Article

cmps

Conflict Management and Peace Science
2025, Vol. 42(5) 514–535

DOI: 10.1177/07388942241285609
journals.sagepub.com/home/cmp
Sage

Hurting or healing? How conflict exposure and trauma (do not) shape support for truth commissions

Amélie Godefroidt
Center for Research on Peace and Development, University of Leuven, Belgium

Karin Dyrstad
Department of Sociology and Political Science, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway

Abstract

Truth commissions (TCs) are a much-discussed and sometimes controversial means of establishing sustainable peace. Despite their prevalence and potential, the determinants of public support for TCs, particularly the role of conflict exposure, remain poorly understood. We suggest *trauma* as a key mechanism through which conflict exposure affects support for TCs. Trauma may lead victims to see TCs as hurting or healing, respectively, which may decrease or increase support. We test these competing hypotheses across Nepal, Guatemala, and Northern Ireland; three post-conflict cases with differing truth-seeking experiences. While conflict exposure predicts trauma in all three cases, trauma only determines support for TCs with tangible implications, and only in Nepal and Northern Ireland. By qualitatively examining context-specific scope conditions, we propose that the *prospective closure utility* of a specific TC could bolster its support. Future research is needed to probe the validity of this novel theoretical construct.

Keywords

Conflict exposure, need for closure, public opinion, truth commissions, trauma

> [...] failure to provide justice for past crimes creates direct and tangible harms in the present: families who lost loved ones years ago continue to seek justice and are forced to live without closure. (Human Rights Watch (2020: 2) on the Nepali peace process.)

Both scholars and practitioners have long argued that closure is crucial to fostering post-conflict peace and reconciliation (Hamber and Wilson, 2002). Truth commissions (TCs) are often proposed and installed to provide such closure. Yet despite their prevalence and potential, we know little

Corresponding author:
Amélie Godefroidt, Center for Research on Peace and Development, University of Leuven, Parkstraat 45, 3000 Leuven, Belgium.
Email: amelie.godefroidt@kuleuven.be

about the extent to which, and why, the public, and especially victims, desire a TC. Do victims turn to TCs searching closure, or do they avoid them out of fear of re-traumatisation and disillusionment? Moreover, the bulk of evidence on public support for TCs, or transitional justice (TJ) more generally, comes from single-case studies (e.g. Aguilar et al., 2011; Aloyo et al., 2023; Balcells et al., 2022; Hall et al., 2018; Tellez, 2021), which complicates comparisons between and generalisations to a larger population of cases. To fill these gaps, this study examines support for TCs within three post-conflict contexts with different experiences with truth-seeking mechanisms, i.e. Guatemala, Nepal and Northern Ireland. Given the inherent objective of TCs to provide answers to victim-survivors, we specifically focus on the role of victimisation and trauma in shaping support for TCs and argue that trauma could channel the relationship between victimisation and support in two competing ways.

On the one hand, case studies and anecdotal evidence suggest that victims seek the truth, even many years after the conflict ended (Human Rights Watch, and Advocacy Forum, 2024; Robins, 2011). Moreover, earlier work often assumed that testifying would have a healing or cathartic effect on survivors and society (Mendeloff, 2009). Based on the notion that people, and especially victim-survivors, might see TCs as a possible means of getting closure, post-traumatic stress could positively channel the relationship between victimisation and attitudes towards TCs. On the other hand, several studies question the healing nature of TCs (Leebaw, 2008; Mendeloff, 2009; Robins, 2012) and warn against potentially harmful effects on victim-survivors who testify (Brounéus, 2010), especially when TCs fail to meet their expectations (David, 2017; Laplante and Theidon, 2007). In line with this, recent work on the psychological drivers of post-conflict public opinion suggests that victims who suffer from psychological distress are more likely to activate defensive strategies aimed at minimising harm (Canetti-Nisim et al., 2009; Hirsch-Hoefler et al., 2016), which might decrease support for TCs.

To test these competing hypotheses, we apply structural equation models on representative survey data gathered in Guatemala ($N = 1009$), Nepal ($N = 954$) and Northern Ireland ($N = 702$). The cases were selected to maximise variation on a range of potential scope conditions, including geographic location, level of development, conflict characteristics, and notably, the implementation and outcomes of a TC. At the time of the survey, Guatemala had already seen two TCs – one official and one unofficial – deliver their reports, while in Nepal, two different truth-seeking institutions had just been established. In Northern Ireland, in contrast, the peace agreement did not include any provisions on truth-seeking, and consequently, there had been several grassroots initiatives and commemorations, but there was no prospect of a formal TC. As such, people in the selected case studies had different real-life experiences with truth-seeking mechanisms, which could have influenced baseline levels of support for TCs and how conflict exposure and/or trauma influences such support.

Our results indicate that the relationship between conflict exposure, trauma and support for TCs is weak and complex. We find no support for the re-traumatisation argument. In contrast, in Nepal and Northern Ireland, we do find that symptoms of post-traumatic stress increase support for TCs, but only for TCs that reveal the names of perpetrators and compensate victims. In Guatemala, trauma does not play a significant role in shaping support for TCs. Finally, our results also suggest that people in post-conflict societies generally seek truth and accountability, as evident in overall high levels of support for TCs.

Trying to explain our divergent findings, in a second, theory-building step, we draw on qualitative insights from the three cases, mainly focusing on differences in the timing and characteristics of truth-seeking initiatives. This inductive exercise leads to the following hypothesis: in cases where a TC is still a viable peacebuilding strategy, citizens who developed symptoms of post-traumatic stress after having endured violence may be more likely to rely on this mechanism for what we

call 'truth with teeth'[1] and thus, *potentially*, for closure. In contrast, in cases where a TC has already delivered an extensive final report, trauma may no longer affect support for TCs. We describe these scope conditions in detail in the Discussion section, but, as always, future research is needed to unravel further how what we label the *prospective closure potential* of truth commissions may affect public support.

Our comparative, victim-centred approach to TCs contributes to both science and society. Theoretically, we provide a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between victimisation, trauma and support for TCs by introducing psychological insights into the literature on post-conflict consolidation. Empirically, we test two competing hypotheses across three post-conflict cases and are among the first to use psychological screeners for PTSD within these settings. Our divergent findings highlight the pitfalls of drawing too general conclusions from single-case studies, emphasising the need for more comparative and context-sensitive post-conflict research. Finally, our findings hold important implications for policymakers currently dealing with the design of TCs in post-conflict societies. Bearing in mind that victims primarily support truth with consequences and that this support is partially driven by conflict-induced trauma, policymakers should ensure that TCs are designed to address victims' need for closure adequately.

Conflict exposure and support for truth commissions

Extensive research has analysed how exposure to political violence shapes attitudes towards war and peace (Bateson, 2012; Bauer et al., 2016; Blattman, 2009; Canetti-Nisim et al., 2009; Hirsch-Hoefler et al., 2016) and support for specific conflict-termination policies (Bakke et al., 2009; Beber et al., 2014; Dyrstad et al., 2011; Irwin, 2006; Tellez, 2019). At its core, this literature indicates that conflict exposure has a negative impact on a range of attitudes, including support for peace and reconciliation (Grossman et al., 2015; Hall et al., 2018; Hirsch-Hoefler et al., 2016), intergroup relations (Canetti-Nisim et al., 2009; Lupu and Peisakhin, 2017) and political tolerance (Kijewski and Rapp, 2019).[2] Turning to truth commissions, the results are mixed and tend to assess the impact of TCs rather than the determinants of victims' attitudes towards TCs.

On the one hand, the normative assumption underlying TCs is that telling – and knowing – the 'truth' is therapeutic for individuals and society and paves the way for reconciliation and durable peace (Mendeloff, 2009). Practitioners assume that particularly TCs with a multi-faceted mandate, broader scope of investigation and subpoena powers will ensure that more victims are recognised and that more segments of society get a share in the process of truth telling (International Center for Transitional Justice, 2014). This, in turn, may bolster the legitimacy of TJ processes (Shaw et al., 2010), thereby increasing support for TCs. Qualitative and anecdotal evidence seems to support this notion. For example, civil society and victims' organisations often call for the truth (Isaacs, 2010; Ross, 2006) – which is evident in the number of unofficial truth projects (Dancy et al., 2010). Drawing on a representative sample of almost 2000 Spaniards, Aguilar and colleagues (2011) also find a positive correlation between victimisation during the Francoist dictatorship and support for establishing a TC.

On the other hand, several scholars have argued that the beneficial claims made in the TJ literature are 'faith-based', not 'fact-based' (Thoms et al., 2010: 331; see also Mendeloff, 2009). Instead of being cathartic, truth-telling 'may retraumatise victims, open old wounds, and deepen historical divisions' (David, 2017: 156). Transitional justice mechanisms often fail to accommodate the needs of victims in general (Gready and Robins, 2014; Hall et al., 2018), and TCs in particular risk intensifying traumatic reactions because they do not allow enough time for desensitisation to occur (Brounéus, 2010). Based on a survey in post-genocide Rwanda, Brounéus (2010) found that

witnesses of *Gacaca* courts[3] suffered from higher levels of depression and PTSD than those who did not witness, even after controlling for common predictors of psychological health. Other scholars suggest that giving testimony may be harmful in the absence of tangible results when the commission has finished its work (Laplante and Theidon, 2007). Likewise, Gibson (2006) demonstrates how the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission positively impacted reconciliation attitudes, yet only for whites. This finding suggests that by bringing about a deeper understanding of the past, the appeal of telling the truth seemed to diminish among those who had been primarily exposed to violence. Similarly, Pham and colleagues (2004) found that respondents who had experienced multiple traumas during the genocide were indeed less – and not more – likely to support both national and *Gacaca* trials. Compared with non-victims, victims were more disappointed with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa (Backer, 2006) and more supportive of retributive justice instead of reconciliatory and reparative justice in Burundi (Samii, 2013) and Kenya (Aloyo et al., 2023).

Taken together, there is mixed and limited evidence of an association between conflict exposure and support for TJ, including TCs. While some studies find a positive correlation between victimisation and support for justice, others find negative results. To complicate matters, some studies find no significant correlation at all. For example, Nussio et al. (2015) find no significant difference between victims and non-victims in their attitudes towards truth-sharing in Colombia. Canetti and colleagues (2017) demonstrate that exposure to terrorism in Israel has no direct effect on peace policy attitudes. Likewise, victimisation is no significant predictor of TJ preferences in Dyrstad and Binningsbø (2019). In what follows, we propose that unravelling the role of *trauma* might bring about a more nuanced understanding of the complex association between conflict exposure and support for TCs.

The role of trauma

As evident, we still lack a rigorous understanding of *why* exposure to violence determines post-conflict attitudes towards TCs. While previous work often implicitly assumes that trauma plays a central role, to our knowledge, no one has theoretically and empirically teased this out. To fill this gap, we propose a two-stage theory of the process through which conflict exposure may shape support for TCs. In the first stage, conflict exposure conditions psychological distress. It is well documented that exposure to violence increases the risk of mental illness (e.g. Elbert and Schaeur, 2002; Herman, 2022; Scholte et al., 2004; Steel et al., 2009; Tol et al., 2010) – stress symptoms that might occur long after the conflict has ended (Herman, 2022). In the second stage, trauma is argued to shape people's attitudes towards TCs. Previous research shows how psychological distress motivates political behaviour. For example, it decreases political tolerance and support for peace efforts after terrorist violence (Canetti-Nisim et al., 2009; Hirsch-Hoefler et al., 2016) and diminishes support for reconciliation and prosocial attitudes in response to conflict exposure (Pham et al., 2004; Vinck et al., 2007). However, it is less evident in what ways trauma may affect attitudes towards TCs.

We propose two competing mechanisms to explain how trauma can shape attitudes towards truth-seeking institutions. First, individuals who experience traumatic distress in response to conflict exposure may have a particularly strong desire for closure, thereby increasing support for TCs. We follow Hamber and Wilson (2002) in seeing closure as 'a situation where the trauma is no longer seen as unfinished business' (p. 37) and argue that TCs might contribute to both cognitive and emotional closure. Cognitive closure occurs when victims get answers to their questions about what has happened, while emotional closure occurs when victims' emotional distress over their war

experiences diminishes to an acceptable level or even ends. Regarding cognitive closure, TCs are a means for obtaining some, if limited, information about what happened to deceased and disappeared persons – especially when trials are off the table. In Guatemala, for instance, the 1994 agreement that established the TC also paved the way for amnesty for war crimes, except for genocide, torture and forced disappearance (Isaacs, 2010). This effectively made the truth commission a crucial means for obtaining answers and a sense of justice.[4] Regarding emotional closure, testifying might 'break an enforced silence', allowing individuals to express their emotions, externalise grief and receive recognition (Hamber and Wilson, 2002: 41). Testimonies that eventually involve reparations or retribution may particularly contribute to closure by, respectively, acknowledging the individual's loss or suffering and holding perpetrators accountable (Hamber and Wilson, 2002). Hence, based on the notion of a need for closure, we would expect individuals who experience distress in response to conflict exposure to *support* TCs.

On the other hand, psychological distress may activate a defence mechanism aimed at avoiding re-traumatisation, thereby decreasing support for TCs. In search for the truth, TCs might re-open old wounds and re-traumatise victims (David, 2017). The risk of re-traumatisation is compounded by several features of TCs. First, TCs often fall short of meeting the psychological needs of traumatised individuals (Brounéus, 2010), partly owing to an inherent tension between individual needs and national healing. By design, TCs tend to treat individuals as a homogeneous entity in the pursuit of nationwide healing (Hamber and Wilson, 2002). Inevitably, in the pursuit of an 'official' collective account of the past, some experiences and perspectives will be remembered at the expense of others that remain unseen (Hearty, 2022), leading to a discrepancy between dispersed individual memories and the official narrative. Relatedly, individual and nationwide healing proceed at different paces, and commissions do not (and cannot) allow enough time for trauma processing (Brounéus, 2010; Hamber and Wilson, 2002).

Truth commissions could also be seen as 'toothless'. For instance, only a minority of past commissions possessed the power to compel testimony and preserve evidence (Zvobgo, 2020). Other studies suggest that victims may expect something in return for giving testimony – reparations, recognitions or both – and that providing testimony without seeing any specific results materialising afterwards may be harmful. Consider the powerful opening quote of a Peruvian woman cited in Laplante and Theidon (2007: 229): 'Oh, why should I remember all of that again? From the top of my head to the bottom of my feet, from the bottom of my feet to the top of my head – I've told what happened here so many times. And for what? Nothing ever changes.' In this regard, it is troublesome – but not surprising – to note that a relatively low share of TC recommendations is fully implemented. For instance, a comprehensive comparative study of recommendations in Latin America found that of 223 identified recommendations for reparations, only 22% were fully implemented, while another 26% were partially implemented (Skaar et al., 2024: 13, Table 4). More so, amnesty is sometimes granted to perpetrators who confess to political crimes or, in some cases like Guatemala, even without any confession (i.e. blanket amnesty). In sum, while traumatised victims may seek closure, they might not see TCs as the preferred means, or even as a harmful means, to achieve it. Consequently, individuals who experience psychological distress in response to conflict exposure might *oppose*, instead of support, TCs.

Taken together, our two-stage theory on conflict exposure and support for TCs leads to the following hypotheses. First, conflict exposure can lead to trauma that persists long after the armed conflict is over (H1). Second, such trauma informs people's attitudes towards TCs (H2), but here, our reasoning leads to two competing expectations.[5] To the extent that psychological distress activates a need for closure, trauma will *positively* channel the effect of conflict exposure on attitudes towards TCs (H2a: closure). To the extent that psychological distress activates a defence mechanism that

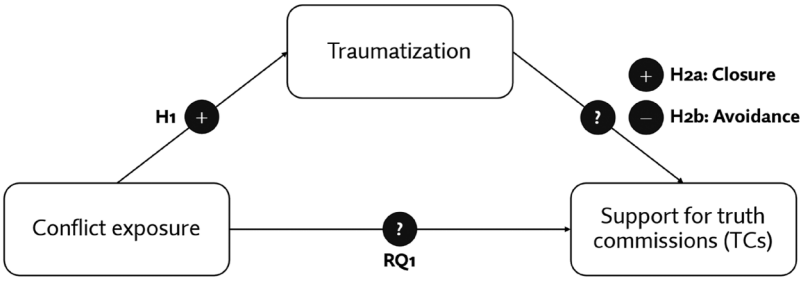

Figure 1. Theoretical model of the relationship between conflict exposure, trauma and support for truth commissions.

prompts victims to avoid the past and/or disappointment, trauma will *negatively* channel the effect of conflict exposure on attitudes towards TCs (H2b: avoidance). Hence, it might not be conflict exposure that affects support for TCs but rather the psychological distress resulting from this exposure. Disentangling and gaining a deeper understanding of the role of trauma can thus help us reconcile competing findings in previous work, as it will shed new light not only on the indirect but also on the direct impact of conflict exposure on support for TCs after controlling for trauma (RQ1). Figure 1 visualises our theoretical model and summarises our expectations about whether and how conflict exposure influences support for TCs.

The cases of Guatemala, Nepal and Northern Ireland

We study support for TCs in Guatemala, Nepal and Northern Ireland, relying on a series of comparative, nationally representative surveys as well as qualitative evidence about each case and, particularly, their truth-seeking mechanisms. The population of cases from which they were selected was defined as (1) peaceful, (2) electoral democracies that had (3) experienced internal armed conflict, which (4) ended through a comprehensive peace agreement. Within this population, we selected cases to assess the generalisability of our findings instead of testing cross-country hypotheses by maximising variation. The selected cases varied on several characteristics (Table 1; see also Dyrstad et al. [2021, 2022] for more information).

Regarding variation in truth-seeking experiences, the peace agreements that ended the civil wars in Guatemala and Nepal included a truth-seeking provision, but the results of these institutions varied. When the survey was conducted, there had been two comprehensive reports in Guatemala: one unofficial, church-led report (ODHAG, 1998) and one official report (Commission for Historical Clarification, 1999; CEH). In addition, both the Center for Human Rights Legal Action and the National Coordination of Widows of Guatemala had been instrumental in collecting testimonies and evidence, advocating for justice and raising awareness about the abuses committed during the civil war. In Nepal, two separate commissions had just been established: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons. Besides being established almost a decade after the peace agreement was signed, at the time of the data collection, the results of the two commissions were virtually nonexistent, as they had yet to get started (Sajjad, 2016). Moreover, their mandate was being both questioned and contested (Selim, 2018).[6] As in Guatemala, several informal initiatives were to play a crucial role in complementing the work of these formal truth commissions, such as the Informal

Table 1. Key case characteristics at the time the survey was conducted (2016).

		Case		
Dimension	Characteristic	Guatemala	Nepal	Northern Ireland
Geographical region	Geographical region	Latin America	Asia	Europe
Development	GDP per capita (current US$)	4173	777	41,064
	Income inequality (GINI)	48.7	32.8	28*
	Life expectancy	73.5	69.5	81.16
	World Bank classification	Upper middle income	Lower middle income	High income
Conflict characteristics	Ethnic conflict?	Yes	No	Yes
	Conflict-related deaths	200,000	>13,000	3700
	Time [duration in years]	1960–1996 [36]	1996–2006 [10]	1968–1998 [30]
Formal truth-seeking	TC included in peace agreement?	Yes	Yes	No
	Number of report(s) with results and recommendations	2	0 (but in progress)	0

Note: Sources include World Bank Indicators; Database of Political Institutions (Beck et al., 2001), UCDP Peace Agreement Dataset (Harbom et al., 2006), US Institute of Peace, CEH (Commission for Historical Clarification, 1999), Do and Iyer (2010) and McKittrick et al. (1999). *The GINI of the UK overall is 32.6.

Sector Service Centre and the National Network of Families of the Disappeared and Missing in Nepal. In addition, Nepal has a National Human Rights Commission, which was established in 2000 as a statutory body and has been a permanent, constitutional body since 2007. Finally, the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland did not include a provision for truth and reconciliation or, in fact, any TJ mechanism at all (Bryson and McEvoy, 2023). Absent a formal TC, Northern Ireland developed an extensive tradition of storytelling and commemorative practices (e.g. Anderson, 2019; McQuaid, 2016) and several smaller, unofficial projects, such as the Ardoyne Commemoration Project (Lundy and McGovern, 2008), emerged. In 2005, Northern Ireland did launch an official truth-seeking initiative: the Historical Enquiries Team. Falling short of being a proper truth commission, the Historical Enquiries Team had a limited mandate and was criticised for not delivering (Lundy, 2011; Lundy and McGovern, 2008).

Empirical design

To test our hypotheses, we rely on data from the Post-Conflict Attitudes for Peace (PAP) survey. The comparative PAP survey was designed to comprehensively map citizens' views on various post-war developments and institutions, as well as their experiences of violence. In the following, we review key features of the data collection as well as our empirical model.

Ethics

Given the sensitive nature of the research topic, several measures were implemented to ensure the ethical integrity of data collection.

(1) In addition to theoretically informed case selection criteria, concerns over the safety and well-being of our respondents and enumerators also influenced the choice of cases.

(2) The timing of our fieldwork was strategically planned to minimise risks.

(3) Expert interviews and consultations with local partners were conducted in all three cases to ensure the appropriateness and adequacy of sensitive questions. This process aimed to minimise the risk of re-traumatisation or discomfort among respondents.

(4) Enumerators underwent rigorous training before fieldwork. This training included not only technical aspects of data collection but also ethical considerations, sensitivity training and protocols for handling sensitive information.

(5) Continuous support and supervision were provided throughout the data collection.

(6) Strict protocols were followed to obtain informed consent from participants, ensuring they understood the purpose of the research, their rights and the confidentiality measures in place to protect their data.

(7) The data were transferred and stored in a way that protected the confidentiality of the data. These measures collectively aimed to ensure that the research was conducted in a manner that respected the rights and safety of all people involved, while also maintaining the scientific rigor and validity of the findings. For more detailed information, see Online Appendix A.1.

Sampling strategy

We relied on local best practices to ensure national representativeness and broad geographical coverage. As a result, the sampling strategy differs somewhat across the cases. In Guatemala, the 2015 electoral roll served as the sampling frame, from which 120 segments were selected as primary sampling units (PSUs).[7] Within each PSU, the aim was to sample 10 respondents. Once PSUs were selected, households were drawn at random and one respondent per household was selected based on the 'last birthday' rule. The resulting sample includes respondents from all 22 *departementos* and 99 out of the 334 municipalities. In Nepal, the 2011 Census served as the sampling frame, from which 60 wards were selected as PSUs using a stratified random sampling technique (with wards stratified by region and urban–rural division; see Table B.2 in the Online Appendix). Twenty respondents were sampled within each PSU. From the PSUs, households were drawn at random and one respondent per household was selected using a kish grid (Kish, 1949). The resulting sample includes respondents from 45 of the 70 districts in Nepal. Finally, in Northern Ireland, households were directly drawn at random from the Postcode Address file and one respondent per household was selected based on the 'first birthday' rule. Online Appendix B includes a map of the spatial distribution of the samples in Guatemala and Nepal,[8] as well as additional information on the samples. After applying listwise deletion, the total sample size equals 2665 ($N_{\text{Guatemala}} = 1{,}009$, $N_{\text{Nepal}} = 954$, $N_{\text{NI}} = 702$). See Online Appendix C for some descriptive statistics.

Measurements

Dependent variable: support for TCs. Our primary outcome variable, generic support for TCs (TC_1), is measured by asking respondents to what extent they agree with the statement: 'It is important to know what happened during the conflict and collect testimonies from victims and perpetrator'. To triangulate the measurement of our construct of interest, we also measure support for different *design features* of TCs. First, the impact of conflict exposure and trauma on support for TCs may vary depending on the specifics of the recommendations and implementation of TCs.

Second, beyond adding empirical value, zooming in on specific realisations of TCs can lead to important policy implications, as these results will provide insight into the possible TJ 'package' that post-conflict countries may or may not wish to implement. To do so, we use three additional statements as secondary outcomes: 'A truth commission report should reveal the names of the perpetrators of the crimes describe' (TC_2), 'The victims of the crimes described in a truth commission report should receive compensation' (TC_3)[9] and 'A truth commission is meaningless if it is not accompanied by the prosecution of perpetrators' (TC_4). All items were measured on a scale ranging from completely disagree (1) to completely agree (5), so that higher values indicate more support for TCs.

Independent variable: conflict exposure. The survey included 15 items to measure whether respondents and/or their family members had been exposed to traumatic events during the conflict, including threats, injuries, detainment, etc. (see Table D.1 in the Online Appendix for the complete list).[10] We dichotomised this variable into respondents who were not exposed to any traumatic event (= 0) and respondents who were exposed to at least one traumatic event (=1). Although important information gets lost owing to this dichotomisation, we opt for a dichotomous operationalisation for several reasons. First, it is not straightforward to classify these experiences into mutually exclusive categories. Two commonly used ways to classify victims are based on direct vs. indirect victimisation experiences and the severity of those experiences. Both categorisations can pose problems. Regarding direct vs. indirect victimisation, 16.85% of our respondents experienced direct victimisation only and 12.20% indirect victimisation only, while 14.07% experienced both. Some 56.89% did not report any form of conflict exposure or victimisation.[11] Moreover, we have no theoretical reason to make this division as both types of victimisations can be traumatic. Categories based on severity might be mutually exclusive but always rely on a somewhat arbitrary classification of experiences and disregards that some respondents might perceive certain events as severe while others may not. In this respect, it is also questionable whether it is ethical for researchers to assume that some traumatic events should be classified as less severe. Second, owing to conflict-specific particularities, the types of traumatic events that people were more likely to endure differ across the cases (see Table D.1). Finally, we rely on the assumption that if people responded *yes* on at least one of the exposure questions, they still consider themselves a victim of the war in some meaningful way. This, we assume, is a sufficient condition to induce subsequent trauma and, in turn, shape worldviews. As a check of this assumption, Table D.2 shows that most correlation coefficients between trauma and the 15 exposure items are positive, statistically significant, and of a similar size.

Mediator: trauma. To measure trauma, we rely on a validated brief screener of PTSD (Han et al., 2016). Respondents were asked to what extent they experienced a series of problems, such as 'repeated, disturbing memories, thoughts, or images of a stressful experience' or 'feeling irritable or having angry outbursts', over the last month on a scale ranging from *not at all* (1) to *extremely* (5). Five items are included in the structural equation models to measure the latent factor 'trauma' ($\alpha_{\text{overall}} = .83$; $\alpha_{\text{Guatemala}} = 0.81$; $\alpha_{\text{Nepal}} = 0.77$; $\alpha_{\text{NI}} = 0.94$).

Estimation strategy

To test the hypothesised relationships, we estimated a multi-group structural equation model (MG-SEM; Kline, 2015) using Stata. MG-SEM is a technique to estimate similar SEMs for different groups (here, cases) separately but simultaneously, analogous to interaction terms in linear

regression models. The SEM combines structural and measurement models, allowing both manifest and latent variables to be included in a path model. The structural component of the model represents the paths between the variables of interest as a sequence of structural equations. This enables us to examine how conflict exposure and support for TCs are related and to tease out both direct and indirect effects (via trauma). Importantly, such structural models, while indicating a direction, only provide correlational evidence. The measurement component of our model arises because we add trauma as a latent scale, thus including measurement error in the model.

Although we built extensively on theoretical insights and previous results to propose the path diagram in Figure 1, we employ a cross-sectional design which gives rise to endogeneity concerns. To alleviate such concerns, to at least some extent, we include several variables in our SEM models that could influence conflict exposure, trauma and support for TCs, and may act as confounders on the different paths in our model. At the same time, we tried to keep the list of confounders short so as not to over-specify our model. Accordingly, we control for the respondents' age, gender, perceived income, level of education and whether the respondent resided outside the country or was not born at the time of the conflict. Moreover, the PTSD screener asked about experiences *over the last month*. As a result, the question wording of our constructs of interest implies a temporal order.

Empirical results

Descriptive statistics

First, we explore the descriptive statistics in Table 2. We observe high levels of support for TCs (i.e. above the midpoint value of 3), across all measures of support and in all cases. At the same time, support differs significantly across the cases, being consistently higher in Nepal and lower in Northern Ireland ($p < 0.001$ for all indicators of support).[12] The mean levels of support may reflect characteristics of the conflicts as well as the duration of peace, as the conflicts in Guatemala and Northern Ireland had ended 20 and 18 years before the survey was conducted, while Nepal had only had 10 years of post-war peace. Consequently, exposure and subsequent trauma were more recent and thus potentially more vivid in Nepal. Additionally, there was – and still is – a pressing lack of knowledge about the whereabouts of the many who were forcibly disappeared (Robins, 2011), and the demand for justice from various victim groups regularly made – and makes – the Nepali news (e.g. Budhathoki, 2021, 2022). This may explain why we find the strongest demand for the truth in Nepal. In contrast, 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland ended 18 years ago, were less violent than the wars in Nepal and Guatemala, and importantly, the peace agreement did not provide for any truth-seeking mechanisms. All of this may explain why we find lower, but still strong, support for truth-seeking in Northern Ireland. Of the possible implementations of TCs, those with compensation for victims enjoy the strongest support in Northern Ireland and Nepal, while respondents in Guatemala especially value revealing the perpetrators' names. However, it is worth noting that within-case differences in the means of the measures of support are small (Table 2).

Second, turning to conflict exposure, the share of respondents who report having been exposed to at least one incident of conflict-related violence is similar across cases and ranges from 41% (Northern Ireland) to 46% (Guatemala). While this may seem high at face value, recall that they cover many different types of exposure, including indirect victimisation and being a witness. As discussed above (and shown in Table D.1), the type of victimisation varies across cases. For example, although both the Guatemalan war and the conflict in Northern Ireland ended some

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of main variables, by case study.

	Range	Guatemala ($N = 1009$) Mean (SD)	Nepal ($N = 954$) Mean (SD)	Northern Ireland ($N = 702$) Mean (SD)	X^2/F^*	p
Conflict exposure	0–1	0.46 (0.50)	0.42 (0.49)	0.41 (0.49)	4.53	0.104
Traumatisation	1–5	$1.75\ (0.76)_a$	$1.58\ (0.63)_b$	$1.26\ (0.63)_c$	100.94	<0.001
Support for TCs						
TC_1 [General]. It is important to know what happened during the conflict and collect testimonies from victims and perpetrators	1–5	$3.78\ (1.45)_a$	$4.28\ (0.83)_b$	$3.43\ (1.33)_c$	19.09	<0.001
TC_2 [Naming]. A truth commission report should reveal the names of the perpetrators of the crimes described	1–5	$3.82\ (1.40)_a$	$4.37\ (0.67)_b$	$3.25\ (1.33)_c$	60.51	<0.001
TC_3 [Compensation]. The victims of the crimes described in a truth commission report [Northern Ireland: if there was one] should receive compensation	1–5	$3.42\ (1.52)_a$	$4.54\ (0.57)_b$	$3.57\ (1.15)_c$	21.65	<0.001
TC_4 [Trials]. A truth commission is meaningless if it is not accompanied by prosecution of perpetrators	1–5	$3.77\ (1.37)_a$	$4.36\ (0.84)_b$	$3.29\ (1.30)_c$	36.34	<0.001

Note: *Chi-square tests were used to detect overall country differences for the dichotomous exposure indicator and one-way ANOVA tests were for all other indicators. Means that do not share subscripts ($_{a, b, c}$) differ cross-nationally at $p < 0.05$, after Tukey's HSD correction for multiple comparisons. N = sample sizes after listwise deletion on all variables used in the main models.

time ago, Guatemala has a comparatively young population (the mean age and median age in our data are 35 and 31 years, respectively), resulting in a higher share of indirect victimisation (see also footnote 11). Finally, the prevalence of PTSD symptoms is low across the cases but is significantly lower in Northern Ireland ($p < 0.001$). This corresponds to the level of violence, which was substantially lower in Northern Ireland (see also Table 1). While the civil war in Guatemala was more brutal than the one in Nepal, the levels of trauma symptoms are similar in the two countries. However, it is important to note again that a significant proportion of Guatemalan respondents was born after the war.[13]

Multi-group structural equation models

To test our hypotheses on whether and how conflict exposure influences support for TCs, we estimated a series of multi-group structural equation models in Stata.[14] The results of our primary outcome are illustrated in Figure 2 and those of our secondary outcomes in Figure 3. The full numerical results can be found in Table D.4, results without control variables in Table D.5 and bivariate correlations in Table D.6. Overall, our findings confirm that conflict exposure induces trauma, but the subsequent relationship between trauma and support for TCs is anything but straightforward.

Starting with our first hypothesis (H1), our results confirm previous findings that exposure to violence is associated with higher levels of psychological distress (Elbert and Schaeur, 2002; Scholte et al., 2004; Steel et al., 2009; Tol et al., 2010). This holds in models without controls (Table D.5) and across the three study contexts, where the coefficients always have the expected sign and are of both substantial and statistical significance ($p < 0.001$). The strength of the associations is also comparable across cases, with standardised regression coefficients ranging from 0.21 to 0.29.

Regarding our second set of competing hypotheses (H2a and H2b), Figures 2 and 3 reveal a complex and context-dependent relationship between conflict exposure, trauma and TC support. In Guatemala, we find that support for TCs is not influenced by trauma in any of the models. More specifically, neither generic support for truth-seeking (Figure 2) nor support for specific implementations of TCs (Figure 3) is affected by the level of trauma. This null result holds in models without control variables (Table D.5; see also the absence of significant bivariate correlations between trauma and all measures of support for TCs in Table D.6). This is not the case in the other two cases. In Nepal and Northern Ireland, we find a similar pattern: trauma increases support for TCs that reveal perpetrators' names and provide compensation to victims, whereas generic

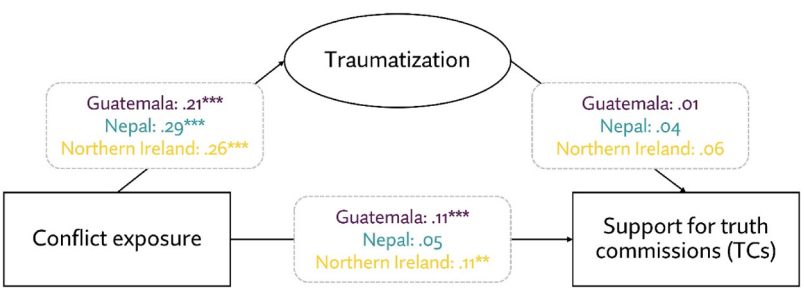

Figure 2. Multi-group structural equation model results for generic support for truth commissions.
Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

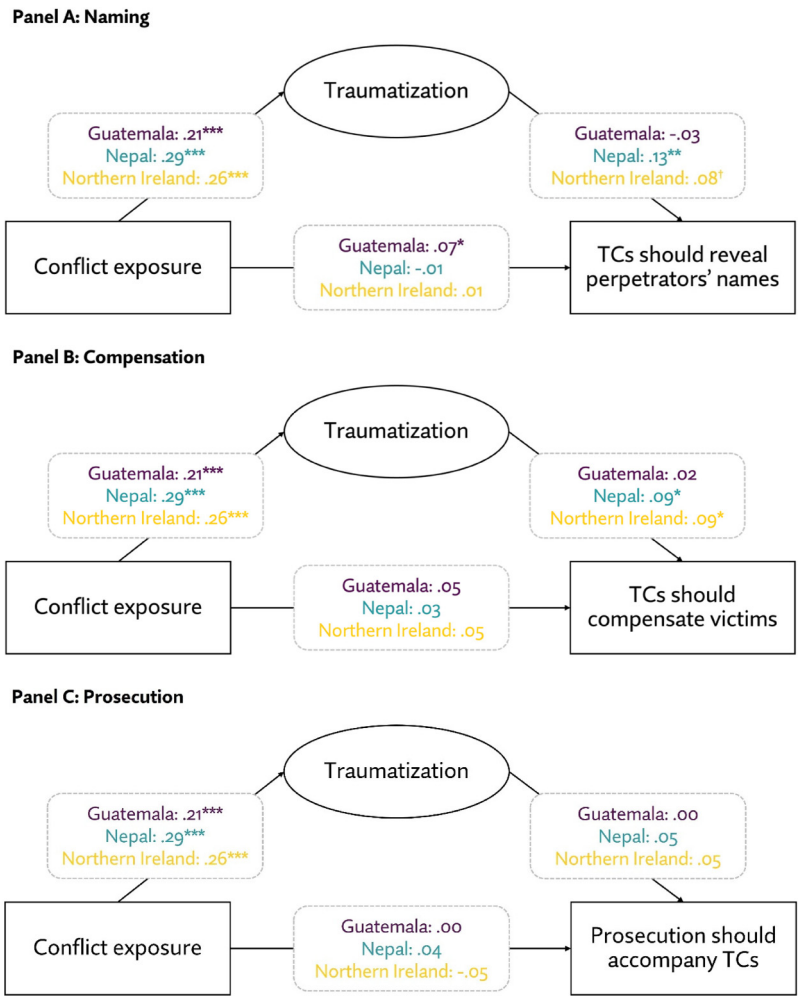

Figure 3. Multi-group structural equation model results for support for specific implementations of truth commissions.
Note: † $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

support and support for TCs accompanied by prosecution remain unaffected by trauma. It should be noted, however, that the substantial effects are 'relatively small' with standardised coefficients between 0.08 amd 0.13 (Cohen, 1988; Gignac and Szodorai, 2016). Further, these patterns again hold in models without controls (Table D.5). Here, and considering the bivariate correlations (Table D.6), we also find an association between trauma and support for TCs that are accompanied by prosecution in Nepal.

Next, we examine whether and how conflict exposure affects support for TCs after accounting for trauma (RQ1). Looking at the direct effect of exposure on TC support, we find both positive and null effects depending on the case and outcome variable in question. Figure 2 shows that generic support for finding the truth is increased by conflict exposure in Guatemala and Northern

Ireland, with standardised coefficients in both cases equal to 0.11. This means that exposure to conflict affects support for truth-seeking through other mechanisms than trauma. Further, Figure 3 reveals that specific implementations of TCs are largely unaffected by conflict exposure (at least in terms of a direct effect), except for the positive relationship between exposure and revealing perpetrators' names in Guatemala. It is noteworthy in this respect that the statement that a TC report should reveal perpetrators' names also received the most support of all four statements in Guatemala (Table 1), but the generally well-received and well-researched Guatemalan TC report was restricted from naming those responsible for the documented atrocities (Hayner, 2011). Respondents thus seem to factor in their experience with TCs when forming their attitudes about TCs – a point we discuss further in the next section.

Finally, a somewhat puzzling null finding, i.e. for support for TCs accompanied by prosecution (Figure 3, panel C), requires additional attention. Conflict exposure is not associated with this outcome variable in any way and in any of the cases. This result can be interpreted in at least two ways. First, it aligns with the notion that the public sees truth as an end in and of itself, not conditional on retributive justice (Braithwaite, 2002). Alternatively, a more methodological interpretation suggests that since the statement asks about two TJ mechanisms simultaneously – TCs and trials –victims may respond differently based on their preferred means of achieving closure and accountability. For some victims, knowing the truth may be more important than potential prosecutions, while for others, presumably those who already know what happened to their loved ones, retribution may be more important. These competing preferences could lead to varying response patterns among conflict victims, producing a null effect.

Discussion

Our findings have at least two implications for the field of peace and conflict studies. First, while trauma undoubtedly remains an important determinant of post-conflict attitudes and preferences for various peace measures (Canetti-Nisim et al., 2009; Hirsch-Hoefler et al., 2016), its relationship with support for truth commissions – which are supposed to heal (national) trauma – is weak. Indeed, our results show that the predictive power of the closure hypothesis is low, while we find no support for the avoidance hypothesis at all. Second, the relationship between conflict exposure, trauma and attitudes towards TCs is not only weak, but also complex.

In the following, based on a qualitative assessment of plausible explanations for the observed (null[15]) results, we cautiously suggest that the *prospective closure utility* (rather than closure as such) of *particular* truth-finding initiatives may underlie public support. That is, in cases where a TC is still a viable peacebuilding strategy, citizens who have developed symptoms of post-traumatic stress after experiencing violence may be more likely to rely on this mechanism for what we call 'truth with teeth'. Below, we discuss how several study features have led to this *post hoc* hypothesis.[16] We hope this will stimulate a conversation about the multiple ways in which trauma conditions post-conflict attitudes and encourage future research to further theorise and deductively test some of these puzzles.

Several factors make Guatemala qualitatively different, which may partly explain why we mostly find null results there. First, the Guatemalan conflict ended 20 years before the survey was conducted. Moreover, the official TC was established in 1994 and published its report in 1999, while the unofficial TC published its report in 1998. Given that the median age of the Guatemalan sample is 31, most respondents were relatively young during the war and the immediate post-war period when truth-seeking took place. Second, the CEH conducted 7200 interviews with 11,000 persons and documented them in an extensive database (United States Institute of

Peace, n.d.). This provided several victims with the opportunity to externalise their grief, fostering emotional closure, while the database aids in cognitive closure. In addition, the reports resulting from the truth-seeking processes were exhaustive, detailing different findings and policy recommendations, and drew (inter)national acclaim. In addition to the commissions, organisations like the Guatemalan Foundation for Forensic Anthropology and the Center for Forensic Analysis and Applied Sciences had also carried out extensive exhumations, which further contributed to providing closure. In sum, at the time of our survey, the prospects for additional closure through TCs were low in Guatemala. Finally, the CEH was not allowed to reveal the names of perpetrators and did not call for prosecution. The report did recommend reparations and a National Reparations Commission was established in 2005, but decisions about policies and process have been slow (United States Institute of Peace, n.d.). Hence, victim-survivors and the population at large may have come to realise that a TC alone was no guarantee of prosecution or reparations. All of this might explain why victims do not turn to TCs, at least not to heal their trauma. Yet again it is worth noting that overall support for TCs remains high, also in Guatemala.

In Nepal and Northern Ireland, on the other hand, the prospects for closure through truth-seeking were considerably higher since, at the time of the survey, truth-seeking processes there were either to be completed (Nepal) or had never officially begun (Northern Ireland).[17] As noted above, in Nepal, two different commissions had just started their work at the time of our fieldwork (Sajjad, 2016), while in Northern Ireland, a formal TC was never included as part of the Good Friday Agreement. Therefore, in both countries, a comprehensive report had yet to materialise, and no official findings, recommendations or other forms of potential closure through truth-seeking had been provided. In the absence of such, other voices in society were advocating for victims and searching for ways to know about and come to terms with the past. Furthermore, recall that in these two cases, we only find a relationship between trauma and support for TCs with a strong mandate, i.e. those that name the perpetrators and advocate for compensation for victims. Taken together, this suggests that people may still be waiting and hoping for more. Hence, in these cases, it may not be closure as such (or what has been done) that shapes attitudes towards truth commissions, but rather the *prospective closure utility* (or what a particular initiative *could* do).

Finally, trauma tends to drive support for truth-seeking initiatives that reveal names and compensate victims, both in a country with official commissions (Nepal) and in one less formal initiatives (Northern Ireland). This finding is crucial for policymakers and civil society organisations tasked with designing truth-finding missions, particularly in contexts where peace agreements preclude the establishment of official commissions. Compared with a weak commission with a limited mandate and independence, the informal truth practices of Northern Ireland may be equally, if not more, effective. Grassroot initiatives may also circumscribe the potential problem of constructing and disseminating one collective narrative which risks sidelining alternative or competing perspectives (Hearty, 2022). However, more comparative research is required to fully evaluate the influence of the official status of truth-finding initiatives on public support.

Conclusion

Scholars, policymakers and civil society organisations often emphasise the need for TCs to build sustainable peace in post-conflict societies as TCs are supposed to heal victim-survivors and society as a whole (David, 2017; Hall et al., 2018). However, are victims in favour of collecting testimonies from fellow victims and perpetrators? And what explains their attitudes toward truth-seeking? In this article, we focused on demands for truth and examined one central mechanism through which conflict exposure could affect support for TCs, namely, trauma. By doing so, our

two-stage theory followed a stress-based model of political behaviour in which experiencing conflict is thought to lead to psychological trauma, which in turn shapes political attitudes (Canetti-Nisim et al., 2009; Hirsch-Hoefler et al., 2016). We proposed two opposing mechanisms to explain how trauma may shape public support for TCs: a *defence* mechanism may cause trauma to lower support for TCs because it triggers victims to avoid re-exposure, re-traumatisation and disappointment. In contrast, a *closure* mechanism may cause psychological distress to increase support because it prompts victims to see TCs as a possible solution to their lingering traumas and questions.

We tested our two-stage theory and its competing hypotheses using the comparative PAP survey data. This approach yielded several findings. First, across the three cases, people were highly supportive of knowing the truth. Notwithstanding minor differences, specific implementations of TCs enjoyed about as much support as the more general notion of the importance of truth-seeking. This descriptive finding creates potential tension for policymakers: while citizens strongly support TCs that reveal names of perpetrators, provide compensation to victims and involve prosecution, these implementations are also typically more expensive and controversial forms of TJ (Chapman and Ball, 2001; Grodsky, 2009). Second, although it is often assumed that victims ask for the truth, we found that this assumption does not always hold empirically. Although conflict exposure increased support for abstract notions of truth-seeking (to a moderate extent and only in two out of the three cases), it was unrelated to demands for specific implementations of TCs in all cases (after accounting for trauma). However, conflict exposure still had an indirect effect on support for a so-called 'truth with teeth' through trauma, yet again to a moderate extent and only in Nepal and Northern Ireland – where an official TC has not yet concluded or is not foreseen at all. Based on these findings, we cautiously suggest that it may not be closure as such that explains how trauma shapes support for truth commissions, but rather the *prospective closure utility* of ongoing or potential truth-seeking initiatives. Finally, we found no negative association between conflict exposure or trauma and support for truth commissions in any of the models or cases, suggesting that (traumatised) victims do not shy away from the truth[18] and that country's experience with TCs – no matter how extensive or limited – does not lead to pernicious withdrawal effects.

Besides these substantive conclusions, our findings also point to the perils of drawing broad lessons from single-case studies. Indeed, findings from one context might not necessarily travel far. For example, had we relied on the case of Guatemala only, we would have concluded that trauma does not channel the relationship between conflict exposure and support for truth commissions in both abstract and specific terms. Similarly, our study highlights that the measurement of the concept of interest matters. That is, had we relied on generic support only, we would have overstated the direct effect of conflict exposure. Therefore, to advance research in this area, a priority should be to develop validated measures that can be used comparatively (Adcock and Collier, 2001; Davidov et al., 2014). When developing such measures, researchers should keep in mind the risk of a ceiling effect and, assuming that baseline support of post-conflict accountability will be high, seek to develop measures that also capture variance at the upper end of the spectrum.

To conclude, several limitations are worth discussing. First, while we theorised a causal model, we relied on cross-sectional data. Our design did not allow us to address endogeneity concerns, beyond controlling for potential confounders. At the same time, setting up a causal design with constructs such as conflict exposure and trauma as independent variables (especially a design that is high in both internal and external validity) is challenging and most likely unethical. Alternative designs that are somewhat stronger in causal identification, such as natural experiments, panel designs or matching techniques, could be explored in the future. Second, in the theoretical

section, we speculated that TCs might offer cognitive and emotional closure through the prospect of finding out what happened, venting one's heart, holding those responsible accountable and offering reparations, among other things. Our outcome measures were chosen to provide an initial indication of *how* victims seek closure, and our results show that trauma increases support only for naming perpetrators and compensating victims. Future research could offer more direct tests of different closure mechanisms (i.e. the *why* question) and particularly, disentangle cognitive and emotional components. Here, one way to go forward could be to investigate differences between direct and indirect victims, as well as different age groups, as the need to know more about the past may vary across victim groups. All this would further refine our understanding of the closure potential of truth commissions.

Acknowledgments

We would like to sincerely thank all seminar and conference participants as well as the Editor and two anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback. Earlier versions of this article were presented at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), MPSA 2021, and ECPR 2021. The Norwegian Research Council (Norges forskningsråd; grant no. 240446) funded the data collection.

Data availability

The data and materials required to verify the computational reproducibility of this article's results, procedures, and analyses is available at the Harvard Dataverse Network at https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/GK4FCA.

Declaration of conflicting interest

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article

Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by the Norges Forskningsråd (grant number 240446).

ORCID iDs

Amélie Godefroidt https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5010-2860
Karin Dyrstad https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0545-1532

Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. The term is borrowed from Ross (2006) who refers to 'demands for a [TC] report with teeth' (p. 79). The notion of 'toothless commissions' is also prevalent in Nepali media.
2. On the other hand, war experience is also associated with pro-sociality and civic engagement (Bauer et al., 2016; Blattman, 2009).
3. *Gacaca* courts are indigenous grassroots courts conducted by locally elected lay judges and involving the entire nation. They hold the middle ground between a judicial trial and truth commission, and have been considered 'the largest officially driven truth and reconciliation process in the world today' (Brounéus, 2010: 413).

4. Note that independent forensic investigations and exhumations also play an important role in providing information about war crimes (Kovras, 2023), as has also been the case in Guatemala (Duterme, 2023).
5. Note that we are agnostic about which hypothesis is more likely to play out.
6. According to two expert informants interviewed in September 2015, the victims' organisations in Nepal had little confidence in the commissions, and the fact that there were two of them complicated matters for victims who had experienced several types of abuses.
7. At the time, the 2015 electoral roll of registered voters was regarded as the most updated and accurate list of people 18 years and older in each municipality. The 2002 census was considered out of date owing to demographic changes like migration, urbanisation and population growth. Also note that the electoral roll was used to sample PSUs, not individual respondents, so potential biases introduced owing to difference between *registered* voters vs. all *eligible* voters would be small.
8. Since in Northern Ireland, households were drawn directly from the Postcode Address file, they were evenly distributed across the state and all six counties are well represented, making a map redundant.
9. In Northern Ireland, we added '*if there was one*' to this statement.
10. An additional, sixteenth item was added in Guatemala (Table D.1).
11. To complicate things further, these categories are not equivalent across our cases. While there are more 'pure' indirect victims in Guatemala (24.68%), the share of respondents who were only exposed to the conflict via friends and family is much smaller in Northern Ireland (7.98%) and Nepal (2.10%).
12. There is one exception to this pattern, however, as support for TCs including compensation for victims is higher in Northern Ireland than in Guatemala.
13. Sixty-five respondents said that they were born after the conflict. The median respondent, born in 1985, would have been 11 years old at the time the peace agreement was signed.
14. A comparison of model fit indices indicates that the best model is one where only the intercepts of the measurement model are constrained to be equal across cases (see Table D.3). We also estimate the covariance between the error terms of two PTSD items (ptsd_1 and ptsd_2), as the model comparison indicates a better fit. The two items belong to the same cluster of symptoms (Han et al., 2016).
15. Beyond our substantive discussion below, a methodological caveat is warranted. Given the high levels of support for truth commissions, particularly in Nepal (Table 2), some null findings could be attributed to a ceiling effect. That is, high levels of support and little variance make it increasingly difficult to explain the variance that does exist (Austin and Brunner, 2003; Šimkovic and Träuble, 2019). Future research should consider this when designing measures of support for TCs and other TJ mechanisms, assuming that baseline support will generally be high.
16. On the usefulness of *post hoc* hypotheses, see Rubin and Donkin (2022: 13), who state that 'inference to the best explanation involves a comparative assessment of the most plausible theoretical explanations of the observed results based on a variety of comparison dimensions'.
17. At the time of writing, the UK Legacy Act has just transferred all investigations of the Troubles to a newly established body, the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery. The Act has been heavily criticised by victims' groups and the main political parties in Northern Ireland (*BBC News*, 2024). It remains to be seen how the commission will fulfil its mandate. We find it indicative of the dominant climate of distrust that a 'myth-busting' fact sheet features prominently on the Commission's webpage (see 'Myth-Busting Commonly Held Misconceptions about the ICRIR', 2024).
18. Truth-*telling* may still be re-traumatising for those victims who do testify, however, as recounting their experiences may force them to relive the trauma and distress associated with the original events. Non-testifying victims and the broader society, on the other hand, may seek truth- and justice-*receiving* to cope with the past, as suggested by our results. Hence while individual testimonies may be painful, the overall societal benefit of truth-*receiving* remains significant. More research is warranted to explore this difference between truth-*telling* and truth-*receiving*, as this was not the aim of this article and as our data did not include enough victims who testified to test this.

References

Adcock R and Collier D (2001) Measurement validity: A shared standard for qualitative and quantitative research. *American Political Science Review 95*(3): 529–546.

Aguilar P, Balcells L and Cebolla-Boado H (2011) Determinants of attitudes toward transitional justice an empirical analysis of the spanish case. *Comparative Political Studies 44*(10): 1397–1430.

Aloyo E, Dancy G and Dutton Y (2023) Retributive or reparative justice? explaining post-conflict preferences in Kenya. *Journal of Peace Research 60*(2): 258–273.

Anderson ME (2019) Community-based transitional justice via the creation and consumption of digitalized storytelling archives: A case study of belfast's prisons memory archive. *International Journal of Transitional Justice 13*(1): 30–49.

Austin PC and Brunner LJ (2003) Type I error inflation in the presence of a ceiling effect. *The American Statistician 57*(2): 97–104.

Backer D (2006) Victims' responses to truth commissions: Evidence from South Africa. In: Ndulo M (eds) *Security, Reconstruction, and Reconciliation*. London: UCL Press, pp. 195–226. Available at: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203965733-23.

Bakke KM, O'Loughlin J and Ward MD (2009) Reconciliation in conflict-affected societies: Multilevel modeling of individual and contextual factors in the north Caucasus of Russia. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers 99*(5): 1012–1021.

Balcells L, Palanza V and Voytas E (2022) Do transitional justice museums persuade visitors? Evidence from a field experiment. *The Journal of Politics 84*(1): 496–510.

Bateson R (2012) Crime victimization and political participation. *American Political Science Review 106*(03): 570–587.

Bauer M, Blattman C, Chytilová J, et al. (2016) Can war foster cooperation? *Journal of Economic Perspectives 30*(3): 249–274.

BBC News (2024) Legacy act: What happens with troubles law on 1 May?, 30 April 2024. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-68930141.

Beber B, Roessler P and Scacco A (2014) Intergroup violence and political attitudes: Evidence from a dividing Sudan. *Journal of Politics 76*(3): 649–665.

Beck T, Clarke G, Groff A, et al. (2001) New tools in comparative political economy: The database of political institutions. *The World Bank Economic Review 15*(1): 165–176.

Blattman C (2009) From violence to voting: War and political participation in Uganda. *American Political Science Review 103*(02): 231–247.

Braithwaite J (2002) *Restorative Justice & Responsive Regulation*. Studies in Crime and Public Policy. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brounéus K (2010) The trauma of truth telling: Effects of witnessing in the Rwandan Gacaca courts on psychological health. *Journal of Conflict Resolution 54*(3): 408–437.

Bryson A and McEvoy K (2023) Human rights activism and transitional justice advocacy in northern Ireland. *International Journal of Transitional Justice 17*(3): 453–469.

Budhathoki A (2021) 15 years on, Nepal conflict survivors await justice and development. *Online Khabar*, November 2021. Available at: https://english.onlinekhabar.com/nepal-conflict-survivors.html.

Budhathoki A (2022) Justice is a far cry from reality for sexual violence survivors of the Nepal civil war. *Online Khabar*, February 2022. Available at: https://english.onlinekhabar.com/nepal-war-sexual-violence-justice.html.

Canetti-Nisim DD, Halperin E, Sharvit K, et al. (2009) A new stress-based model of political extremism: Personal exposure to terrorism, psychological distress, and exclusionist political attitudes. *Journal of Conflict Resolution 53*(3): 363–389.

Canetti D, Elad-Strenger J, Lavi I, et al. (2017) Exposure to violence, ethos of conflict, and support for compromise: Surveys in Israel, East Jerusalem, West Bank, and Gaza. *Journal of Conflict Resolution 61*(1): 84–113.

Chapman AR and Ball P (2001) The truth of truth commissions: Comparative lessons from Haiti, South Africa, and Guatemala. *Human Rights Quarterly 23*(1): 1–43.

Cohen J (1988) *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.

Commission for Historical Clarification (1999) Guatemala: Memory of silence, 13–87. Available at: https://hrdag.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/CEHreport-english.pdf.

Dancy G, Kim H and Wiebelhaus-Brahm E (2010) The turn to truth: Trends in truth commission experimentation. *Journal of Human Rights 9*(1): 45–64.

David R (2017) What we know about transitional justice: Survey and experimental evidence. *Political Psychology 38*: 151–177.

Davidov E, Meuleman B, Cieciuch J, et al. (2014) Measurement equivalence in cross-national research. *Annual Review of Sociology 40*: 55–75.

Do Q-T and Iyer L (2010) Geography, poverty and conflict in Nepal. *Journal of Peace Research 47*(6): 735–748.

Duterme C (2023) The stories bones tell. Collaboration between forensic teams and victims' relatives in the interpretation and ritual accompaniment of human remains in Guatemala. *Death Studies 47*(6): 702–713.

Dyrstad K, Bakke KM and Binningsbø HM (2021) Perceptions of peace agreements and political trust in post-war Guatemala, Nepal, and Northern Ireland. *International Peacekeeping 28*(4): 606–631.

Dyrstad K and Binningsbø HM (2019) Between punishment and impunity: Public support for reactions against perpetrators in Guatemala, Nepal and Northern Ireland. *International Journal of Transitional Justice 13*(1): 155–184.

Dyrstad K, Binningsbø HM and Bakke KM (2022) Wartime experiences and popular support for peace agreements: Comparative evidence from three cases. *Journal of Conflict Resolution 66*(9): 1562–1588.

Dyrstad K, Buhaug H, Ringdal K, et al. (2011) Microfoundations of civil conflict reconciliation: Ethnicity and context. *International Interactions 37*(February 2013): 363–387.

Elbert T and Schaeur M (2002) Psychological trauma: Burnt into memory. *Nature 419*(6910): 883–883.

Gibson JL (2006) The contributions of truth to reconciliation: Lessons from South Africa. *Journal of Conflict Resolution 50*(3): 409–432.

Gignac GE and Szodorai ET (2016) Effect size guidelines for individual differences researchers. *Personality and Individual Differences 102*: 74–78.

Gready P and Robins S (2014) From transitional to transformative justice: A new agenda for practice. *International Journal of Transitional Justice 8*(3): 339–361.

Grodsky B (2009) Re-ordering justice: Towards A new methodological approach to studying transitional justice. *Journal of Peace Research 46*(6): 819–837.

Grossman G, Manekin D and Miodownik D (2015) The political legacies of combat: Attitudes toward war and peace among Israeli ex-combatants. *International Organization 69*(4): 981–1009.

Hall J, Kovras I, Stefanovic D, et al. (2018) Exposure to violence and attitudes towards transitional justice. *Political Psychology 39*(2): 345–363.

Hamber B and Wilson RA (2002) Symbolic closure through memory, reparation and revenge in post-conflict societies. *Journal of Human Rights 1*(1): 35–53.

Han B, Wong EC, Mao Z, et al. (2016) Validation of a brief PTSD screener for underserved patients in federally qualified health centers. *General Hospital Psychiatry 38*(1): 84–88.

Harbom L, Högbladh S and Wallensteen P (2006) Armed conflict and peace agreements. *Journal of Peace Research 43*(5): 617–631.

Hayner PB (2011) *Unspeakable Truths: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions*. New York: Routledge.

Hearty K (2022) Law, 'presentist' agendas, and the making of 'official' memory after collective violence. *Journal of Law and Society 49*(3): 495–517.

Herman B (2022) *Individual Trauma, Collective Stability: The Psychological Consequences of Conflict and Forced Migration on Social Cohesion*. UC Berkeley. Available at: https://escholarship.org/uc/item/72b1z326.

Hirsch-Hoefler S, Canetti D, Rapaport C, et al. (2016) Conflict will harden your heart: Exposure to violence, psychological distress, and peace barriers in Israel and Palestine. *British Journal of Political Science 46*(4): 845–859.

Human Rights Watch (2020) *No Law, No Justice, No State for Victims*. Human Rights Watch. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/11/20/no-law-no-justice-no-state-victims/culture-impunity-post-conflict-nepal.

Human Rights Watch, and Advocacy Forum (2024) Breaking barriers to justice. Nepal's long struggle for accountability, truth and reparations. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2024/04/nepal0324web.pdf.

International Center for Transitional Justice (2014) 'To walk freely with a wide heart': A study of the needs and aspirations for reparative justice of victims of conflict-related abuses in Nepal. Available at: https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-Report-Nepal-Reparations-2014.pdf.

Irwin C (2006) The Northern Ireland 'peace polls'. *Irish Political Studies 21*(1): 1–14.

Isaacs A (2010) At war with the past? The politics of truth seeking in Guatemala. *The International Journal of Transitional Justice 4*(2): 251–274.

Kijewski S and Rapp C (2019) Moving forward? How war experiences, interethnic attitudes, and intergroup forgiveness affect the prospects for political tolerance in postwar Sri Lanka. *Journal of Peace Research 56*(6): 845–859.

Kish L (1949) A procedure for objective respondent selection within the household. *Journal of the American Statistical Association 44*(247): 380–387.

Kline RB (2015) *Principles and Practice of Structural Equation Modeling*. New York: Guildford Press.

Kovras I (2023) Technologies of justice: Forensics and the evolution of transitional justice. *European Journal of International Relations 29*(1): 29–52.

Laplante LJ and Theidon K (2007) Truth with consequences: Justice and reparations in post-truth commission Peru. *Human Rights Quarterly 29*(1): 228–250.

Leebaw BA (2008) The irreconcilable goals of transitional justice. *Human Rights Quarterly 30*(1): 95–118.

Lundy P (2011) Paradoxes and challenges of transitional justice at the 'local' level: Historical enquiries in Northern Ireland. *Contemporary Social Science 6*(1): 89–105.

Lundy P and McGovern M (2008) A Trojan horse? Unionism, trust and truth-telling in Northern Ireland. *International Journal of Transitional Justice 2*(1): 42–62.

Lupu N and Peisakhin L (2017) The legacy of political violence across generations. *American Journal of Political Science 61*(4): 836–851.

McKittrick D, Kelters S, Feeney B, et al. (1999) *Lost Lives: The Stories of the Men, Women and Children Who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles*. Edinburgh: Mainstream.

McQuaid SD (2016) Commemoration as conflict: Space, memory and identity in peace processes. *Irish Political Studies 31*(4): 597–599.

Mendeloff D (2009) Trauma and vengeance: Assessing the psychological and emotional effects of post-conflict justice. *Human Rights Quarterly 31*(3): 592–623.

Myth-Busting Commonly Held Misconceptions about the ICRIR (2024) Independent Commission for Reconciliation & Information Recovery (blog), 14 June. Available at: https://icrir.independent-inquiry.uk/document/myth-busting-commonly-held-misconceptions-about-the-icrir/.

Nussio E, Rettberg A and Ugarriza JE (2015) Victims, nonvictims and their opinions on transitional justice: Findings from the Colombian case. *International Journal of Transitional Justice 9*(2): 336–354.

ODHAG (1998) *Nunca Más: Informe Proyecto Interdiocesano de Recuperación de La Memoria Histórica [Never Again: Report of the Interdiocescan Project on the Recovery of Historic Memory]*. Guatemala: Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala [Office of Human Rights of the Archdiocese of Guatemala].

Pham PN, Weinstein HM and Longman T (2004) Trauma and PTSD symptoms in Rwanda. *Jama 292*(5): 602.

Robins S (2011) Towards victim-centred transitional justice: Understanding the needs of families of the disappeared in postconflict Nepal. *International Journal of Transitional Justice 5*(1): 75–98.

Robins S (2012) Challenging the therapeutic ethic: A victim-centred evaluation of transitional justice process in Timor–Leste. *International Journal of Transitional Justice 6*(1): 83–105.

Ross A (2006) The creation and conduct of the Guatemalan commission for historical clarification. *Geoforum; Journal of Physical, Human, and Regional Geosciences 37*(1): 69–81.

Rubin M and Donkin C (2022) Exploratory hypothesis tests can be more compelling than confirmatory hypothesis tests. *Philosophical Psychology*: 1–29. DOI: 10.1080/09515089.2022.2113771.

Sajjad T (2016) Heavy hands, helping hands, holding hands: The politics of exclusion in victims' networks in Nepal. *International Journal of Transitional Justice 10*(1): 25–45.

Samii C (2013) Who wants to forgive and forget? Transitional justice preferences in postwar Burundi. *Journal of Peace Research 50*(2): 219–233.

Scholte WF, Olff M, Ventevogel P, et al. (2004) Mental health symptoms following war and repression in eastern Afghanistan. *JAMA 292*(5): 585–593.

Selim Y (2018) Contestation and resistance: The politics of and around transitional justice in Nepal. *Conflict, Security and Development 18*(1): 39–60.

Shaw R, Waldorf L and Hazan P (2010) *Localizing Transitional Justice: Interventions and Priorities after Mass Violence*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Šimkovic M and Träuble B (2019) Robustness of statistical methods when measure is affected by ceiling and/or floor effect. *PLOS ONE 14*(8): e0220889.

Skaar E, Rudling A, Selvik L-MM, et al. (2024) The implementation of truth commission recommendations: Exploring the 'beyond words' database for Latin America. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*: 1–24. DOI: 10.1177/07388942241229283.

Steel Z, Chey T, Silove D, et al. (2009) Association of torture and other potentially traumatic events with mental health outcomes among populations exposed to mass conflict and displacement: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *JAMA 302*(5): 537–549.

Tellez JF (2019) Worlds apart: Conflict exposure and preferences for peace. *Journal of Conflict Resolution 63*(4): 1053–1076.

Tellez JF (2021) Peace without impunity: Worldview in the settlement of civil wars. *The Journal of Politics 83*(4): 1322–1336.

Thoms ONT, Ron J and Paris R (2010) State-level effects of transitional justice: What do we know? *International Journal of Transitional Justice 4*(3): 329–354.

Tol WA, Kohrt BA, Jordans MJDD, et al. (2010) Political violence and mental health: A multi-disciplinary review of the literature on Nepal. *Social Science and Medicine 70*(1): 35–44.

United States Institute of Peace (n.d.) *Truth Commission: Guatemala*. United States Institute of Peace. Available at: https://www.usip.org/publications/1997/02/truth-commission-guatemala (accessed 5 June 2024).

Vinck P, Pham PN, Stover E, et al. (2007) Exposure to war crimes and implications for peace building in northern Uganda. *JAMA 298*(5): 543.

Zvobgo K (2020) Demanding truth: The global transitional justice network and the creation of truth commissions. *International Studies Quarterly 64*(3): 609–625.