

Human security law and International Criminal Court (ICC) or regional equivalents row summary

Legal and accountability interventions can support peaceful dispute resolution, but impacts on violence, rights, justice, and survivor safety are often mixed and context-dependent, being undermined by political elites and with risks of backlash and intimidation.

Human security law + International Criminal Court (ICC) or regional equivalents refers to The use, revision, or development of law (including conventions, treaties, and related legal frameworks) together with the use of the International Criminal Court (ICC) or regional equivalents to investigate or prosecute individuals for serious international crimes (or similar grounds). In the included studies, the specific interventions are: (i) treaty ratification and domestic legal implementation; (ii) ICC investigations, indictments, arrest warrants and prosecutions; (iii) international or hybrid tribunals and internationalized prosecution support; and (iv) transitional or community justice processes that function as accountability mechanisms (e.g., community courts).

These interventions are intended to reduce conflict and atrocities by increasing accountability and deterrence (by raising expected costs for perpetrators), strengthening rule-of-law institutions and legal constraints, supporting survivor rights and access to remedies, and establishing shared rules and fora for peaceful dispute settlement. In practice, effects may be undermined when enforcement is not credible, when cooperation with investigations is weak, or when legal processes become politicized—potentially triggering backlash, strategic non-cooperation, and intimidation of witnesses or victims.

Where quantitative estimates are available, average effects vary in magnitude. There is a large beneficial effect on diplomatic relations and peaceful dispute resolution ($g = 0.44$), though prosecutions can undermine peace negotiations. There are large adverse effects on political security ($g = -0.31$) and the nature or scale of violence and atrocities ($g = -0.38$). Any positive effects of signing international conventions on physical security and violence lessens over time. Willingness to participate in negotiations is negatively affected as ethnic rivalries can be exacerbated ($g = -0.16$), and one study reports large harmful effect on mental health linked to participating in transitional justice ($g = -0.65$). Narrative findings in other outcome areas emphasize heterogeneity and implementation risks. Access to justice and justice outcomes are frequently described as constrained by domestic political incentives, lack of state cooperation, and capacity—leading to limited accountability or uneven delivery of remedies, even where legal frameworks exist. Government performance effects are described as mixed: legal accountability mechanisms can catalyze reforms or shifts toward greater domestic legal capacity in some contexts, but can also provoke political resistance, and deliberate undermining of international mechanisms. Physical security evidence highlights risks to survivors and witnesses (threats, retaliation, intimidation), indicating that protective measures are important to avoid harm. For SGBV and social protection-related outcomes, reviews emphasize that legal codification and accountability are important but insufficient alone; stigma, retaliation, and institutional constraints limit enforcement, and the evidence base is thin with few long-term evaluations—supporting calls for integrated, multi-sector

approaches (legal accountability, protection or prevention, and survivor services) and more rigorous assessment.

Confidence in findings is generally low because the evidence base is small and diverse in design (often qualitative case studies or observational analyses), and results depend heavily on contextual factors such as conflict phase, political incentives, and whether enforcement is credible. Evidence also suggests mechanism-level differences matter (e.g., oversight versus prosecution, or the presence of credible witness protection), so pooled averages may not generalize across settings.

Table of effect sizes (Hedges g)

Magnitude labels: <0.05 little or no effect; <0.1 small; 0.1–0.2 moderate; >0.2 large.

Outcome	Effect size (g)	Direction	Magnitude	Number of studies	Number of effect sizes
Political security (political terror / civil liberties)	-0.308	Harmful	Large	2	8
Nature and scale of violence/atrocities	-0.383	Harmful	Large	6	46
Diplomatic relations and peaceful dispute resolution	0.437	Beneficial	Large	3	53
Willingness to participate or help (intergroup cooperation)	-0.16	Harmful	Moderate	1	11
Food security/nutrition or health security (measured via emotional/mental health impacts of transitional justice)	-0.65	Harmful	Large	1	10