

**Balancing Justice and  
Stability in Liberia:  
Implementing  
Transitional Justice in a  
Fragile Society Facing  
Socio-Economic Issues**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to examine the balance between seeking justice and maintaining stability in post-conflict Liberia, that is fragile and has many socio-economic issues. The study employed a mixed-methods with convergent parallel design. The 399 respondents sample for quantitative data had a 100% response rate. Ten participants were interviewed for qualitative data. Stratified proportional sampling was used for quantitative data, whereas purposive

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and snowball methods were used for qualitative data. Findings from the inferential statistics showed that Economic Security has a strong positive effect on the dependent variable, Transitional Justice, explaining 61.7% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.617$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), with a significant standardised coefficient ( $\hat{\alpha} = 0.444$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The findings from the qualitative data showed that the most significant hindrances to the pursuit of transitional justice in Liberia include political will, finance, corruption, and inadequacies in the justice system. Threat of instability, economic hardship, and political convenience deprioritised justice, leaving victims bereft of redress. For the achievement of sustainable peace and the consolidation of democracy, Liberia must pursue a balanced approach that unites both reconciliation and justice.

**Keywords:** Economic Security, Fragile Societies, Justice, Liberia, Stability, Socio-Economic Issues

### **Introduction**

As a concept, transitional justice has gained increasing relevance as a framework for dealing with the aftermath of conflict, oppressive rule, or other severe human rights abuses (Yusuf 2021). The idea lays out various mechanisms and processes aimed at addressing historical injustice, healing fractured communities, and building a foundation for sustainable peace (Cohen 2020). From 1989 to 2003, Liberia, a small nation in West Africa, was embroiled in civil war. Its consequences included relocation of over 50 percent of the population and the killing of about 150,000 to 250,000 men, women, and children (Christian, 2018). After considerable efforts at addressing past atrocities and the promotion of reconciliation, Liberia is still left with continuing problems that expose transitional justice processes to jeopardising the attainment of total human security. Very few perpetrators of suffering were prosecuted for crimes against humanity during the conflict. This situation of impunity becomes a direct threat to human security by eroding possible trust in the judicial system and fostering a culture of violence. A large section of the population still suffers from marginaliaation and

injustice, further aggravating prospects for social unrest, causing economic instability, and obstructing access to essential services (Issa, 2023).

In spite of the outcry of civil society, the international community, and other influential Liberians, perpetrators of heinous atrocities remain unpunished. There are, nonetheless, some Liberians who had the strong conviction that prosecuting individuals who committed atrocities during the 14 years' civil war is not an immediate concern because it has the potential of threatening the relative peace that the nation has enjoyed in the last two decades. This problem, which may be described by the author as the stability for justice dilemma, has defined the boundaries of post-war governance and reconciliation in Liberia. The study analysed the peace for justice conundrum facing the nation by exploring how the quest for justice posed a threat to sustaining peace in post-war Liberia and the principal problems in balancing peacebuilding and accountability in post-war Liberia. To address these problems, three principal objectives are pursued, which are to: examine the influence of transitional justice mechanisms on economic security in Liberia; probe the stability and justice argument in Liberia; and explore challenges in implementing transitional justice in Liberia.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Rational Choice Theory***

Rational Choice Theory has been employed to study political decisions and behaviour. Political behaviour was studied by Downs (1957) with the help of Rational Choice Theory in his book, *Economic Theory of Democracy*, where he explained the way politicians make rational choices for the maximisation of their self-interest. Decisions are taken in expectation of utility maximisation due to instrumental rationality, as per rational choice theory (Robert 2018). The Theory suggests that individuals make rational choices following a cost-benefit calculation. Criminals are able to weigh the benefit of impunity or amnesty and measure it against the risk of prosecution or any other type of accountability in transitional justice (Cunha 2021). Individuals, and political leaders, as well as other stakeholders involved in politics, make choices based on rational self-interest. Political actors in the human security arena would be more concerned with policies for safeguarding citizens when they align with political agendas or work to

improve their prospects of staying in power. RCT can be highly relevant in extending its logic to transitional justice processes.

When societies are transitioning from war and authoritarianism to peace and democracy, the majority of powerful actors in such societies weigh costs and benefits of support or opposition on the usefulness of their support or opposition to particular justice mechanisms such as reparations or war crimes tribunals. It may also instrumentalise political elites' support of transitional justice measures when the latter gains political legitimacy or safeguards interests at the expense of complete justice.

### **Background of the Liberian Conflict**

The intricate history of Liberia is marked by human rights violations, war crimes, and economic crimes of both historical and recent origin. Founded by emancipated American citizens, Liberia's political and economic systems were dominated by an Americo-Liberian oligarchy, displacing native populations and aggravating entrenched social and ethnic cleavages (Gross et al., 2024). Poor governance, corruption, and impunity also played a part in widespread abuses and discrimination. Civil wars tormented Liberia from 1989 to 2003, and approximately 150,000–250,000 individuals perished, with over half the population displaced (Levy et al., 2018). Rape, torture, and child conscription were severe violations perpetrated by all parties involved (Cabrera & Sarkarati, 2018). Charles Taylor's regime and subsequent rebel revolts, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD); and Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), drowned the country in new bloodshed (Käihkö, 2021).

The 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) ended the war and addressed enormous rights violations such as mass killings, sexual violence, and economic plundering (Evrard, 2023). It established a transitional government and demanded reforms and demobilisation (Julie, 2017). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which was formed in 2006, gathered nearly 20,000 testimonies of atrocities committed between 1979–2003 (James-Allen et al., 2010) and, in 2009, requested an Extraordinary Criminal Court to try war crimes and human rights violations (Heliso, 2020).

### **Transitional Justice Implementation in Liberia**

Transitional justice in Liberia has only been implemented to some extent by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The National Palava Huts programme was initiated by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in 2013 to address war-time abuses at the grassroots through reconciliation (Odum 2023; UNDP 2022). Even though there were successes, it was affected by a lack of funds, lack of psychiatric treatment, and impunity from serious crimes. No special tribunal has been established, mainly due to political laziness and warlords clinging on to power (Odum 2023). International efforts, such as French and Finnish trials, and U.S. prosecutions for immigration reasons, have offered limited justice (Bondo 2022). Efforts at the local level to undertake reparations have stalled, with a focus on communal reparations and negligible progress in sexual violence redress (Liberian Observer 2022; Odum 2023). These frustrations have prompted both protests and initiatives, including a held-up 2020 Transitional Justice Commission. There is still international pressure, the recent setup of the Office of War and Economic Crimes Court by President Boakai being proof of new commitment. Success does hinge on extensive international financial and technical support (Odum 2023; United Nations Office in Liberia 2024).

### **The Justice and Stability Dilemma**

The “stability and justice” debate in post-civil war Liberia reflects the global dilemma of balancing sustainable peace with accountability for wartime atrocities. Two competing theories dominate this discourse: the “peace-first” approach, which prioritises stability and reconciliation (Sriram, 2009), and the “justice-first” view, advocating for accountability as a prerequisite for true peace (Ainley, 2017). Liberia’s civil wars (1989–2003), which killed over 200,000 and displaced nearly two million, underscore this tension. Transitional justice mechanisms such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and international courts, like the International Criminal Court (ICC), have illustrated both potentials and pitfalls. While mechanisms like the 2003 Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement aimed at reconciliation, justice efforts have been slow due to political resistance, resource constraints, and entrenched impunity (Sawyer, 2012; Pajibo, 2012).

Globally, justice processes like the Nuremberg Trials have faced criticism as victor’s justice (Simpson, 2007), while ICC indictments, for example, in

Sudan have sparked fears of reigniting conflict (Branch, 2011). Hayner (2018) explores these justice-versus-peace dilemmas in cases from Colombia, Uganda, and the Balkans. In Liberia, granting warlords political legitimacy in peace treaties rather than prosecuting them has eroded public trust (Sawyer, 2012). As Liberia continues to grapple with this conundrum, the outcomes of its transitional justice efforts remain vital to securing lasting peace and genuine reconciliation.

### **Challenges in Achieving Stability and Justice**

Liberia must surmount serious obstacles in its quest for enduring peace and justice, even many years after the signing of the Accra Peace Agreement in 2003. The lasting impacts of the civil wars have led to unsolved ethnic grudges, weak governance mechanisms, and socioeconomic issues, all which undermine the country's fragile stability. The 2005-established Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) made efforts to remedy the same by unmasking the truth regarding war atrocities and putting measures of accountability in place (Heliso, 2020). The undue delay in securing justice has led numerous victims and survivors to feel that their agony still awaits a solution.

The international community is worried by Liberia's failure to hold perpetrators of gross human rights violations and war crimes accountable. Following Liberia's July 2018 appearance before the UN Human Rights Committee, the committee noted that none of the alleged perpetrators documented in the TRC report had been held accountable and requested the government to establish a system of accountability (Human Rights Watch, 2019). In spite of appeals, political stagnation and structural problems block the path to justice, creating a sense of impunity among those who have committed atrocities. Furthermore, the public accountability narrative in Liberia's politics adds another dimension to the problem.

### **A Call for Justice**

The establishment of a War and Economic Crimes Court (WECC) in Liberia is a contentious but necessary move towards confronting impunity, promoting justice, and securing long-term peace. The court would prosecute those responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and economic

exploitation during Liberia's conflicts. New Afrobarometer data (2025) shows growing public support for the court, a shift from Afrobarometer (2022), when the public preferred to proceed without prosecution. Human Rights Watch (2022) refers to Liberia's history of civil war and corruption and asserts the need for accountability as a way of discouraging such abuses in the future. The court would uphold Liberia's obligations under international treaties like the Rome Statute (Amnesty International, 2018) and demonstrate a commitment to human rights and the rule of law. To combat the entrenched culture of impunity, the court would even the justice playing field and provide a platform for truth, redress, and reconciliation (Gross et al., 2024). Despite government hesitation, both local and international actors, the Liberian National Bar Association and Human Rights Watch (2021), among others, continue to campaign for the court as being essential to lasting peace and justice.

#### **Post-War Justice Trend in Liberia**

Former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf launched the National Palava Huts programme in October 2013, as advised by the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and organised by the Liberian Independent National Commission on Human Rights. The programme enabled victims of war-associated atrocities like sexual violence, displacement, and murder to confront perpetrators through community-based reconciliation processes (Odum, 2023). While it contributed to national healing, it was marred by challenges such as psychological trauma, low psychosocial support, financial constraints, and procedural flaws (UNDP, 2022).

At the international level, war criminals like Kunti Kamara (France) and Alieu Kosiah (Switzerland) were prosecuted under universal jurisdiction. Domestic accountability was sluggish, however, because of political resistance and the continued influence of former warlords. Activists were concerned about corruption, such as fabricated testimonies and coached witnesses (Bondo, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2022).

In 2019, President George Weah initiated legislative consultations on the implementation of TRC recommendations, including a war crimes court. He also raised the issue at the UN General Assembly (Human Rights Watch,

2019). While over 50 lawmakers initially indicated support, the process stalled. President Weah later backtracked, a sign of governmental ambivalence. The US War Crimes Ambassador Beth Van Schaack issued a statement in October 2022 indicating America's revitalised interest in accountability, triggering optimism for justice (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Furthermore, the UN Peacebuilding Commission's Liberia Configuration convened a high-level meeting on August 19, 2024, where they prioritised transitional justice (UN Office in Liberia, 2024). Foreign Minister Sara Beysolow Nyanti announced the formation of the Office of War and Economic Crimes Court (OWECC) through President Joseph Nyumah Boakai's Executive Order. According to Cllr. N. Oswald K. Tweh, the court represents a firm governmental stance against impunity. Community-driven efforts, including the Women's Peace Huts and Palava Hut programmes, remain central to grassroots reconciliation. Yet, sustained international funding and technical assistance will be vital to the court's success.

## **Materials and Method**

### ***Research Design***

The study adopted the mixed method. The most common and renowned design to mixed methods is the Convergent Parallel Design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) which this study adopted. This type of research design involves the parallel application of various methods to study the same phenomenon. Convergent parallel design was suitable for this study due to its ability to give the researcher the freedom to gather and integrate both qualitative and quantitative data within the same time frame.

### ***Population of the Study***

The population of this study considered the population in Liberia on Census Night November, 2022 which put the country at 5.2 million (5,248,621) people (Liberia Institute for Statistics and Geo-Information Services, 2022). The five geographic regions were fully accounted for in the population. Northern Region: comprises of the following counties, Lofa and parts of Nimba; Central Region: encompassing the counties of Margibi and Bong; Western Region: this region includes the counties of Bomi, Grand Cape Mount, and Gbarpolu.; Southeastern Region: Made up of the counties of



Grand Kru, Sinoe, and River Cess, Grand Gedeh, River Gee and Maryland and West Central including Grand Bassa.

### **Sample Size and Sampling Techniques**

Taro Yamane formula was used to generate the sample size for the qualitative study. From the calculation, the sample size for the study is 399 respondents. The inclusion criteria for this study is that participating individuals must be a permanent resident of the selected regions. A total of 10 participants were interviewed for the qualitative data collection. The participants were drawn from government institutions, civil society and key informants who have knowledge of transitional justice practices. The sampling for this study was purposive to recruit participants who have adequate knowledge of the research intent. For the quantitative aspect, the sampling technique that was utilised is the proportional stratified sampling technique.

**Table 1 Sample Size Distribution per Region**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Sample Proportion</b>	<b>%</b>
Northern Region	989,217	119	29.2
Central Region	772,507	93	23.4
Western Region	408,567	49	12.4
South-Eastern Region	865,242	104	26.3
South-Central Region	293,689	35	8.7

### **Data Collection Instruments**

The study used structured questionnaire as the main data gathering instrument. The Likert five-point scale, which contained strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree, was used as response options for the survey questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised a total of 24 items.

### **Method of Data Collection**

Primary data were collected through face-to-face interviews, focus group discussion, participant observation and survey. The researcher concurrently collected both qualitative and quantitative data to avoid bias. To ensure that

the data collection process accounted for an adequate number of responses, the researcher self-administered and hand-delivered the instrument to each of the respondents and collected the same promptly, along with personal interviews. The data collection process allows the researcher to collect all the information in response to the research instrument, for the evaluation of relevant outcomes (Thomas & Lawal, 2020; Dangal, 2021).

### **Data Analysis Method**

The two types of data that were collected concurrently were analysed independently using both qualitative and quantitative analytical tools. Thematic analysis was employed for the qualitative analysis. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Version 27 was utilised to perform the statistical analyses, including testing the correlational hypothesis of the study. The researcher integrated the data by presenting findings of the qualitative study, followed by the quantitative study in charts, tables and graphs.

### **Findings and Discussion**

#### **Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	2.437	.171		14.238	.000
ESJ	.760	.043	.444	9.733	.000

R=0.783    R<sup>2</sup>=0.617    AdjR<sup>2</sup>=0.614    F-Stat=40.624    P-Value=0.000

Dependent Variable: TJI

There is a high positive correlation between Transitional Justice Implementation (TJI) and Economic Security (ES), as indicated by the R-value of 0.783. According to the R<sup>2</sup> value (0.617), ES (Economic Security) accounts for 61.7% of the variation in TJI. The stability of the model is confirmed by the adjusted R<sup>2</sup> (0.614). The model is statistically significant, according to the F-statistic (40.624, p = 0.000).

Keeping all other variables equal, the unstandardised coefficient ( $B = 0.760$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) indicates that TJI rises by 0.760 units for every unit increase in ESJ. The standardised beta coefficient of 0.444 suggests that ESJ has a moderate effect on TJI.

This model shows that economic security significantly influences the implementation of transitional justice mechanisms. Strong economic security contributes positively to the effectiveness of transitional justice.

### ***Qualitative Data Presentation***

This section presents the themes that were generated from the thematic analysis done on the qualitative data that were collected from key informants' interview. Each generated theme is briefly discussed with direct quotations from the key informants. A brief discussion also follows each theme.

### **Challenges in Implementing Transitional Justice in Liberia**

The most significant hindrance to the pursuit of transitional justice in Liberia include political will, finance, corruption, and inadequacies in the justice system.

#### ***Theme 1: Political Will and Leadership***

The absence of leadership commitment and political will to execute transitional justice was a recurring theme in the interviews. There are major obstacles to justice because the political elites are reluctant to confront past atrocities because of strategic or personal interests. Participant 1 emphasises the lack of political commitment, noting, "So, political commitment, lack of political commitment, or consensus. Look at consensus, the move of the governing elite, it's a problem." Participant 2 stresses that political will is paramount, stating, "The political will of our leaders, you know, to implementing; this is number one. Because I know if the political will is there, other things can follow, right?" Participant 3 adds that leadership is the most significant obstacle to justice, declaring, "The biggest and I think the highest of them for me is leadership."

***Theme 2: Funding and Resources***

One major barrier to the full implementation of transitional justice systems is lack of financing. Citizens are frustrated by the nation's financial limitations and dependence on outside funding sources. Participant 4 notes, "This funding also goes to who decides who gets what reparations. Liberia has to decide what do we do with child soldiers who occupy the position of both perpetrator and victim." Participant 5 emphasises the fear that pursuing transitional justice may reopen old wounds, which is compounded by the lack of resources: "I see this relating to the idea of the fear that if we go into it, something could erupt, because we'll be opening old wounds, right? And of course, resources." Participant 6 succinctly underscores the primary challenge, stating, "The major challenge the government faces is of course, finance." These perspectives show how Liberia's financial difficulties influence the procedures and difficulties involved in a transitional justice implementation.

***Theme 3: Political Interference and Corruption***

Political interference and corruption have considerably stalled justice efforts, particularly when high-level government misconduct is involved. As Participant 2 notes, "the Weah government... and the political marriage with key players... became another obstruction to the implementation." This indicates how political ties create barriers to effective governance and justice reform. Participant 7 observation, "Too many people hurt. There's no redress. And those who committed the hurt seem to be in big positions," further highlights the sense of impunity among those in power, as they remain untouched by the harm they have caused.

***Theme 4: Fear of Instability and Lack of Trust in the Justice System***

The notion of using justice systems to address past crimes in post-conflict societies is tainted with concerns that it might make things more unstable. This fear, which stems from the concern that reopening old wounds could lead to more violence, is clear in Participant 8's remarks, "purported fear that if you open old wounds, something bad could happen." The issue is compounded by a lack of trust in the legal system, as pointed out by Participant 9, who states, "Limited trust in our judicial system. That's maybe a major aspect that needs to be looked at." Furthermore, the potential negative

consequences of seeking justice are reflected in Participant 5's concern: "To what end? You get justice at the detriment of division, potential conflict." These viewpoints highlight the difficulty of striking a balance between justice and national stability, as well as the doubts about how well judicial processes can right historical wrongs without further polarising society.

#### ***Theme 5: Challenges in Documenting and Verifying War Crimes***

It is difficult to prove war crimes when there are no adequate records, which makes it more difficult to hold people accountable and decide who should be compensated. The theme of "Challenges in Documenting and Verifying War Crimes" draws attention to how hard it is to prove war crimes in the absence of adequate documentation and proof. Attempts to hold offenders accountable and decide on suitable compensation for victims are severely hampered by this lack of proof. Participant 4 emphasises this struggle: "The war was largely undocumented means that a lot of instances of people who say massacre happened here... but there are really no records of it to a large extent." Participant 5 further elaborates on the extensive process required to even begin investigating such crimes: "So, even to start a process, you have to conduct investigation. You have to hire investigators, train special investigators."

#### **Stability and Justice Dilemma**

The Liberian political situation is characterised by intense divisions among political elites regarding the implementation of transitional justice mechanisms. Although demands for accountability have been made by some leaders, there has been fierce opposition, especially from former warlords and powerful political leaders who are afraid of being prosecuted. This is added to by the political expediency of successive governments, the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and George Weah governments, that have ignored or rejected outrightly the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Transitional justice has been strongly advocated for by international actors and civil society organisations, but they undermine their credibility through corruption within their own ranks as well as through financial inducements. Lip service and insincerity on the part of the political elite have weakened the push for the full implementation of transitional justice, part of a general pattern of political survival over accountability.

### **Divided Political Will Among Elites**

Political elites' disagreement about the full implementation of post-war justice mechanisms was one of the recurring themes in the analysis. Accountability has been vigorously opposed by certain politicians and supported by others. Their inconsistent position begs the question of how sincere their promises are. These perspectives highlight how political commitment to post-war justice is erratic and frequently incongruous. Even though a few politicians openly advocate for the court's creation, their behaviour or lack thereof tells a different story. Participant 1 captures this division thus: "Oh, well, I think the political elites are divided on it. There are some who have campaigned, have been involved with advocacy at the legislature. There was a small bipartisan support for the implementation at the legislature." This would suggest that while there might be a few political supporters, it remains scant and does not have far-reaching consensus. Further emphasising this divide, Participant 1 adds, "So, in terms of commitment by the political elites, they are mixed, they are divided." His statement reinforces the notion that political leaders do not have a common stand; this disunity undermines transitional justice efforts. Participant 5 averred that "Okay, so it is more or less cosmetic when this is concerned-it's more said than done." This would say that many of the political elites publicly support Transitional Justice but did not take effective action toward realisation.

### **Fear of Instability and Lack of Trust in the Justice System**

Addressing past crimes through implementation of justice mechanisms raises concerns that it could further destabilise the nation. This dread coexists with mistrust of the legal system and doubts about the efficiency of the legal system's procedures. There are some people who fear that seeking justice could spark new hostilities or violence. The notion of using justice systems to address past crimes in post-conflict societies is tainted with concerns that it might make things more unstable. This fear, which stems from the concern that reopening old wounds could lead to more violence, is clear in Participant 8 remarks, "purported fear that if you open old wounds, something bad could happen." The issue is compounded by a lack of trust in the legal system, as pointed out by Participant 9, who states, "Limited trust in our judicial system. That's maybe a major aspect that needs to be looked at." Furthermore, the potential negative consequences of seeking

justice are reflected in Participant 5 concern: *“To what end? You get justice at the detriment of division, potential conflict.”* These viewpoints highlight the difficulty of striking a balance between justice and national stability as well as the doubts about how well judicial processes can right historical wrongs without further polarising society.

### **Justice as a Secondary Concern in the Face of Immediate Survival Needs**

Justice becomes less important when fundamental needs like food and education are not supplied, and people prioritise survival above more significant societal issues like the war crimes court.

The theme draws attention to the fact that when people are struggling to meet their basic needs, justice, justice efforts frequently become secondary. In societies where poverty is pervasive, people prioritise survival over more significant societal issues like accountability for past atrocities. Participant 2 captures this sentiment, stating, “A dying man is not looking for justice; a dying man is looking for what he wants to eat.” Similarly, Participant 4 emphasises the link between economic stability and societal engagement with justice, arguing that “If people earn more, they will go to school more, they will be more informed, we’ll be a better educated society and we’ll have better educated conversations around this, where they understand the nuances in its implementation.”

### **Resistance from Former Warlords and Political Leaders**

Another factor contributing to the hesitancy to adopt justice procedures is opposition from former warlords who currently hold substantial political sway. Opposition to the establishment of a criminal tribunal (War Crimes Court) is fuelled by their fear of being prosecuted.

This resistance highlights the entrenched power of former warlords and their role in obstructing justice for war victims. Participant 1 explains how this new identity gives the former warlords a front to resist measures for accountability through the war crimes court: “Worse still, warlords who signed the peace agreement are now organized under a new banner and referring to it as signatory of the peace agreement. ‘The war crime court, a criminal tribunal’, they say ‘is counterproductive’.” Another warlord, now senator, Prince Johnson (deceased) has employed his political leverage in

the pursuit of avoiding accountability as well. As Participant 1 puts it: “If anyone wanted the endorsement of Prince Johnson, you have to agree with him in principle that the TRC report, the transitional justice measures targeting him would remain untouched.” Participant Four explains further how such transition of warlords into political power has considerably weakened political will for justice: “Because of the political consequences and the fact that a lot of former warlords kind of transitioned their military power to political power and wield significant influence, being kings and kingmakers themselves, there has been less political willpower to implement.”

#### **Political Expediency and the TRC Report’s Neglect**

Another key theme is how political leaders have deliberately ignored the TRC recommendations for political convenience. These views, as expressed, imply that institutions and political leaders have not demonstrated a sincere commitment to putting the TRC’s recommendations into practice, frequently postponing or avoiding action out of political expediency and scheming. These claims show that political leaders have put their own survival ahead of justice and accountability, claiming stability as an excuse to reject demands for a war crimes court. Participant 1 highlights the long-standing pattern of inaction, stating: “Across three administrations now, we’ve seen the TRC report and all the transitional justice measures have been neglected.” The administration of former President George Weah provides a particular illustration of this political manoeuvring. Participant 4 points out that, “George Weah, even though he was very pro-implementing the report prior to ascending power, but his political relationship with Prince Johnson also meant that he changed his tune regarding transitional justice implementation.” Additionally, Former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf’s role in stalling the TRC process is noted by Participant 8, who remarks: “You can see what were her [Former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf] actions... she tried to sway things away, and it did not work then.” Participant 7 echoes the concern about the lack of political will, stating: “There has been a glaring lack of political will to implement the recommendations of the TRC...just we had no report.”



### **Lip Service and Lack of Genuine Commitment**

Lastly, a major concern is that political leaders have been deceptive and have not followed through on their commitments of implementing transitional justice mechanisms after coming to office. The public's trust has been eroded by this pattern of justification without action. Political leaders and parties have acted dishonestly and inconsistently with regard to transitional justice, frequently employing it as a political ploy instead of tackling the root causes.

Political leaders in Liberia have repeatedly failed to honour their commitments to implementing transitional justice mechanisms, using them as campaign promises but abandoning them once in power. As Participant 2 observes, "They use it during campaign time, assure Liberians, 'I'm committed to doing this,' you know? But the moment they get to power, they are compromised, you know? They lay those commitments aside." This pattern of deception has eroded public trust, with leaders often prioritising political survival over justice. Participant 2 further highlights this inconsistency, noting that "President Weah clearly said it, you know, that he thinks that the transitional justice process, you know, we should put that aside now." Such dismissive attitudes reflect a broader trend of political dishonesty regarding transitional justice.

Participant 9 reinforces this sentiment, explaining that "the lack of a dedicated war crimes tribunal and limited reparations suggest a partial commitment, likely influenced by political considerations." Similarly, Participant 8 critiques the process, stating, "I think it has been more of a kind of deceptive kind of thing...it's been more deceptive than genuine...politicians, being more deceptive about the whole idea of transitional justice in Liberia." This lack of genuine commitment is not new, as even former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf failed to act decisively on justice, a hesitation that Participant 3 attributes to political entanglements: "Madam Sirleaf failed to use that trump card... she got so dragged down with the natural apparent tendency of this interconnectivity that Madam Sirleaf could not take an action of justice." Ultimately, these inconsistencies underscore how transitional justice has been more of a rhetorical tool than a sincere effort to address past atrocities.

## **Discussion**

Economic security plays a vital role in enabling transitional justice. Stability encourages trust and participation (Urueña & Prada-Urbe, 2018), while economic hardship deters engagement. Employment and service access foster reconciliation (Lederach, 1997; Weber, 2022), and reducing inequality through empowerment is essential (Emeziem, 2021; Shahid, 2023). Reparations and job programmes restore victim stability (Gready, 2022; Larue, 2023), and economic policies must align with justice objectives (Urueña & Prada-Urbe, 2018). For Liberia to achieve reconciliation and sustainable peace, it must strengthen political will, resource mobilisation, public awareness, judicial effectiveness, coordination, and integrate economic strategies with justice goals.

The advancement of transitional justice in Liberia is persistently undermined by a lack of political will, which is essential to its success (Songa, 2021; Gallen, 2023). Successive administrations have demonstrated reluctance or resistance, as noted by Dr. Aaron Weah, Participant Four, and Participant 7, citing neglect and disregard for TRC recommendations. Kapshuk (2022) attributes successful peace agreements elsewhere to strong political commitment, which Liberia lacks. Financial constraints further impede progress. Dolo, Rojas and Shaftoe (2021) stress the need for adequate funding, yet Liberia's budget does not prioritise justice, reflecting competing interests and political manipulation (Songa, 2021). This makes Tamba to describe government behaviour as deceptive.

Weak political will is compounded by elite opposition and a divided legislature, with over half of the survey respondents blaming political leaders. This aligns with findings by Julie (2017) and Pham et al. (2019) on the need for initiation, mobilisation, and implementation of political will. Low public awareness further diminishes accountability (Lawther, 2021), and both Presidents Sirleaf and Weah failed to honour commitments (Participant Three; Korpu; Tamba). Other constraints include underfunding, elite opposition, a weak judiciary, poor government-civil society coordination, bureaucratic inefficiencies (McAuliff, 2021), and security risks (Participant Three). Dr. Weah and Atty. Bondo highlight the obstructionist role of former warlords in politics.

Economic survival may take priority over justice in post-conflict countries, as noted by Mani (2002). A stable economy, Urueña and Prada-Urbe (2018) noted, can give the citizens hope that their participation in transitional justice would yield concrete, positive outcomes and allow the government to adequately fund and execute programmes on justice. In Liberia, economic hardship and widespread poverty are some of the reasons for low public interest in post-conflict justice processes. Shahid (2023) opined that transitional justice programmes must also offer meaningful opportunities for economic empowerment alongside redressing past grievances. Where individuals are more worried about survival from day to day, justice takes a back seat, making the leniency to adopt transitional justice processes even greater.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Economic stability is a vital enabler of the achievement of transitional justice in Liberia, but it is nevertheless hampered by elite opposition, a lack of political will, and financial constraints. Public participation falls in the absence of solid economic conditions, and justice projects are underfunded and lack credibility. Liberia must link fiscal policies with reconciliation aims, include economic empowerment into justice frameworks, and overcome political resistance through accountability and public pressure if transitional justice is to take hold and promote lasting peace. In order to demonstrate political commitment, the government should publicly support and implement the TRC's recommendations; integrate economic empowerment programmes, such as social services, job creation, and reparations, into justice strategies; and launch civic education campaigns to increase public awareness, improve accountability, and encourage grassroots demand for justice and reform.

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