice, new instances of deployment of surveys continue to be observed. In some cases, the research is conducted while active violence remains ongoing, as a basis of documentation of violations and advocacy of responses as part of a transition; a recent example was observed in Syria.⁸²

⁷⁸ Brounéus, “The Women and Peace Hypothesis.”

⁷⁹ UNHCR, *Rule-of-Law Tools for Post-Conflict States*.

⁸⁰ International Center for Transitional Justice, “What is Transitional Justice?” <https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-Global-Transitional-Justice-2009-English.pdf> (accessed on July 22, 2015).

⁸¹ Palmer et al., *Transitional Justice Methods Manual*.

⁸² The Day After, *Pilot Survey on Transitional Justice*, Istanbul: The Day After, 2014.

Limitations of Existing Research Using Survey Data

Along the way in this article, we have identified a number of shortcomings of the research to date in the transitional justice field that employs survey data. Here, we collate and expand on the list.

First, not enough researchers in the field actually make use of survey data to conduct analysis, let alone engage in original data collection. Instead, an overreliance on reprising the results from available studies—especially a small, select subset of them—is detected. Those studies are generally of good quality and warrant being referenced. The downside is an echo chamber that masks the limited extent of survey research. More researchers should conduct primary data collection and analysis, or at least secondary data analysis. The benefit would be fresh insight, with a more sophisticated, critical eye and greater investment in the process by which the data are compiled and analyzed.

Second, not enough cross-national comparison is observed. This deficiency is a function of several factors. Surveys have been conducted in a limited set of countries. Multi-country research is the exception. Questionnaires used in different studies are not necessarily comparable. The raw data from the surveys is rarely made available in the public domain. Some researchers favor treating countries as unique and remain unconvinced about the value of cross-national analysis. All these factors run counter to demonstrated needs of the field. The phenomenon of transitional justice spans many countries. Strong reasons exist to expect that the dynamics of transitional justice exhibit certain patterns across these countries—at least those with similarities. Part of the reason is that experiences are transmitted among countries, through diffusion of ideas and exchanges of personnel. Policies, institutional designs, and other features are also promoted by external actors in multiple countries. Dynamics within individual countries likely exhibit meaningful differences that cause refraction in outcomes. Disparities among countries, rather than short-circuiting cross-

national comparison, should provide impetus. The point is to search for central tendencies in relationships, while seeking to account for relevant variation. Well-designed and -executed surveys fit this aim, affording structure that is amenable to cross-national comparison.

Third, not enough surveys are replicated over time. In most instances, data were collected within a single time period. Rare exceptions include IJR's South African Reconciliation Barometer, some work by Vinck, Pham, and colleagues and separately by Gibson and colleagues, and our own research. This longitudinal research supplies compelling evidence that things do not remain fixed. The paucity of such data limits knowledge of evolving processes of reconstruction, justice, reconciliation, and recovery, which unfold over long timelines in ways that are not necessarily consistent, monotonic, or predictable. One-off surveys provide a snapshot that is inevitably compromised in terms of an ability to reliably capture changes. More can be learned with repeated data collection in the same settings.

Fourth, not enough surveys are designed to ensure that data are collected both before and after transitional justice measures were undertaken. In some cases, this omission is due to consultations with a lack of follow up. In other cases, research is fielded with a retrospective, evaluative lens. Rarely do both happen in the same setting. Instead, these types of research ought to be connected.

Survey Research in the Transitional Justice Field: Looking Forward

In this article, we focus on the use of surveys to collect individual-level data on transitional justice themes, which we see as helpful for tackling important theoretical issues in the field, as well as the practical implementation of policies to address past conflicts, remediate harms, and prevent recurrence. We firmly believe that obtaining reliable information at an individual level with high quality, considerable depth, and interesting complexity is realistic. Far from being inaccessible and closed, many individuals are actually willing to talk and be forthcoming,

even about serious, sensitive topics. They are often quite engaged, aware, and savvy. Rather than approaching conflict from a narrow vantage point, many individuals see multiple dimensions with intricate intersections. Their understandings exhibit nuance and can be counterintuitive. Surveys should embrace and aspire to unearth all these aspects.

What can be done to improve and better leverage survey research? We have several recommendations to offer, building on thoughts presented earlier in the article.

A basic recommendation is more survey research, involving collection and analysis of data, cross-national comparison, replication, and longitudinal study, including pre/post evaluations. Also, the breadth and depth of inquiry should continue to grow, involving multi-disciplinary teams with the expertise and horsepower to tackle the complexities of studying post-conflict transitions.

We do not envision this expansion of research on the strength of independent projects alone. Instead, greater coordination and support are advisable. With a higher frequency, researchers need to share survey protocols, instruments, and questions, work together to develop questionnaires and cross-pollinate questions for different surveys, and make raw data publicly available. One means to facilitate these interactions is a central repository of the survey materials and data. An ideal is a transitional justice survey database, with comparable information spanning many countries—like what exists with the World Values Survey or regional barometer surveys. Pham and Vinck started down that path with the *Peacebuildingdata* website, which provides access to results from several surveys they have conducted, with mapping functionality. Along these lines, more work needs to be integrated across research teams and projects and made available in user-friendly forms that promote further data collection and analysis. Achieving many of these gains hinges on resources. Compelling cases can be made for funding both basic and applied survey research on transitional justice. The onus is on researchers to appreciate the gaps

in existing knowledge and seek out and capitalize on opportunities that boost the scope and vitality of what the method contributes.

Appendix

In this appendix, we outline the process through which we sought to determine the extent and evolution of survey usage in transitional justice scholarship. We first attempt to gauge the frequency with which the transitional justice literature refers to surveys, what we call prevalence. Then, we isolate which of these studies actually make surveys a central component of their data analysis.

Prevalence

Pinning down exact usage of survey research related to transitional justice is difficult, for several reasons.⁸³ We opted against an all-encompassing search, in the interest of time and efficiency. Instead, we chose to undertake several more narrow searches.

The most broad-based search used Google Scholar, which has the advantage of vacuuming up references in written material that appears online, including both published and unpublished work (while avoiding a larger volume of mere references on websites). This resource identified about 25,800 items that mention the term “transitional justice” anywhere in the full text. Of these items, about

⁸³ First, the field encompasses a wide range of topics. Not all relevant work employs the precise term “transitional justice,” even in passing. Therefore, identifying material requires a lengthy list of search terms, including the many modes of transitional justice and pertinent themes. Second, the field is inherently interdisciplinary and global in scope. Consequently, one cannot examine just literature from select disciplines and area studies. Survey research is concentrated in the social sciences, but also seen outside conventional boundaries, including in hybrid disciplines such as peace studies and socio-legal studies. Third, the field spans policymaking, practice, and scholarship, with an assortment of contributors. Consequently, references to surveys can appear in many places, beyond just the normal products of academia. Locating and compiling a distilled list of all this material is hardly straightforward.

10,200 (39.5%) also mention “survey(s)” in the full text.⁸⁴ This figure is likely inflated by an alternative meaning of the word survey. Searching instead for “survey data” reduced the list to just 643 items; adding “analysis” to the search yielded 617 items. Some items are spurious for our purposes. The upshot is a lower bound of estimates of usage of surveys in the field that is closer to 2%. One of the earliest items discusses public opinion polls conducted before and after South Africa’s 1994 political transition and especially as the TRC process was ongoing, which are among the first known instances of survey data collection explicitly on transitional justice issues.⁸⁵

Another search used JSTOR, a well-known “digital library of academic journals, books, and primary sources” that is widely used among scholars.⁸⁶ A full-text search for “transitional justice” in the entire JSTOR database yielded 2,423 items, comprised of 1,977 from journals and 446 from books (including numerous clusters of chapters). Of these items, 668 also mention “survey” in the full text. Searching instead for mentions of “surveys” yields 302 items, while “survey data” yields 110 items, though significant shares are still spurious. A couple of items reference results of other early instances of survey data collection, including those conducted in the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, Hungary and Poland by the Central

⁸⁴ With Google Scholar’s search algorithms, simple variants of terms—such as plurals—produce the same results.

⁸⁵ Gunnar Theissen, “Common Past, Divided Truth: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South African Public Opinion,” paper presented at the Workshop on “Legal Institutions and Collective Memories,” International Institute for the Sociology of Law, Oñati, Spain, September 22-24, 1999.

⁸⁶ JSTOR’s coverage of journals, in particular, is extensive: nearly 10,000 across 77 fields. Of course, we would not expect to find anything pertinent on surveys related to transitional justice in most of these journals and fields. JSTOR’s coverage of books is more limited: 30,000 published in digital format, which represents a small fraction of what exists and tends to favor more recent material. Another important gap is non-English language publications, which is especially meaningful for French and Spanish.

European University in 1992, and 1994,⁸⁷ as well as in Poland by the Center for Public Opinion Research in 1994, 1996, 1997, and 1999.⁸⁸ Only 36 items mention “survey” and “data analysis” in the full text, again not always in ways that are pertinent. The first of these that is a true instance of collecting and analyzing survey data on relevant themes appeared in 2004.⁸⁹ A clearer indicator of the centrality of the method to the research is when “survey” is mentioned in the abstract, which is true for only 28 items.⁹⁰

A further search used the ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database. This resource captures products of upcoming scholars at final stages of professional training, supplying a useful indicator of where the field may head in the future. Since 1996, 674 dissertations and 226 Master’s theses have mentioned “transitional justice” in the full text. Of these 900 items, 721 also mention “survey(s)” and 660 mention “survey data” in the full text.

Other logical places to search are within journals and book series that specifically focus on transitional justice. These sources mitigate extraneous results—at the very least, everything is pertinent to transitional justice—and give a handle on what methods the field favors.⁹¹ Of course, other relevant publications do not appear in these specialized outlets and therefore are excluded from such narrow searches. Those publications should be captured in the broader searches above.

⁸⁷ Natalia Letki, “Lustration and Democratisation in East-Central Europe,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 54.4 (2002): 529-552.

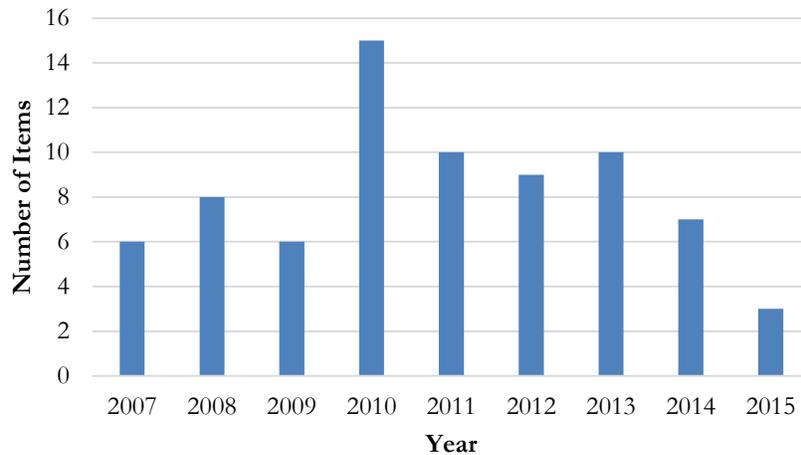
⁸⁸ Aleks Szczerbiak, “Dealing with the Communist Past or the Politics of the Present? Lustration in Post-Communist Poland,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 54.4 (2002): 553-572.

⁸⁹ Jodi Halpern and Harvey Weinstein, “Rehumanizing the Other: Empathy and Reconciliation,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 26.3 (2004): 561-583.

⁹⁰ According to JSTOR, approximately 10 percent of the articles in the database have abstracts. This circumstance will tend to bias any search using abstracts toward a lower number of results, relative to a search using the full text.

⁹¹ The search algorithm of Oxford Journals, the online interface of the publisher of *IJTJ*, mirrors Google Scholar’s.

The *International Journal of Transitional Justice* (IJTJ) is the premier specialized journal in the field. Since its inception in 2007, IJTJ has published nearly 250 articles, notes from the field, interviews, book reviews, and editorial notes. Of these, 95 mention “survey(s)” in the full text, out of which only 74 actually concern individual-level surveys. As Figure 1 shows (page 230), no clear trend in frequency is discernable; the number peaked in 2010, largely attributable to the publication of a special issue featuring impact evaluation.



Note: The value for 2015 reflects the first two of three issues of IJTJ for the year.

Figure 1. Items Mentioning Surveys in IJTJ

Meanwhile, three specialized book series have emerged in the field. The longest-running and currently the largest of the series is published by Intersentia. Our search found that only one of the books

in this series made any use of survey data (see Table 2 on page 231).⁹² By contrast, most of the books in the Routledge and Springer series contain at least some mention of survey data.

Series Publisher	Duration	Books in Series	Books Mentioning Surveys
Intersentia	2007-present	18	1
Routledge	2011-present	14	9
Springer	2013-present	10	9

Table 2. Usage of Surveys in Transitional Justice Book Series

Centrality

In the transitional justice literature, different degrees of importance are accorded to the usage of survey data. In some instances, the research design and empirical analysis concentrate on survey data, as the sole or main source. In other instances, surveys are one of multiple sources of data the analysis examines. Most often, authors who use survey data in statistical analyses were directly responsible for the data collection. Secondary analyses are surprisingly rare; reasons may include the lack of availability of raw data in the public domain and sharing among scholars. An exception is reliance on responses to questions embedded in broader public opinion polls, which comprise an important segment of survey data related to transitional justice, but are typically characterized by narrower scope and depth than special-purpose surveys. Instead, the most common form of usage involves reprising results of analyses of survey data conducted by others. Such references are usually included as documentation in support of specific points or lines of argument, rather than forming the core of analysis. Surveys are

⁹² We conducted the search via Google, which was unable to access a couple of the recent Intersentia books.

also addressed in the context of discussions of methods of analysis related to transitional justice.

As one gauge of centrality, we disaggregated the results for the IJTJ publications discussed previously. As Table 3 (see page 232) shows, just 14 of the 74 items (19 percent) involve primary analysis of survey data collected by the authors. We found no instances of secondary analysis. Instead, a majority of items reference findings of research conducted by others—mostly a few contributors to the literature. A small share of items mention surveys solely in the context of discussing the method.

Year	Primary Analysis	Reference	Editorial	Review Essay	Method Only	Total
2007	2	4				6
2008	2	4	1		1	8
2009		5	1			6
2010	5	6		2	2	15
2011		6		2	2	10
2012	1	4		3	1	9
2013	1	5	1	2	1	10
2014	2	4			1	7
2015	1	1		1		3
2007-Present	14	38	3	10	7	74

Table 3. Distribution of Items Mentioning Surveys in the *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, by type of usage

A similar pattern was observed within the book series. We identified only two instances—both chapters in edited volumes—of primary analysis of survey data collected by the authors. All remaining instances were references to survey research by others.