

Transitional Justice Research Collaborative

Truth Commission Coding Manual

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Table of Contents

Section 1: Project Overview	2
Affiliations and Funding.....	2
Scope of Project	2
Section 2: Truth Commission Coding Project.....	3
2.1 Definitions	3
Truth Commission	3
Unit of Observation	4
Human Rights Abuse	4
2.2 Data Collection Strategy	4
2.3 Coding Process	4
2.4 Coding Instructions	6
2.5 Coding Template.....	6
Country Name.....	6
Official Name.....	6
<i>“What is the official name of the commission?”</i>	6
Official name is the formal name of the truth commission body. This name is included in the mandate, the final report, government documents, etc. Coders type in the official name.	6
Location of Truth Commission.....	6
Transitions Sample.....	6
Narrative (text box)	7
Establishment of the Commission	7
Year Truth Commission Report is Issued.....	8
No Final Report.....	8
Crimes covered (by the mandate)	9
Perpetrators’ Names.....	9
Section 3: Appendix	14

Section 1: Project Overview

Affiliations and Funding

Scholars and policymakers have recently advocated transitional justice as a means to strengthen both democracy and human rights protections. Transitional justice is defined as a set of processes to address past human rights violations following periods of political turmoil, state repression, or armed conflict. It encompasses three main mechanisms—human rights prosecutions, truth commissions, and amnesty— along with lustration policies, reparations, institutional reforms, commemorative acts, and the construction of monuments and museums. Despite significant geographic and institutional variation, transitional justice mechanisms are assumed to share a common set of goals: avoid “repeating, reenacting, or reliving past horrors” (Bhargava 2000, 54); deter future violations; restore the dignity of citizens victimized by atrocity; and stabilize democratic rule.

The purpose of this part of the project is to detail as much information as is available on *truth commissions*, by building on and deepening information that has been gathered in two previous data collection efforts.

Scope of Project

The Alternative Accountabilities for Past Human Rights Abuses project will add new data to the database the TJRC has already assembled on human rights trials, truth commissions, and amnesties. The new project will add new “alternative accountability” mechanisms, thereby completing the online system of all judicial and non-judicial transitional justice mechanisms used in transitional countries from 1970 to 2011. The project addresses an important scholarly and policy question: do alternative accountabilities successfully substitute or complement other transitional justice mechanisms to strengthen human rights protections, democracy, and peace?

Table 1 (below) presents a timeline of data collection milestones by transitional justice mechanism:

Table 1. Data Collection Milestones

Mechanism	Phase	Data Collection Begin	Data Collection Complete	Date Publically Available
Prosecutions	1	Fall 2010	Fall 2012	Spring 2013
Truth Commissions	1	Fall 2010	Fall 2012	Spring 2013
Amnesties	1	Fall 2010	Fall 2012	Spring 2013
Vetting	2	Spring 2013	<i>In progress</i>	TBD

Reparations	2	Spring 2013	<i>In progress</i>	TBD
Civil Trials	2	Spring 2013	<i>In progress</i>	TBD
Customary Justice	2	Fall 2013	<i>In progress</i>	TBD

Section 2: Truth Commission Coding Project

2.1 Definitions

Truth Commission

(1) What is a truth commission?

We follow Priscilla Hayner’s definition of a truth commission in this project: “A truth commission 1) is focused on past, rather than ongoing events, 2) investigates a pattern of events that took place over a period of time, 3) engages directly and broadly with the affected population, gathering information on their experiences, and 4) is a temporary body, with the aim of concluding with a final report and 5) is officially authorized or empowered by the state under review” (2nd edition, 2011).

Some truth commissions examine one particular event of human rights abuse, as opposed to a pattern of events e.g. the Bloody Sunday Inquiry and the Greensboro Truth Commission. We code only those commissions that, despite the focus on one event, have mandates that additionally explore wider patterns of violence in the region under investigation.

(2) How are truth commissions operationalized in the dataset?

We operationalize a truth commission as a formal, state-sanctioned, temporary body that investigates a pattern of past human rights abuses and aims to include a final report of its findings (see below for further clarity on what constitutes human rights abuses).

(3) What are examples of inclusionary and exclusionary criteria?

Coders should note the following criteria for inclusion and exclusion (*not exhaustive*):

Inclusion

- Truth commissions that are initiated domestically, internationally or through a hybrid arrangement (domestic and international actors are involved).
- Truth commissions that are initiated by the executive, legislature/parliament or judiciary.
- Truth commissions whose mandates include a final report, though it may not be released yet (these are considered ongoing truth commissions).

Exclusion

- Truth commissions that are initiated and led by non-state groups.
- Truth commissions that investigate matters unrelated to human rights abuse (as defined by the project, see below).
- Investigations of human rights abuses that are conducted by a *permanent* government body.

Unit of Observation

The unit of observation for the truth commission dataset is the truth commission, which is identified by a name, e.g. Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Human Rights Abuse

For the purposes of the OMTJC, human rights abuse(s) are violations of physical or personal integrity rights carried out by a state or agents of the state. Violations include abuses such as extrajudicial killing, torture or similar physical abuse, disappearances, and political imprisonment.¹

2.2 Data Collection Strategy

We use three groups of sources to collect data. The first group includes the most commonly used sources in the quantitative human rights literature: *United States State Department* annual reports, *Amnesty International* annual and special reports; and *Human Rights Watch* annual and special reports. The second group includes published expert “scholarly” or “academic” journal articles and books written about truth commissions (or related topic). Examples include Priscilla Hayner (2011) *Unspeakable Truths: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions* and Tricia Olsen, Leigh Payne & Andrew Reiter (2010) *Transitional Justice in Balance*. The third group of sources is found using academic search engines and law databases. Search engines include *Google Scholar* and *LexisNexis Academic*. Sources include academic journals, organizational reports, newspaper articles, and other relevant sources.

Coders will search for data until all template questions are answered or until no new data is generated with additional sources.

2.3 Coding Process

1. Begin by reviewing the definitions in Section II
2. Locate sources

(a) Sources Type A: Suggested sources that *identify* cases (truth commissions).

Coders should reference the following sources to identify cases:

- Geoff Dancy, Hunjoon Kim and Eric Wiebelhaus-Brahm Dataset (unpublished)

¹ See Wood and Gibney (2010) and Cingranelli and Richards (1999) for more information about physical integrity rights and related standard based measures.

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- Priscilla Hayner (2011). *Unspeakable Truths: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions*: Routledge.
- Tricia Olsen, Leigh Payne & Andrew Reiter (2010). *Transitional Justice in Balance*, Washington D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press (This data can be found at their website: <http://www.tjdbproject.com/>. Click on “Data” in upper right of screen.)
- International Center for Transitional Justice: www.ictj.org (Look under their Truth Commissions tab and in their News section for details).
- United States Institute of Peace Truth Commission Digital Collection: <http://www.usip.org/publications/truth-commission-digital-collection>
- U.S. State Department Annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices
- Databases such as LexisNexis

(b) Sources Type B: Suggested sources with information for *coding* cases

Coders should reference the following sources to collect data and code cases:

- All of the above sources
- Kritz, Neil J. ed. (1995). *Transitional Justice: How Emerging Democracies Reckon with Former Regimes*, Vol. II Country Studies and Vol. III Laws, Rulings and Reports.

3. Build a Sourcebook/ Manuscript

- Build a Manuscript for each country.
- Label the Manuscript (e.g. South African Truth Commission).
- Specify year(s) when a country has more than one truth commission.

4. Collect and record data in the Sourcebook/ Manuscript

- Collected data should be organized by variable.
- All collected data must have a recorded source in the form “author name/ title/year” and when possible other relevant information such as hyperlink.
- Coders should include notes about coding decisions, especially for difficult coding decisions
- Coders should record all sources used to collect data after the narrative section at the end of the template

5. Code

- Using collected data, coders interpret data and make coding decisions.
- Coders then code directly into the website.

6. Archive

- Truth commission reports, mandates and other relevant documents that are available in electronic form are to be stored in the Truth Commission Dropbox folder.

2.4 Coding Instructions

Summary of coding instructions:

- **First, review and follow the detailed process outlined in section 2.2 (above).**
- Second, code all categorical variables (see section 2.5) in coding manuscript
- For each coded variable, record evidence and notes in coding manuscript.
- Record important notes about the case or variables at end of the manuscript.
- Record all utilized sources at the end of the template.
- Save. Upload all relevant files (e.g. commission report, mandate) to the Truth Commission Dropbox folder.
- Transfer all coding decisions from the coding manuscript to the website.

2.5 Coding Template

Country Name

“What is the country name?”

Country name is the name of the country that is the focus of the truth commission mandate.

Coders choose country name from drop down menu.

Official Name

“What is the official name of the commission?”

Official name is the formal name of the truth commission body. This name is included in the mandate, the final report, government documents, etc. Coders type in the official name.

Location of Truth Commission

“Is the truth commission held domestically (locally)?”

Coders select a response from the drop down menu:

- **Yes**
- **No**

Transitions Sample

“Is this country in the list of transition cases?”

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Coders select a response from the drop down menu:

- **Yes**
- **No**

Narrative (text box)

In this section, coders can provide more detail about the truth commission that is not captured by the initial questions.

Establishment of the Commission

“What body initiated the commission?”

Coders check one of the following:

- **Executive**
- **Legislature/Parliament**
- **Judiciary**

Individual Who Created the Commission

“Who specifically initiated the commission?”

Coders write in the name of the individual (e.g. president, judge, legislator) who initiated the commission.

International

“Was the truth commission initiated by international actors?”

Coders select a response from the drop down menu:

- **Yes**
- **No**

Hybrid

“Was the truth commission initiated by both domestic and international actors?”

Coders select a response from the drop down menu:

- **Yes**
- **No**

Other

“Was the truth commission initiated by another group of actors not listed here?”

Coders select a response from the drop down menu:

- **Yes**

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- **No**

Please explain (text box).

Coders elaborate on the creation of the commission with pertinent details. For example, if the commission is a hybrid arrangement, the coder may provide detail on the specific actors involved and how the commission operates.

Year that Truth Commission Law Was Passed

“What year was the law creating the truth commission passed?”

Coders type in the year.

Day/Month of Law

Coders type in the day and month of the law or they check “Unknown.”

Year Truth Commission Begins Operating

Coders type in the year the truth commission begins its work. For example, in this year, commissioners and staff have been hired, funding has been secured, and the commission is tackling one or more elements of its mandate, such as collecting victim testimony.

Year Truth Commission Completes Operation

Coders type in the year the truth commission ceases all activities.

Year Truth Commission Report is Issued

Coders type in the year that a final report is completed.

No Final Report

“If no report is issued, what is the last day/month of truth commission operation?”

Coders type in this information if no final report is issued. Note that there is an additional question below (Yes/No) about whether a report was issued. This question, in contrast, is meant to capture the timing of the commission.

Pattern of Abuse

“Is a pattern of abuse being investigated?”

Note: A pattern of abuse is that which goes beyond a single political event, like the assassination of a single leader.

Coders choose a response from the drop down menu:

- **Yes**
- **No**

Crimes covered (by the mandate)

“What crimes are targeted for investigation within the commission mandate?”

Coders check all that apply from the following options:

- **Disappearance**
- **Death**
- **Torture**
- **Other**

Please explain (text box).

Coders provide detail here on the specific type of crimes under investigation.

Number of Victims Investigated

Coders type in the number of victims investigated by the commission. This number may be the same as the number of testimonies collected (see below), or it may differ. The truth commission final report typically differentiates between the two, if relevant.

Testimony of Perpetrators

“Did perpetrators give testimony?”

Note: Testimony can be written or public.

Coders choose a response from drop down menu:

- **Yes**
- **No**
- **Unknown**

Perpetrators' Names

“Were the perpetrators named?”

The purpose of this variable is to identify whether perpetrators' names were revealed in the *testimony process* (not in the final report, see below).

Coders choose a response from drop down menu:

- **Yes**
- **No**
- **Unknown**

Perpetrator Group

“Was the individual a member of one of the below?”

Coders select a response from drop down menu for each of the following categories:

Military

- Yes**
- No**
- Unknown**

Opposition/political group

- Yes**
- No**
- Unknown**

Political Exiles

- Yes**
- No**
- Unknown**

Governing Regime

- Yes**
- No**
- Unknown**

Police/Security Forces

- Yes**
- No**
- Unknown**

Perpetrator Benefit

“Did the perpetrator receive something in return (for his/her testimony)?”

Coders select a response from drop down menu:

- Yes**
- No**

- **Unknown**

Participation Encouragement

“Did the truth commission make any efforts to encourage participation?”

Coders select a response from drop down menu:

- **Yes**
- **No**
- **Unknown**

Time Period of Abuses

“What is the specific time period covered by the truth commission?”

Coders type in the years of human rights abuse that the truth commission focuses on in its mandate.

Total Testimonies

“What is the total number of testimonies presented to the truth commission?”

Coders type in the total number of victim and perpetrator testimonies given to the truth commission. These may have been provided orally at a commission hearing, in written form, or both. The final report or a commission website often contains this information.

Availability of Testimonies

“Are the testimonies available to the public, either in hard copy or electronic archives?”

Coders select a response from the drop down menu:

- **Yes**
- **No**
- **Unknown**

Please explain (text box).

Coders elaborate here about where testimonies are available e.g. physical location of an archive or website link.

Final Report

“Was there a final report issued?”

Coders select a response from drop down menu:

- **Yes**

- **No**
- **Unknown**

Publishing of Perpetrators' Names

"If so, were perpetrators' names published in the report?"

Coders select a response from drop down menu:

- **Yes**
- **No**
- **Unknown**

Availability of Report

"Is the report publicly available?"

The report is publicly available if it is accessible to the public in a physical location within the country, it has been widely disseminated, and/or it is available to read/download online.

Coders select a response from drop down menu:

- **Yes**
- **No**
- **Unknown**

Please explain (text box).

Coders elaborate here on the location of the report or explain further what has prevented it from being publicly available.

Publishing of Report

"Who published the report?"

Coders type in the name of the institution or person that published the report in its final form. This may be the government or other actor, and though the report is published, it does not necessarily mean it was then made publicly available.

Recommendations

"What were the final recommendations of the truth commission?" (text box)

Coders summarize (given text box limit) the main recommendations outlined in the commission's final report.

Support for Prosecution

“Did the truth commission mandate support prosecution?”

Coders select a response from drop down menu:

- Yes**
- No**
- Unknown**

Number of Commissioners

“How many commissioners are on the truth commission?”

Coders type in the number of commissioners leading the commission or select “Unknown.” These individuals are typically identified in both the mandate and the final report.

Number of Staff

“How many staff members does the truth commission have?”

Coders type in the number of staff members working for the commission or select “Unknown.” These individuals are typically identified in both the mandate and the final report.

Cost of the Truth Commission

“What is the estimated cost of the truth commission?”

Coders type in the estimated cost or select “Unknown.” This information may be in the mandate, the final report, or news reports about the truth commission.

Commission Funding Source

“What is the truth commission’s funding source?”

Coders type in the institution(s) that provide funds for the truth commission or select “Unknown.”

Public Opinion Polls

“Do any public opinion polls exist on the truth commission?”

Coders select a response from drop down menu:

- Yes**
- No**
- Unknown**

“If yes, please explain.” (text box)

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Coders provide more detail here on the poll, what body commissioned it, the results (briefly) and where the polling data can be accessed.

Sources (text box)

Coders list all sources used to complete the coding manuscript here.

Notes (text box)

Coders write additional pertinent notes not captured by variables above.

Section 3: Appendix

Country Name	COW ID	Region	Spell type	Start	End
Albania	339	Euro	democratic transition	1990	1995
Albania	339	Euro	autocratic reversion	1996	1996
Albania	339	Euro	democratic transition	1997	2010
Algeria	615	MENA	democratic transition	2004	2010
Argentina	160	Amer	democratic transition	1973	1975
Argentina	160	Amer	autocratic reversion	1976	1982
Argentina	160	Amer	democratic transition	1983	2010
Armenia	371	Euro	democratic transition	1991	1995
Armenia	371	Euro	autocratic reversion	1996	1997
Armenia	371	Euro	democratic transition	1998	2010
Azerbaijan	373	Euro	democratic transition	1992	1992
Azerbaijan	373	Euro	autocratic reversion	1993	2010
Bangladesh	771	Asia	democratic transition	1972	1973
Bangladesh	771	Asia	autocratic reversion	1974	2008
Bangladesh	771	Asia	democratic transition	1991	2006
Bangladesh	771	Asia	autocratic reversion	2007	2008
Bangladesh	771	Asia	democratic transition	2009	2010
Belarus	370	Euro	democratic transition	1991	1995
Belarus	370	Euro	autocratic reversion	1996	2010
Benin	434	Africa	democratic transition	1990	2010
Bolivia	145	Amer	democratic transition	1982	2010
Brazil	140	Amer	democratic transition	1985	2010
Bulgaria	355	Euro	democratic transition	1990	2010
Burkina Faso	439	Africa	democratic transition	1977	1979
Burkina Faso	439	Africa	autocratic reversion	1980	2010
Burundi	516	Africa	democratic transition	2005	2010
C Af Republic	482	Africa	democratic transition	1991	2002
C Af Republic	482	Africa	autocratic reversion	2003	2010
Cambodia	811	Asia	democratic transition	1988	1996

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Cambodia	811	Asia	autocratic reversion	1997	1997
Cambodia	811	Asia	democratic transition	1998	2010
Chile	155	Amer	democratic transition	1989	2010
Congo (Brazzaville)	484	Africa	democratic transition	1991	1996
Congo (Brazzaville)	484	Africa	autocratic reversion	1997	2010
Cote d'Ivoire	437	Africa	democratic transition	1999	2002
Cote d'Ivoire	437	Africa	autocratic reversion	2003	2010
Croatia	344	Euro	democratic transition	1999	2010
Czechoslovakia	315	Euro	democratic transition	1989	1992
Czechoslovakia	315	Euro	democratic transition	1993	2010
Dominican Rep	42	Amer	democratic transition	1978	2010
DR Congo	490	Africa	democratic transition	2004	2010
Ecuador	130	Amer	democratic transition	1979	2010
El Salvador	92	Amer	democratic transition	1982	2010
Estonia	366	Euro	democratic transition	1991	2010
Ethiopia	530	Africa	democratic transition	1994	2010
Gabon	481	Africa	democratic transition	2009	2010
Georgia	372	Euro	democratic transition	1991	2010
Germany	255	Euro	democratic transition	1990	2010
Ghana	452	Africa	democratic transition	1970	1971
Ghana	452	Africa	autocratic reversion	1972	1977
Ghana	452	Africa	democratic transition	1978	1980
Ghana	452	Africa	autocratic reversion	1981	1995
Ghana	452	Africa	democratic transition	1996	2010
Greece	350	Euro	democratic transition	1974	2010
Guatemala	90	Amer	democratic transition	1986	2010
Guinea-Bissau	404	Africa	democratic transition	1991	2002
Guinea-Bissau	404	Africa	autocratic reversion	2003	2004
Guinea-Bissau	404	Africa	democratic transition	2005	2010
Haiti	41	Amer	democratic transition	1990	1990
Haiti	41	Amer	autocratic reversion	1991	1993
Haiti	41	Amer	democratic transition	1994	1999
Haiti	41	Amer	autocratic reversion	2000	2003
Haiti	41	Amer	democratic transition	2004	2010
Honduras	91	Amer	democratic transition	1980	2010
Hungary	310	Euro	democratic transition	1989	2010
Indonesia	850	Asia	democratic transition	1999	2010
Iran	630	MENA	democratic transition	1997	2003
Iran	630	MENA	autocratic reversion	2004	2010
Kenya	501	Africa	democratic transition	2002	2010
Kosovo	347	Euro	democratic transition	2008	2010
Kyrgyzstan	703	Asia	democratic transition	2005	2010
Latvia	367	Euro	democratic transition	1991	2010
Lebanon	660	MENA	democratic transition	2005	2010
Lesotho	570	Africa	democratic transition	1993	2010

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Liberia	450	Africa	democratic transition	2003	2010
Lithuania	368	Euro	democratic transition	1991	2010
Macedonia	343	Euro	democratic transition	1991	2010
Madagascar	580	Africa	democratic transition	1991	2010
Malawi	553	Africa	democratic transition	1994	2010
Mali	432	Africa	democratic transition	1991	2010
Mauritania	435	Africa	democratic transition	2007	2007
Mauritania	435	Africa	autocratic reversion	2008	2010
Mexico	70	Amer	democratic transition	1994	2010
Moldova	359	Euro	democratic transition	1991	2010
Mongolia	712	Asia	democratic transition	1990	2010
Mozambique	541	Africa	democratic transition	1994	2010
Nepal	790	Asia	democratic transition	1990	2001
Nepal	790	Asia	autocratic reversion	2002	2005
Nepal	790	Asia	democratic transition	2006	2010
Nicaragua	93	Amer	democratic transition	1990	2010
Niger	436	Africa	democratic transition	1991	1995
Niger	436	Africa	autocratic reversion	1996	1998
Niger	436	Africa	democratic transition	1999	2008
Niger	436	Africa	autocratic reversion	2009	2009
Niger	436	Africa	democratic transition	2010	2010
Nigeria	475	Africa	democratic transition	1978	1983
Nigeria	475	Africa	autocratic reversion	1984	1998
Nigeria	475	Africa	democratic transition	1999	2010
Pakistan	770	Asia	democratic transition	1973	1976
Pakistan	770	Asia	autocratic reversion	1977	1987
Pakistan	770	Asia	democratic transition	1988	1998
Pakistan	770	Asia	autocratic reversion	1999	2006
Pakistan	770	Asia	democratic transition	2007	2010
Panama	95	Amer	democratic transition	1989	2010
Paraguay	150	Amer	democratic transition	1989	1991
Paraguay	151	Amer	democratic transition	1992	2010
Peru	135	Amer	democratic transition	1979	1991
Peru	135	Amer	autocratic reversion	1993	1999
Peru	135	Amer	democratic transition	2000	2010
Philippines	840	Asia	democratic transition	1986	2010
Poland	290	Euro	democratic transition	1989	2010
Portugal	235	Euro	democratic transition	1974	2010
Romania	360	Euro	democratic transition	1989	2010
Russia	365	Euro	democratic transition	1992	2010
Senegal	433	Africa	democratic transition	2000	2010
Serbia (Yugoslavia)	345	Euro	democratic transition	2000	2010
Sierra Leone	451	Africa	democratic transition	2001	2010
Slovakia	317	Euro	democratic transition	1993	2010
Slovenia	349	Euro	democratic transition	1992	2010

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South Africa	560	Africa	democratic transition	1992	2010
South Korea	732	Asia	democratic transition	1987	2010
Spain	230	Euro	democratic transition	1975	2010
Sudan	625	MENA	democratic transition	1985	1988
Sudan	625	MENA	autocratic reversion	1989	2010
Taiwan	713	Asia	democratic transition	1992	2010
Thailand	800	Asia	democratic transition	1974	1975
Thailand	800	Asia	autocratic reversion	1976	1977
Thailand	800	Asia	democratic transition	1978	1990
Thailand	800	Asia	autocratic reversion	1991	1991
Thailand	801	Asia	democratic transition	1992	2005
Thailand	802	Asia	autocratic reversion	2006	2007
Thailand	800	Asia	democratic transition	2008	2010
Timor-Leste	860	Asia	democratic transition	2002	2010
Turkey	640	MENA	democratic transition	1973	1979
Turkey	640	MENA	autocratic reversion	1980	1982
Turkey	640	MENA	democratic transition	1983	2010
Uganda	500	Africa	democratic transition	1980	1985
Uganda	500	Africa	autocratic reversion	1986	2010
Ukraine	369	Euro	democratic transition	1991	2010
Uruguay	165	Amer	democratic transition	1985	2010
Zambia	551	Africa	democratic transition	1991	2010
Zimbabwe	552	Africa	democratic transition	2009	2010
