

BOOK NOTE

Transitional Justice in Balance: Comparing Processes, Weighing Efficacy, By Tricia D. Olsen, Leigh A. Payne, and Andrew G. Reiter. United States Institute of the Peace Press, 2010. Pp. 210. \$21.95 (paperback).

“Transitional justice” is a state’s process of addressing past human rights violations following a period of state repression, political turmoil, or armed conflict. *Transitional Justice in Balance: Comparing Processes, Weighing Efficacy* uses an empirical database to analyze the efficacy of transitional justice mechanisms across 161 countries from 1970 to 2007. The database tracks multiple mechanisms—amnesties, truth commissions, trials, reparations, and lustrations—in order to avoid errors that occur when analyzing these mechanisms in isolation. In response to a lack of empirical studies on the subject, *Transitional Justice in Balance* tests hypotheses on the mechanisms that best impact the transitional justice goals of strengthening democracy and reducing human rights violations.

Transitional Justice in Balance is divided into nine chapters and four appendices, which include charts derived from the database. Chapters One and Two discuss the hypotheses in existing literature regarding transitional justice mechanisms that countries choose and mechanisms that will most likely succeed. The later chapters test these hypotheses with analysis and findings from the database.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five focus on the conditions and factors considered critical to successful transitional justice. These chapters discuss how the type of political economy, type of authoritarian regime, and the type of transition affect the implementation of transitional justice mechanisms. They also consider the role of international governmental organizations and international non-governmental organizations in determining the decisions of new democracies.

Chapters Six and Seven consider the recent trend among transitional justice countries away from amnesties and toward accountability mechanisms. They also consider the relationship between civil wars and transitional justice to determine whether the type of conflict impacts implementing certain mechanisms.

The authors conclude by considering whether specific mechanisms meaningfully achieve the goals of strengthening democracy

and reducing human rights violations. While the study shows a general connection between transitional justice mechanisms and strengthening democracy and human rights protections, the authors were unable to support the hypotheses of many scholars regarding the efficacy of specific mechanisms. In particular, the study showed that truth commissions, working alone, had an overall negative impact on transitional justice. The authors, however, did find that a combination of truth commissions, amnesties, and trials had a positive impact on democracy and human rights, confirming the "holistic approach" to transitional justice.

Tricia D. Olsen is a Ph.D. candidate in political science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she studies the political economy of first- and second- generational rights in developing countries.

Leigh A. Payne is a professor of sociology and Latin American studies at Oxford University and a visiting professor of political science and global studies at the University of Minnesota. She is also a recipient of a U.S. Institute of Peace grant.

Andrew G. Reiter is a Ph.D. candidate in political science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he works on issues of violence and conflict resolution.