

'Righting The Wrong': A Multi-Country Study on People's Perceptions of 'Making Things Right' in the Wake of Human Rights Violations

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Abstract

More and more academics and policy makers advocate that countries ought to deal with past human rights violations. In this article, we explore whether people across the world agree with this normative expectation, and if so, what they think should be done to 'make things right' and why. Our overarching objective was to see whether we can observe any universal patterns or common themes in this regard or whether people's ideas and intuitions are primarily subject to cross-country variation. Through 283 interviews conducted in Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Indonesia, Japan, Jordan, the Netherlands, Poland, and the United States, we found that people largely share the belief that countries should deal with past transgressions, and that they see this as multi-dimensional process that includes multiple measures that help ensure security and stability, restore harmony and peace, as well as meet other collective economic, social and moral needs. Our findings also suggest, however, that people's ideas about the specific measures that should be part of this process are at least partially shaped by the local social, economic, cultural and political context as well.

Key words: *making things right*, justice, peace, reconciliation, cross-country

Public significance statement: As more and more academics and policy makers advocate that countries ought to deal with past human rights violations, we argue that it is important to first understand whether people across the world agree, and whether their ideas on what should be done and why overlap. By interviewing 283 people in eight diverse countries (Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Indonesia, Japan, Jordan, the Netherlands, Poland, and the United States), we find that people generally agree, but also that they think that this process should include multiple measures (for example apologies, dialogue, developmental measures etc.) to help ensure security and stability, restore harmony and peace, as well as meet other collective

economic, social and moral needs. We also find, however, that despite certain commonalities, people's ideas are also shaped by the local social, economic, cultural and political context.

Introduction

‘Im Namen des deutschen Volkes sind aber unsagbare Verbrechen begangen worden, die zur moralischen und materiellen Wiedergutmachung verpflichten...’

– Konrad Adenauer, 27 September 1951

In his landmark statement made to the German Bundestag in 1951, Federal Chancellor Konrad Adenauer declared that the German people were obliged to make moral and material reparations or *Wiedergutmachung* for the horrific crimes and immeasurable suffering caused by the Nazi regime (Adenauer, 1951). Although *Wiedergutmachung* has become synonymous with the 1950s German reparations policy, the term itself means ‘making amends’, ‘compensation’ or ‘reparations’ – translating literally to ‘making good again’. *Wiedergutmachung*, as an expression within the reparations policy, was propagated out of a sense of moral obligation by a group of Germans who hoped that its moral dimension would “appeal to people’s conscience” (Schrafstetter, 2003). In that sense, the notion of ‘making good again’ is a normative one: it suggests that a ‘wrong’ should be addressed and repaired to ensure that everything is ‘right’ again. A normative notion that has arguably gained traction over the past 75 years as countries increasingly debate about what should be done to address past injustices, to ‘right’ the ‘wrong’.

Complementing a wider paradigmatic shift within international politics in which human rights gained preeminence, the premise that countries *ought to* ‘deal with the past’ has become more and more institutionalized. This is partly exemplified by the development of transitional justice as a field of research and practice, comprising “the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society’s attempts to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses” (United Nations Security Council, 2004, p. 4). While initially including predominantly criminal justice measures such as prosecutions and trials, the range of measures developed over time to include more symbolic and commemorative mechanisms

such as apologies and truth commissions, as well as reparations (e.g., Arthur, 2009). With the former geared towards ensuring accountability and punishment, and the latter towards restoring relations and repairing the harm done, these measures are often presented by transitional justice scholars as a 'toolbox', which contribute to different justice dimensions (for some examples, see Table 1). Similar – albeit less expansive - categorizations have also been made by researchers within social psychology, who mostly distinguish between retributive (i.e., more punishment-oriented) and restorative (i.e., more oriented towards restoring relations) justice approaches (e.g., Li & Leidner, 2019; Wenzel et al., 2008).

The idea that countries should try to 'deal with the past' by acknowledging and addressing their legacy of human rights abuses has hence become a prominent consideration in many countries, whereby it is often assumed that the various transitional justice mechanisms are key in combating injustice and impunity by ensuring accountability, facilitating reconciliation and recognizing the suffering experienced by victims and their families. Research in this area has subsequently focused on the implementation and impact of various transitional justice mechanisms in different settings, whereby understanding the situational context is vital particularly when it comes to assessing what factors enable and constrain such processes within that given setting, and especially when these have direct on-the-ground consequences. (e.g., Čehajić-Clancy & Brown, 2019; Gausel et al., 2018; Philpot & Hornsey, 2008). A more fundamental question that has remained largely unaddressed, however, is whether this idea that countries should deal with the past is rooted in a shared premise. Is there truly a universal *normative* expectation that countries *should* deal with past human rights violations, and if so, to what extent do people share certain expectations about what this should look like and what it should achieve? Understanding the degree of consensus (or lack thereof) in these underlying normative considerations is crucial, as it provides a foundational overview of how and the extent to which people's perceptions systematically

match the often standardized responses proposed by many existing academic and policy frameworks.

Based on existing scholarship, one could argue that the belief that countries should address past wrongdoing may be indeed be universal. From a social psychological perspective, the desire to restore moral order following wrongdoing can be considered a fundamental human motive at the interpersonal and collective level (e.g., Fischer, 2016; Iqbal & Bilali, 2018). Some scholars have therefore suggested that 'deeper ideational instincts in the human brain' may imply universal receptivity to transitional justice practices (e.g., Sikkink, 2011). On the other hand, while there is some evidence that suggests that the *demand* for justice is universal, there is also reason to believe that people's interpretations of what this entails and how it can be achieved can vary (Van der Merwe, 2009). Lambourne (2009), for example, found during her fieldwork in Sierra Leone, Cambodia, Rwanda, and East Timor, that interviewees in Sierra Leone were more concerned with immediate socioeconomic needs and political justice than with truth-telling mechanisms, while in Cambodia, only a few interviewees mentioned socioeconomic justice as a priority and instead emphasized the need for acknowledgement and truth. In addition, Nee and Uvin (2010) found that people in Burundi were afraid that prosecutions or a truth commission may risk future peace and stability, and instead expressed a stronger preference for dialogue that was rooted in "a strong normative value of compromise and social repair" (Shaw & Waldorf, 2010, p. 14).

The studies that have been conducted so far, however, make it difficult to ascertain any potential broader systematic patterns in people's intuitions about what should be done following human rights violations, and the extent to which their ideas resonate with formal processes of 'dealing with the past' as propagated by (inter)national policy makers and civil society, or the diverse justice categorization proposed by academics within social psychology and in transitional justice. For example, most transitional justice surveys and case studies

have either focused on people's preferences or attitudes towards transitional justice processes within a single region or situational context, or looked at the impact and efficacy of specific mechanisms and strategies as opposed to the preferences and expectations people may hold in common across contexts (e.g., Cole & Firchow, 2019; Nussio et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2010). The same holds for many studies within social psychology as these tend to focus on specific predefined measures (e.g., apologies or reparations) within particular intergroup contexts, and on the (mostly person-level) moderators (e.g., emotional responses or identity concerns) that may either facilitate or inhibit people's preferences in this regard (e.g., Brown & Cehajic, 2008; Gausel et al., 2018; Shnabel & Nadler, 2015; Wohl et al., 2011). Although these studies have yielded valuable results, their situation specific or measure specific 'focus' makes it difficult to identify any potential overarching commonalities in people's expectations concerning the broader process of 'dealing with the past', and the extent to which "internationally promoted and generalized [*transitional justice*] concepts... and practices resonate" with people more generally (Macdonald, 2015, p. 77).

The aim of this study is to address this and complement existing work by combining a bottom-up qualitative approach with a cross-national perspective to explore how 'dealing with the past' lives in the wider public imagination. Do people across the world *share* the normative expectation that countries should deal with the past? If so, what do they think should be done and why, and to what extent do their expectations overlap? Can we observe a common normative 'vocabulary' or script for how people think countries should address past injustices or is this subject to contextual differences? Drawing conceptually on *Wiedergutmachung*, we use the notion of 'making things right' as our starting point rather than terms such as 'justice', 'reconciliation' or 'peace'. Adopting this terminology allows us to focus on the underlying normative framework(s) and related scripts of the *process*, rather than focusing solely on a particular (or potential) outcome given that these are likely to overlap and hold different meanings (e.g., Selim, 2018), especially given the mediated nature

of many of these terms and their relative meaning in different languages. Hence, we conducted interviews to capture people's ideas on *whether* something should be done to *make things right* following a situation in which a country has harmed people, and if so, *what* and *why* across eight countries including Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Indonesia (Java), Japan, Jordan, the Netherlands, Poland, and the United States (Alabama). We see this systematic exploration of people's overarching normative expectations of 'righting the wrong' as complementary to the more commonly-adopted grounded case study or quantitative experimental and survey approach, and providing a unique cross-disciplinary perspective to ongoing academic debates on how countries should deal with or respond to past injustices.

Study Scope

We deliberately chose to conduct this study across a diverse range of countries because we were interested in seeing whether we could detect any universal patterns in people's ideas and intuitions despite their countries' contextual differences. In all of these countries, however, the question of how a country should deal with past injustices is relevant, as each continues to grapple with its own historical record of human rights violations regardless of how peaceful, liberal or economically-advanced they may be. In the Netherlands and the United States, for example, there are active public debates on how the country should recognize and deal with the structural repercussions of slavery and (settler) colonialism, while in Japan and Poland, the country's role during the Second World War remains a contentious topic. Meanwhile both Indonesia and Burkina Faso are still coming to grips with the aftermath of previous autocratic regimes. Other concerns such as the acknowledgement and response to the discrimination of ethnic or sexual and gender minorities resonate across the eight countries.

Nonetheless, these countries have considerably different socio-economic, cultural, historical, and political contexts, even though the degree to which they vary across these dimensions differs. For example, while some have recently been confronted with the threat of

(regional) violence, economic pressures or a shrinking democratic space, countries such as the Netherlands and Japan have been politically and economically relatively stable for an extended period of time. Culturally-speaking, however, these two liberal democracies are quite distinct. In contrast to the Dutch, who are considered prototypically individualistic and known for their directness, the Japanese avoid explicit disagreements and conflict, and instead value saving face and politeness within their social interactions to ensure greater social harmony (Hirata & Warschauer, 2014). Such culturally-rooted conflict management or reconciliatory strategies are visible across the different countries. Like in Japan, but also Indonesia, people in Costa Rica value conflict avoidance as is characterized by the absence of a national army and their longstanding dedication to peace and human rights (Joseph, 2016). The importance of social cohesion is also visible in Burkina Faso, where 'asking for forgiveness' or apologizing is a core value and part of traditional mediation processes for the Mossi (Canavera, 2006). Nevertheless, despite the country's culturally-embedded propensity to peace and rapid democratic progress following the ousting of former president Blaise Compaoré in 2014, it is increasingly confronted with terrorist violence and (regional) instability (The Fund for Peace, 2020). While considerably more fragile, it is not the only country in the sample which suffers from regional instability. Both Costa Rica and Jordan are considered peaceful 'islands' within a region that is often fraught with violence or conflict. Regional conflicts have weakened Jordan's economy as it struggles with a large influx of refugees placing a strain on the country's already limited (natural) resources. Violent demonstrations such as those against the 2018 financial reforms exposed a potentially volatile situation as broader discontent with the government simmers under the surface (ACLED Data, 2018). Large-scale protests against government policies also took place in Poland (against new abortion restrictions and court reforms) and the United States (against the Trump administration's family separation policy) during the interview period, reflecting a period of increasing autocratization in both countries (Luhmann et al., 2018).

Method

Participants

Within each country, we aimed to obtain a comparatively varied sample in terms of gender, age, locality, and education. To ensure greater cultural *within-country* homogeneity, however, we focused on each country or region's major ethnic or religious group (for example the Mossi in Burkina Faso or Muslim Javanese in Indonesia). Participants from other groups were not excluded, however, if they happened to participate. Our final sample consisted of 284 participants, who were mostly recruited via snowball sampling – with the exception of Japan where participants were identified by a panel company (see Table 2 for a breakdown of the country samples and demographics).

Interview Procedure and Protocol

In each country, face-to-face interviews were conducted between 2017 and 2019 by local interviewers using a structured protocol. This protocol was developed in English, and then formally translated into Arabic, Dutch, French, Indonesian (and Javanese), Japanese, Polish, and Spanish. Independent back translations were reviewed and discussed with local experts to verify the accuracy and validity of various key terms, including for example the concept of 'making things right'. To ensure a consistent approach across countries, all interviewers attended two in-country training sessions given by members of the core research team.

Prior to each interview, participants were informed about their rights and what they could expect during the interview. They were subsequently asked to give either verbal or written consent for participation and for the interview to be recorded. Where participants refused to be recorded (N=19), the interviewer took manual notes. Interviews were

transcribed in their original language, before being informally translated into English (with the exception of the Dutch and French interviews).

We opted for a bottom-up qualitative approach to explore how people think about 'making things right' when a country has done wrong, as this enabled us to capture people's ideas in their own words and based on their own experiences. Simultaneously, however, we needed to be able to *compare* these ideas across the different countries, which meant that we needed to prompt people with a human rights violation scenario that was comprehensible, comparable, and recognizable to all. This posed a significant challenge, as (past) injustices vary in terms of severity, timing, impact and other contextual factors. To address this concern, we presented participants with the following open-ended question:

Now, I would like you to imagine a situation in which a country – any country, not necessarily [name country] – has harmed a group of people, either within the same country or in another country. For example, by physically harming them, or by treating them unjustly.

Given that 'harm' does not always translate, we added two short examples highlighting both the physical and psychological dimensions to ensure cross-country comparability. We also deliberately emphasized that the harm was done to a 'group of people' as opposed to a single person, to ensure that it was seen as larger scale abuse. With this scenario in mind, participants were then asked questions on 'making things right'.¹

1. So, if a country has harmed a group of people – are there ways in which the country could make things right – and if so, can you list them?
2. Is it important or not for a country to make things right? Why or why not?

While an abstract approach may seem counterintuitive given ample evidence that context matters, it actually facilitated an active consideration of whether and how people

¹ As this study was part of a larger project, it covered a range of additional topics, including collective shame, guilt and responsibility. The full questionnaire is available on request.

contextualize their responses. More than half of the participants (59%), for example, were able to reflect on these questions in a purely abstract manner, while the rest had specific events or situations in mind, most of which reflected country or community specific concerns. In Burkina Faso, for instance, some participants mentioned the assassination of former president Sankara while in Indonesia, people mentioned the state violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar. Some examples were specific incidents (e.g., shooting of MH17), while others referred to more protracted situations ranging from more contemporary (e.g., the conflicts in the Middle East) to historical (e.g., slavery). Although the use of an abstract scenario inevitably introduces complexity (as the wide range of examples show), it is precisely this complexity that allows us to better identify any shared commonalities in people's thinking, and simultaneously, identify perspectives that are driven and shaped by context-specific concerns.

Analysis

The final corpus of 283 interviews was analyzed using qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012).² Our codebook included three broad overarching components: situations, measures and reasons. The codes were either literature driven – for example 'reparations' and 'apologies' – or based on common themes identified within the data such as 'development measures' and 'medical and psychological care'. The analysis approach consisted of five iterative rounds of coding including a sample check, total sample coding, a second sample check for agreement, a language check and a final total sample check. Using a preliminary version of the codebook, 40 interviews were coded by a team of three independent coders, with each interview being coded twice. Codes with a percentage agreement lower than 90% were reviewed, resulting in minor changes to the code book, and clearer coding instructions. Using the updated version of the codebook, all interviews (including the first sample) were

² One interview was excluded as the participant misinterpreted the questions, and hence the responses were not comparable.

(re)coded, with each of the three coders coding a different subsample. A subsample of 96 previously coded interviews (33%) was subsequently coded by a second coder to verify intercoder agreement. Wherever this was less than 80%, differences were discussed and reviewed. A final coding check of the entire corpus was conducted by the primary coder. Additionally, as most of the coded interviews were English translations, five interview transcripts from each country were coded by native speakers in their respective languages to ensure that nothing was 'lost-in-translation'. These were subsequently compared and discussed with the core coding team. No major issues were identified.

Results

Overall, we identified three overarching commonalities in people's ideas about 'making things right', where it not only constituted a '*shared norm*' among our participants but was also perceived as a '*multi-dimensional*' process geared towards obtaining *material, social and moral objectives*. We will discuss each of these observations in turn.

'Making Things Right' as a Shared Norm

The vast majority of our participants (N=258) indicated that countries *should* try to address past wrongdoing. This apparent shared normative expectation not only transcends any individual differences between participants but it also appears to be impervious to any contextual differences. For example, most participants considered the process of addressing past wrongdoings as important regardless of whether they were able to reflect on the abstract example more generally (59%), or whether they had specific examples in mind (41%).

Nonetheless, we also noticed that people often described the process of 'making things right' as an ideal that should be pursued, but that may be unattainable. Some participants, for example, argued that the severe impact of a situation – in particular the loss of lives – means that 'making things right' is an unachievable ideal:

When you say, 'make those things right', see that's not really true. If I gave somebody a million dollars ... because their son was killed, that can't replace the fact that he

was killed, but you could ... ease the pain or kind of atone for what you did. You can't erase what's happened. (73 year old man, United States)

On the whole, however, most participants still argued that injustices should be addressed and even more so when they are severe because of the lasting impact, regardless of when these injustices took place. As this man stated:

As time passes, it is more difficult ... people become more impatient, like yes why do we have to deal with that now, that is so far behind us, those were other people, other times ... it is also more difficult to demonstrate or have the feeling that you are responsible for something. Unless, of course, you have done something in the past that has such an impact that it will continue for decades, maybe even a hundred years. (65 year old man, Netherlands)

While severity appears to trump timing, most people shared the opinion that it is harder to address injustices in the more distant past. Some, like the man quoted above argued that it is difficult to determine direct involvement or responsibility (or trigger a sense of responsibility), while others argued that it is easier to address recent incidents, because it is more present in people's minds – *"I think it would be difficult to fix what has happened in the past ... If it happened in the past, we might already have forgotten"* (81 year old woman, Indonesia).

'Making Things Right' as a Variable Multi-Dimensional Process

When it comes to how countries should try to 'make things right' in the wake of past wrongdoings, our data suggest that participants imagine this as a multi-dimensional process, as described by this 31 year old man from Java:

From the psychological side, for example, it may be necessary to bring in a psychiatrist, a psychologist ... if it has a physical impact, a doctor ... In terms of stigma in society, it might be sociologists, and then maybe we need geologists to help fix damaged regions.

The range of measures listed by participants was extensive. By and large, however, we identified six overarching 'justice' dimensions based on the direction of the effects these measures are presumed to have (see David, 2017), namely: reconciliatory, reconstructive, reparatory, retributive, reflective, and revelatory measures (see Figure 1). We also detected two broader trends in the relative salience of these measures. First, reconciliatory, reconstructive and reparatory measures (arguably more forward-looking measures), were far more salient among our participants than the more past-oriented retributive, reflective and revelatory measures, even though these last three are often at the heart of formal transitional justice processes. Second, while people in each country gave examples of measures across different dimensions, the cross-country differences that we also found (see Figure 2) suggest that people's expectations as to how countries should deal with the past do vary and seem to be shaped by cultural-historical and socio-political factors as well. In contrast, people's expectations showed little variation between those who had a specific example in mind and those who reflected on the question in a more abstract manner.

Looking across the sample, measures geared towards reconciling and repairing relationships - such as apologies, acknowledgement, and dialogue and cooperation - were mentioned most frequently by our participants. Yet while apologies, and to a lesser extent acknowledgement, were salient in Burkina Faso, the Netherlands, Poland and the United States – they were less salient in Japan, Indonesia, and Costa Rica, where the emphasis was instead on dialogue and cooperation (see Figure 3; for illustrative quotes, see Table 3). The relative salience of these specific reconciliatory measures seems to reflect different cultural values and local practices. For example in Burkina Faso, where the act of apologizing is customary, apologies were mentioned by three out of every four participants. Some saw apologies as the "*only remedy*", while others saw it as a first step in a bigger process. In the Netherlands, Poland, and the United States apologies were also mentioned relatively often (one in three), while at least one in four participants mentioned acknowledgment. Across

these countries, people mostly emphasized the need to 'first' acknowledge the responsibility but also the wrongdoing by "*being very transparent with what happened...and admitting that it was wrong*". The similarities in the pattern of results for both apologies and acknowledgement (i.e. salient in the Western countries but less so in Costa Rica, Indonesia and Japan) may be due to the importance placed on taking accountability within these cultural contexts (e.g., Velayutham & Perera, 2004). Similarly, the cultural importance of avoiding conflict and maintaining harmony in Japan, Indonesia, and Costa Rica, may explain why dialogue and cooperation were particularly salient in these countries. Participants here emphasized the need to talk to different parties, and to ensure that multiple voices are heard. In Indonesia, for example, multiple participants emphasized the need to hear both sides, and to work together towards a consensual solution, which may also reflect the local consensus building deliberation model or *musyawarah mufakat*, which is taught at schools and applied within public dialogues.

The second most commonly mentioned group of measures by our participants were those geared towards reconstructing social, economic, and political livelihoods and infrastructure. While the salience of specific reconciliatory measures appears to be shaped by cultural factors, the relative salience of these measures appears to be primarily driven by the context of the human rights violation people had in mind. In the Netherlands and United States, for example, participants mentioned these measures in the context of colonization and slavery, as a way of countering the structural economic and social consequences. In Costa Rica, Indonesia, and Jordan, participants expressed their preference for socioeconomic development measures 'to make things right' in the context of more recent (and protracted) conflict (e.g., the war in Syria and Iraq, the Rohingya genocide) or regional insecurity. Across the board, however, participants underscored the structural quality of these measures, thereby distinguishing it from direct acts of financial compensation or 'reparations'. Some participants also reflected on people's civil needs, and emphasized the promotion of

democratic values and human rights by either, “*roll[ing] back certain laws, so that...you as a country would ensure more equal rights,*” (62 year old woman, Netherlands), or by ratifying and enforcing laws and policies, particularly in relation to victims' rights. The importance of free elections and the need to overhaul certain political systems, were primarily mentioned by participants in the context of wrongdoings committed by (former) autocratic regimes (e.g., Syrian regime, former Soviet regime) or political misconduct.

Participants also mentioned reparations as a means to make thing right. This was particularly salient in Jordan, the Netherlands, Poland, and the United States, where it was mentioned by around two-thirds of the participants. This may reflect local conflict resolution practices as well as broader national narratives concerning the process of dealing with the past. For example, in the case of Jordan, settlement or *sulh* is a recognized conflict resolution custom. In the Netherlands, Poland, and the United States, reparations have become a familiar and prominent part of public debates on dealing with past injustices, particularly in the context of slavery and the atrocities committed during the Second World War or during colonial rule.

While most participants (86%) listed reconciliatory, reconstructive and reparatory measures, only a third mentioned retributive, reflective or revelatory measures. Most prominent, however, are the relatively high number of mentions of retributive measures in Burkina Faso. While this is possibly linked to increased exposure to bouts of violence and political insecurity, the salience of judicial measures may have also been triggered by news coverage of the indictment and trial of Blaise Compaoré and others for the assassination of Thomas Sankara and other human rights violations (Amnesty International, 2018). Where people do mention legal measures, it is often described as essential and hence, as the first step in a larger process. Meanwhile Indonesia's ongoing struggle with the aftermath of Suharto's authoritarian regime and the stunted fact-finding approach so far (and subsequent

prosecution) may explain why 'truth-seeking' is important to some people here (Andriyani et al., 2011).

While the political context sheds some light on the relative salience of retributive and revelatory measures, our data suggest that the salience of reflective measures or measures that allow societies to reflect and learn from the past (e.g., increasing awareness and educating people about the past, commemorating the past through memorials, museums or other symbolic forms) is influenced by the socio-historical context as well. In Costa Rica, for example, raising awareness and education was more salient than any of the reparatory, revelatory or retributive measures. Given the country's relative political stability and dedication to upholding peace and human rights, this is perhaps unsurprising. Education was seen as a means to instill the right values, to "*plant a seed*", but also to "*teach the young generation what to avoid in the future*". Meanwhile symbolic measures were most salient in Poland, the Netherlands, and the United States, where they were often mentioned in the context of the Second World War. This is perhaps to be expected given that all three countries have dedicated national liberation or remembrance days and memorials that actively commemorate the lives lost during the World War(s).

'Making Things Right' to Meet Material, Social and Moral Objectives

We also examined *why* people felt it is important for countries to 'make things right'. Interestingly, our participants' responses in this regard reflected various social development priorities or objectives that help ensure a thriving society. We distinguished three sets of collective goals or needs among the reasons people gave: (1) material objectives including improved security and wellbeing, (2) social objectives such as increased social harmony, reputation, trust, loyalty and pride, and (3) moral objectives which encapsulate a sense of moral obligation, the need to uphold moral values and to restore justice (also see Figure 4). While people mentioned examples of each of these objectives across the eight countries, their salience within each country differed (see Figure 5).

In spite of the differences, one common response for people across all countries was the need to ensure security and stability by preventing future violence and conflict (see Figure 6; for illustrative quotes see Table 4), suggesting that this can be considered a shared priority. People explained the danger of accumulating hate or anger, “*then this anger...only grows and is transmitted*”, and the possible further ramifications of an ongoing cycle of violence. The act of ‘making things right’ would bring this to a halt, and prevent further escalation, but also stop this from happening again, by stemming the risk that the next generation will inherit current grievances. While ensuring security and stability was a primary goal for most, the overall relative salience of material objectives was highest in Indonesia, Costa Rica, and Japan. In Costa Rica especially, but also occasionally in Indonesia, people emphasized that it was important to ‘make things right’ “*because it means progress, development, growth*”. Economic and social wellbeing was only mentioned once in Japan, however, possibly because it is better off economically than the other two countries, and hence less salient as a potential objective. Instead, we observe a higher relative salience of social objectives in Japan, compared to Costa Rica and Indonesia.

While social objectives are mentioned relatively frequently by people in the Netherlands, Jordan, Poland, and Japan, they were mostly a priority for people in Burkina Faso, who emphasized the contribution to harmony and peace. They repeatedly stressed that the process “*is important for the preservation of peace*” as it contributes to “*social cohesion and national unity*”. This specific emphasis on improving *internal* social harmony is in line with the reconciliatory beliefs and norms that are embedded within local mediation practices, but may also be amplified by the recent history of internal discord and ongoing political unrest in Burkina Faso. In contrast, people in the Netherlands and Japan talked about ‘making things right’ in terms of strengthening *external* international relations suggesting that if “*we can get along together normally*”, and “*stop getting in each other’s way*”, the stronger cohesion will facilitate political and economic collaboration and prosperity. The importance

of having a reputable status was also mentioned in this context. In Jordan, the focus was on achieving both *internal* and *external* harmony as the process of 'making things right' was perceived as a way for the country "*to earn the respect of its people and the citizens of other countries*" thereby restoring the country's reputation not only in the eyes of others, but also in the eyes of its own people. By extension, they indicated that this would also have a positive effect on people's sense of belonging, as well as their loyalty to and pride in the country.

Across the entire sample, moral objectives were the least salient. Nonetheless, it was the most prominent category within the United States, and mentioned by at least one in three Dutch and Polish participants. Participants perceived the process of 'making things right' as important because it portrayed the moral integrity of the country by meeting a sense of moral obligation or validating moral values more generally. In the United States, in particular, multiple participants indicated that they "*believe that there is a public responsibility for the country to do what's right*". This moral obligation to do right was rooted in a belief that "*if they're the ones at fault ... they're the ones who need to rebuild this*", and that countries should uphold the values they claim to stand by. This is in line with a broader understanding across the countries that doing the right thing "*shows the moral foundation of ... it shows the character of the country*", and is important for the moral worth or "*moral wellbeing of the country*", while not acting would suggest that "*we would have no standard*". The link to moral values often led to a tautological explanation, where people believed the country should 'make things right' because it is the right thing to do. While some participants provided no further explanation for this belief, others noted that their moral frame of reference was shaped by their religious values or drew on a more humanist moral framework.

Discussion and conclusion

In this article, we set out to obtain an understanding of how 'dealing with the past' lives in the wider public imagination by capturing people's beliefs on *whether* something should be

done to *make things right* following a situation in which a country has harmed people, and if so, *what* and *why*. We were interested in seeing whether we could detect any broader systematic commonalities in people's ideas and intuitions about what countries should do in the wake of human rights violations, and how people's perceptions might resonate with academic conceptualizations of 'dealing with the past'. To this end, we adopted a bottom-up qualitative approach, which allowed us to systematically evaluate whether people's ideas reflect shared tendencies across a range of social, cultural, political and economic contexts, or whether these are instead subject to country-specific concerns.

One overarching finding is that the process of dealing with the past appears to be largely rooted in a shared premise. Despite the diversity of our sample, we observe a normative consensus that countries should at least attempt to address past injustices seemingly independent of situation-specific concerns such as temporality, severity and other human rights violation specific assessments. This normative consensus lends further support to the premise that justice concerns are universal (Fischer, 2016) and echoes the growing agreement within (inter)national politics that 'dealing with the past' is necessary (Kritz, 2009).

Broadly speaking, we also find that the 'holistic' and pluralistic approach to addressing human rights violations appears to be part of a larger shared social imaginary or schema, where people share the idea that the process of 'making things right' requires the 'interweaving, sequencing, and accommodating (of) multiple pathways to justice' (Roht-Arriaza, 2006, p. 8). Our data indicate that people imagine the process of 'making things right' as a multi-dimensional mix of measures geared towards facilitating reconciliation, reconstructing livelihoods, repairing the damage, revealing and recognizing the truth, ensuring retribution, and enabling people to reflect and learn from the past. Taken together, people's ideas appear to mostly match the measures included in the justice classifications adopted by transitional justice scholars and practitioners, albeit that the range of measures within our data constitutes a slightly wider array of categories than many existing transitional

justice typologies (which usually include four or five dimensions, see Table 1).

Simultaneously, the multitude of measures and justice orientations suggest that the focus on retributive and restorative perceptions of justice in social psychology (e.g., Wenzel et al., 2008) may be too restrictive, at least when trying to understand people's expectations in the wake of human rights violations. Furthermore, our data indicate that people consider multiple mechanisms and approaches simultaneously (as opposed to either or), and that they share a common understanding of sequencing, where, for example, reconciliatory approaches such as apologies and dialogue precede other justice dimensions.

Notably, however, measures geared towards helping people move on or move forward, such as reconciliatory, reconstructive, and reparative measures, were around three times as salient in people's imagination than the past-oriented revelatory, retributive, and reflective measures, which arguably focus more on coming to terms with the past. This distinct pattern of results suggests that overall forward-looking measures resonate more with people than backward-looking mechanisms, despite the latter forming a corner stone of paradigmatic transitional justice processes. One possible explanation for this difference in salience is the relative importance of material goals (as compared to social or moral objectives) across the countries, given that measures that aim to reconcile, reconstruct, and repair are likely to be seen as contributing to a more stable and secure situation and improving general wellbeing. This is consistent with findings from other transitional justice case studies and surveys, which suggest that people often prioritize measures related to basic survival needs and security over formal transitional justice goals such as accountability and truth (e.g., Macdonald, 2013). The relative prominence of material objectives, however, was notably higher in some countries. This might be explained by the functional pluralism model of justice, which assumes that people draw on different motives (i.e. more material, social or moral) depending on which needs may have already been met or are salient given the context (Skitka et al., 2016). As such the socio-economic context may, for example, trigger certain collective needs and by

extension, affect the salience of certain measures. At the same time, Skitka and colleagues (2016) argue that material, moral and social concerns are contingent rather than competing concerns, which may explain why all three objectives – material, social, and moral – are considered important, albeit to varying degrees, across all eight countries.

While the importance of certain collective needs may explain some of the observed differences, the similarities as well as the differences in the pattern of results across the countries nonetheless suggest that various cultural, social, and political factors may also play a more direct role in shaping the ideas and intuitions or schemas that people hold. For example, the similar pattern of results in the three Western countries, but also between Costa Rica, Indonesia, and Japan suggests that the imagined process of 'making things right' may be partially shaped by prominent cultural values such as the importance of individual accountability in the former, or the maintenance of social harmony in the latter. This insight builds on and adds further nuance to ongoing discussions concerning the influence of cultural values on people's moral evaluations and subsequent emotional responses (e.g. shame and guilt) in the wake of wrongdoing, and how these might relate to repair tendencies (e.g., Fischer, 2016; Hakim et al., 2021; Young et al., 2021). In this case, for example, it appears that the prominence of different cultural values creates a context that is more or less conducive to people's expectations of (or possibly even support for) certain measures. It is also plausible, however, that the cultural context may affect, for example, how ashamed or guilty people may feel, or the extent to which they identify as the victim and have a knock-on effect on their perceptions of various measures. Simultaneously, explanations given by some participants suggest that the salience of certain measures is also triggered by the specific human rights violation (e.g., colonization) that comes to mind, or may be shaped by local socially and historically embedded practices (e.g., commemoration practices concerning the World Wars). On the one hand, these insights appear to support a more context-specific approach when it comes to understanding people's expectations of how a country should

respond to human rights violations. On the other hand, the multiple observed cross-national patterns paint a more complex picture as they highlight the possible systematic but varying effects cultural, social, and political factors may have *across* countries. Future studies should try to more systematically assess the degree to which such factors – both independently and combined - explain potential differences in people's expectations, and how these interact with person-level factors.

Overall, this study provides a unique broader systematic overview of people's ideas and intuitions of what countries should do following a range of human rights violations across multiple and diverse contexts. In addition to further validating the international mandate that countries should address past wrongdoings, the insights gained within this study open up multiple new avenues of research. For example, when it comes to examining people's expectations, preferences and attitudes concerning country level wrongdoing, future studies may wish to consider a wider set of mechanisms and strategies than most studies currently include. Our findings also suggest that applying a more synchronous or sequential lens (whereby multiple measures are presented either simultaneously or in combination, as opposed to focusing on one or contrasting measures) can be a valuable addition to understanding how people's expectations or preferences for various measures relate. Furthermore, they may also benefit from a stronger consideration of how collective material, social and moral needs drive such preferences, in addition to the previously examined effects of individual needs (e.g., Kirchhoff et al., 2013; Nadler & Shnabel, 2015). Finally it is important to note that this study only represents a single 'snapshot' of people's perceptions of addressing wrongdoing, whereby they were prompted by a non-specific scenario. While this enabled us to establish that people share the normative expectation that countries should 'make things right', we should be mindful that this does not automatically imply that such a process would be successful or appreciated once initiated. In contrast, existing research strongly suggests that individual preferences in specific contexts are likely to deviate from

the broader patterns identified within this study, thereby warranting further investigation as to when and why people's preferences may deviate from more collective normative scripts. This becomes especially pertinent when we consider that people's thoughts on what the process of 'making things right' should look like not only varies and appears to be subject to and shaped by different cultural-historical and socio-political factors, but also when we consider existing evidence that suggests that people's preferences or support for various measures can be facilitated or inhibited by various person-level psychological factors such as perceived victimhood for example (e.g., Čehajić-Clancy & Brown, 2019; Hornsey et al., 2017; Li & Leidner, 2019). A fruitful next step would therefore be to examine the relative *importance* of these measures and approaches across countries as opposed to their relative salience as observed in this study. This is a crucial distinction because while certain measures and objectives may be more salient due to various contextual factors, this does not mean that less salient measures and objectives are less valued.

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Table 1*Examples of Transitional Justice Typologies and Policy Frameworks*

United Nations (2006)	International Center for Transitional Justice (n.d.)	Crocker (2003)	Lambourne (2009)	David (2017)	Torpey (2017)
	Criminal justice	Accountability and punishment	Accountability, or legal justice, that reconciles retributive and restorative justice (rectificatory justice, restores public order and rule of law, removes culture)	Retributive justice measures, (e.g. criminal, noncriminal sanctions, revenge, fines, deprivations in pensions and other penalties; pardons, amnesties, and conditional amnesties)	Transitional justice (legal and quasilegal mechanisms such as criminal trials, political purges)
Restitution Compensation	Reparations	Compensation to the victims	Socioeconomic justice (reparation, restitution, compensation, distributive justice)	Reparatory justice measures	Compensation (financial and in-kind)
Satisfaction <i>public apology</i>		Reconciliation		Reconciliatory justice measures (e.g. apology, expressions of regret, and confessions)	Apology/regret
<i>verification of the facts and full and public disclosure of the truth</i>	Truth and memory	Truth Public platform for victims Public deliberation	'Truth' and healing, or psychosocial justice: knowledge and acknowledgement	Revelatory justice measures, (e.g. truth commissions, and the opening of secret archives)	Truth commissions
<i>commemorations and tributes to the victims</i>					Communicative history (memory, memorials, historical consciousness)
Guarantees of non-repetition	Institutional reform	Rule of law Institutional reform and long-term development	Political justice (political reform, governance, democratization)		

Table 2*Sample Demographics*

Country	N	Age		Male	Female	Rural	Urban	Education		
		M	Range					Low	Medium	High
Burkina Faso	37	39.1	19-71	22	14	23	13	13	9	15
Costa Rica	38	40.2	18-74	19	18	21	17	4	15	19
Indonesia	38	46.2	21-81	18	20	16	22	12	13	13
Japan	33	52.0	22-76	17	16	16	16	14	8	11
Jordan	37	45.0	21-90	18	17	19	15	5	13	16
Netherlands	32	48.4	19-88	13	19	17	15	3	11	18
Poland	36	43.7	18-85	18	17	21	14	3	21	11
USA	33	37.9	21-80	15	16	16	16	8	8	16

Figure 1

Categorization of Proposed Measures

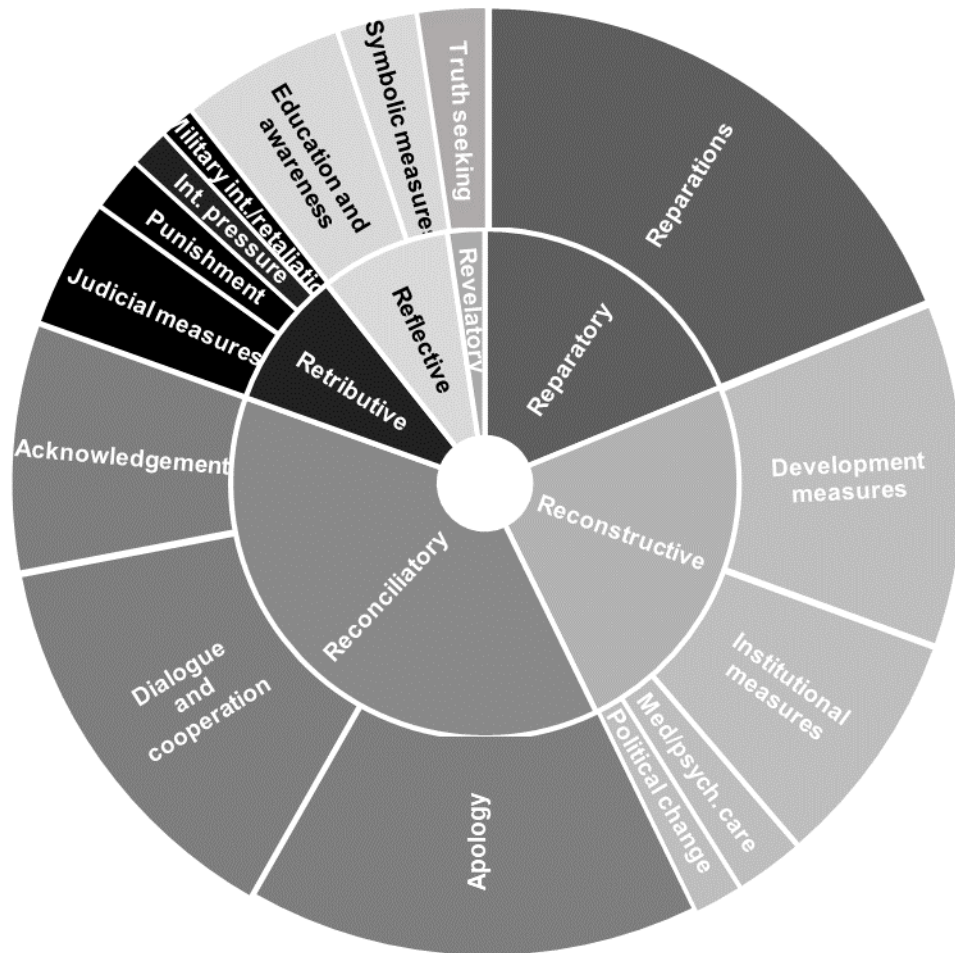
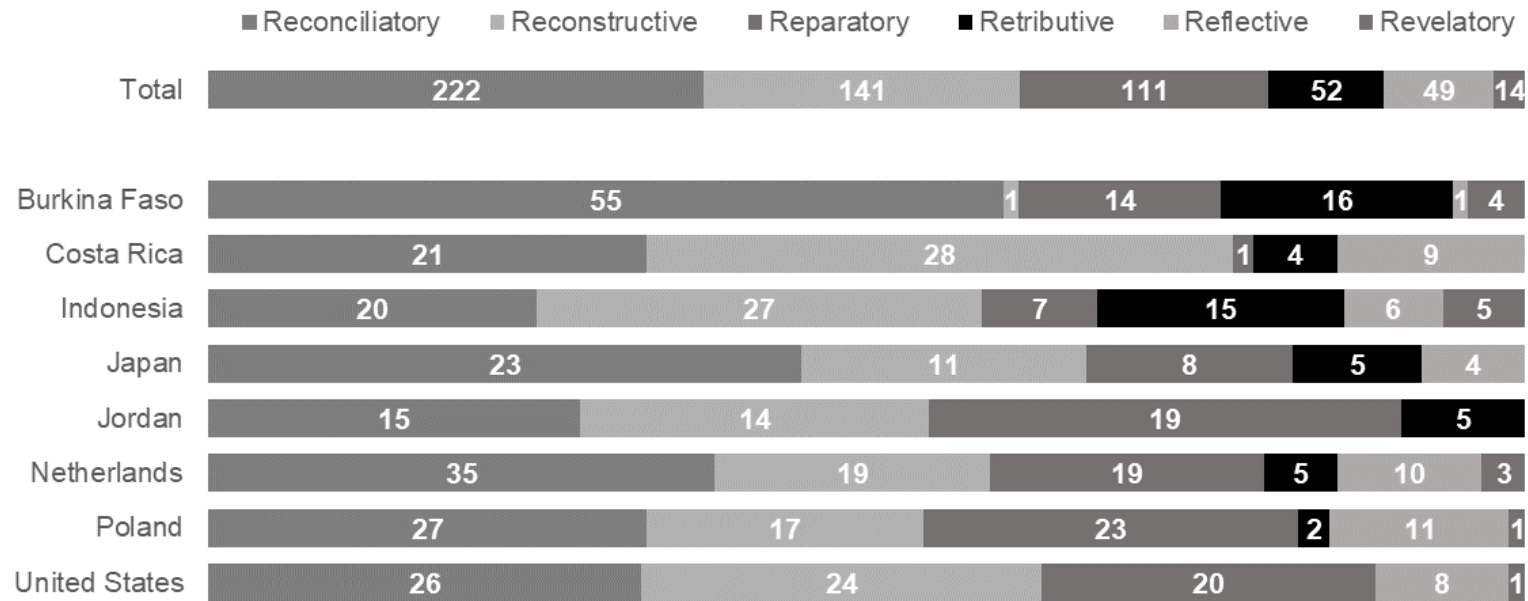


Figure 2

Division of Proposed Measures by Category across Countries



Note. Chi-square analyses indicated that the relative salience of measures varied significantly across countries, $\chi^2(7, N = 285) > 15.52, ps < .031$.

Figure 3*Overview of Specific Measures Proposed across Countries*

	TOTAL	Burkina Faso	Costa Rica	Indonesia	Japan	Jordan	Netherlands	Poland	United States
Number of interviews including measure(s)	264	36	32	37	31	32	30	35	31
Total number of measures mentioned	624	92	69	86	56	57	93	86	85
Average number of measures per interview	2.4	2.6	2.2	2.3	1.8	1.8	3.1	2.5	2.7

Frequency of interviews including measures by type

	TOTAL	Burkina Faso	Costa Rica	Indonesia	Japan	Jordan	Netherlands	Poland	United States
Reparations	111	14	1	7	8	19	19	23	20
Apology	91	27	4	4	6	9	12	17	12
Dialogue and cooperation	81	19	14	14	16	5	8	1	4
Development measures	69	1	12	13	3	9	12	7	12
Acknowledgement	50	9	3	2	1	1	15	9	10
Institutional measures	48		13	11	5	2	4	6	7
Education and awareness	33		8	6	4		6	4	5
Judicial measures	26	13	3	6		2	2		
Symbolic measures	16	1	1				4	7	3
Truth seeking measures	14	4		5			3	1	1
Medical and psychological care	14			3			1	4	5
Punishment	11	3		4	1	1	1	1	
Political change	10		2		3	3	2		
International pressure	8		1	1	4	1		1	
Military intervention/retaliation	7			4		1	2		
Other measures	35	1	6	6	5	4	2	5	6

Table 3*Selection of Quotes Illustrating Proposed Measures*

RECONCILIATORY MEASURES	
Apology	<i>Apologizing is the only remedy. If they accept the apology, we can greet each other. (70 year old man, Burkina Faso)</i> <i>The first is to ask for a public apology, for example, France must make this public apology to Africa. (30 year old woman, Burkina Faso)</i>
Acknowledgement	<i>A first step is acknowledging what's happened. That's step one. (28 year old man, United States)</i> <i>Acknowledging what went wrong and showing that you take that responsibility for it comes first. (67 year old woman, Netherlands)</i>
Dialogue and cooperation	<i>It's better to have a lot of people than to just talk one on one ... there will be no biases and it should be fairer (69 year old man, Japan)</i> <i>What is important is communication. That is the hard part and it should go two ways... [to] exchange ideas ... what is your problem, what is my problem? Then together find the solution. (41 year old woman, Indonesia)</i>
RECONSTRUCTIVE MEASURES	
Development measures	<i>People say African Americans should be given reparations. For what happened in the past ... I don't think they should do it. ... I think a more responsible method would be ... giving people better access to various avenues of society, how to be successful, how to live good lives, how to lead healthy lives. (28 year old man, United States)</i> <i>America left Iraq destroyed and damaged...So, it is America's responsibility to finish things...by reconstructing Iraq... education is essential and it's part of reconstructing the country, it's not just about buildings...Supporting them, not financially - since I think this changes nothing - but by teaching and reconstructing. (23 year old woman, Jordan)</i>
Institutional measures	<i>Defining policies, or re-defining policies, or removal of policies that impact the social framework. (37 year old man, Costa Rica)</i> <i>Let say in Indonesia, for the political prisoners from 1965 ... We could return their rights and help them, give them a stepping stone, so they could be equal to the other society. (25 year old man, Indonesia)</i>
Medical and psychological care	<i>There are so many ways, for example, in United States one of the ways to improve the family separation matter is to try to ... collaborate so that the parents can have their children in a timely manner ... [and] provide them with therapy, psychologists, teachers, medics that are healing them (woman, Costa Rica)</i>
Political change	<i>For example, Syria...Bashar should step down, let a coalition rule the country, which should constitute different parties and from different religions to satisfy all people. (55 year old woman, Jordan)</i> <i>If we were talking about Japan, then maybe we should have an election, disband the Diet, and have an election to include the people and what they think and have to say. (27 year old man, Japan)</i>

REPARATORY MEASURES

- Reparations *Let's say that a country will occupy the lands of a given community...After finding out that it was a mistake, it could return to them this piece of land that was previously theirs, this community's. (23 year old man, Poland)*
- It should compensate harmed people...if it demolished their home, it should build another. If it jailed them unjustly, it should apologize, let them out and financially and psychologically compensate them. (55 year old woman, Jordan)*

RETRIBUTIVE MEASURES

- Judicial measures *A state cannot afford to resolve a conflict without judgment... there is a court that must decide. (26 year old man, Burkina Faso)*
- The first thing is to locate the responsibilities, to apprehend the culprits and those responsible, and to bring them to justice (32 year old man, Burkina Faso)*
- Punishment *When the oppressor is punished in front of the oppressed, the problem is almost totally solved...It's the only and the perfect way. To punish who deserve. (anonymous, Jordan)*
- International pressure *I think it would be good to have external powers, that international organizations and such demand the country change/improve their political stance and whatnot...when Russia invaded parts of Ukraine and their navy bases, the international society carried out sanctions on Russia. I think it's important to have international cooperation on issues like that. (64 year old man, Japan)*
- Military intervention/retaliation *It is possible for the state to offer an apology or compensation to the victims...These are the most common methods...but if they suffer injustice, their country can take their right, even if it requires war against an aggressor state, because it is an insult to the individual, an insult to the entire society, and this policy should be followed by most countries. (53 year old woman, Jordan)*

REFLECTIVE MEASURES

- Education and awareness *If people were educated that...it doesn't matter if you like a man, and you are a man, or if you like a woman being a woman, if they were to be educated in love, respect, tolerance, in basic things, these are basic, many things would resolve. (24 year old woman, Costa Rica)*
- I think that the nation should conduct educational activities on a daily basis...the country should strongly argue that discrimination and prejudice are bad things. And I think that the nation must communicate this knowledge to many people. (22 year old woman, Japan)*
- Symbolic measures *To memorialize it somehow ... rewarding with some medals, building monuments of this terrible catastrophe ... such a symbolic gesture that somehow spiritually let us know that this is behind us, so that they no longer have to be afraid of something like that. (22 year old woman, Poland)*
- The only thing you can do then is admit guilt and make sure that there is attention for that...for example, something, well for example like Liberation Day or a monument, those kinds of things. (43 year old man, Netherlands)*

REVELATORY MEASURES

- Truth-seeking measures *We have to be more transparent ... So that the people know what happened (50 year old man, Indonesia).*

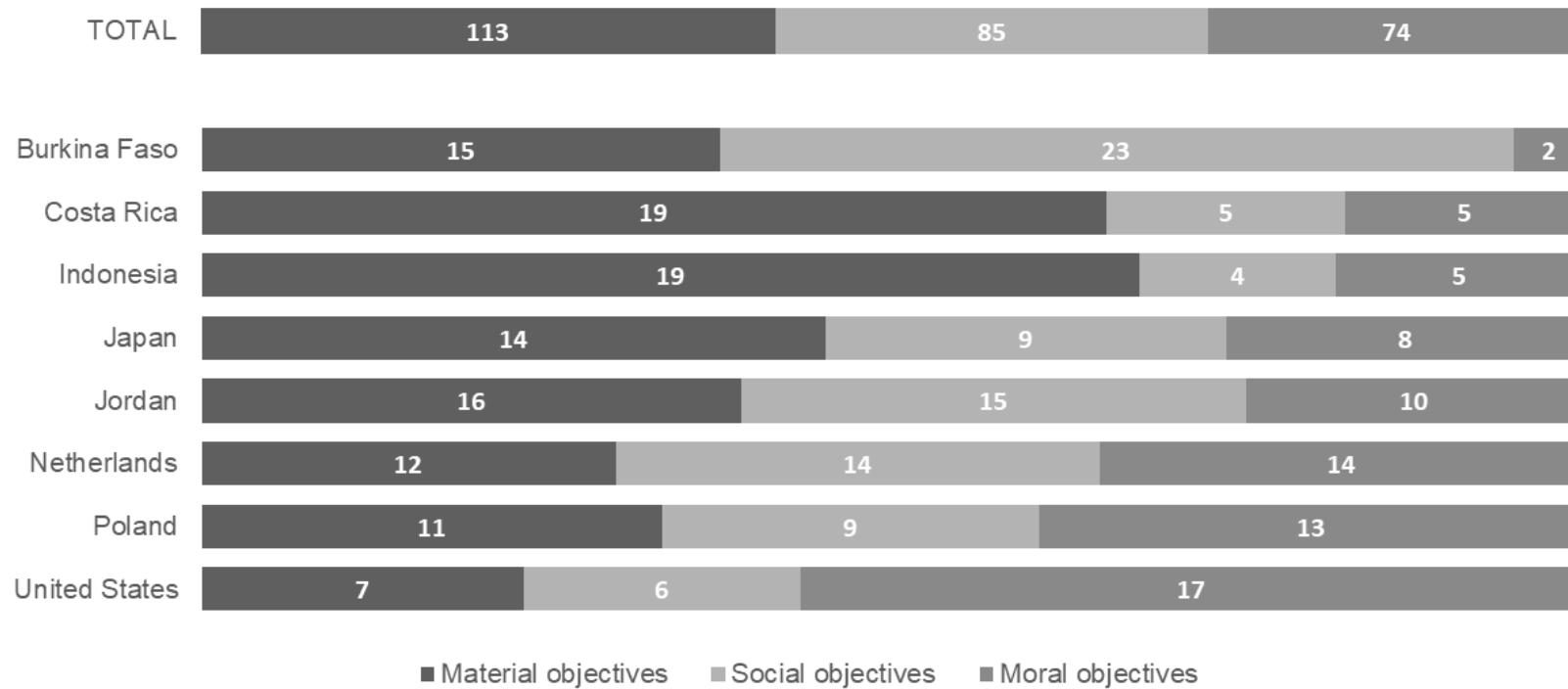
Figure 4

Categorization of Objectives for Why it is Important for Countries to 'Make Things Right'



Figure 5

Division of Objectives by Category for Why it is Important for Countries to 'Make Things Right'



Note. Chi-square analyses indicated that the relative salience of social and moral objectives varied significantly across countries, $\chi^2(7, N = 285) < 24.75, p < .001$. No significant differences were found for material objectives, $\chi^2(7, N = 285) = 7.58, p = .37$.

Figure 6*Overview of Objectives for Why it is Important for Countries to 'Make Things Right'*

	TOTAL	Burkina Faso	Costa Rica	Indonesia	Japan	Jordan	Netherlands	Poland	United States
Number of interviews including reason(s)	215	31	27	24	27	28	26	25	27
Total number of reasons mentioned	297	41	34	31	35	41	42	37	36
Average number of reasons per interview	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.5	1.6	1.5	1.3

Frequency of interviews including reasons by type

Ensuring security and stability	89	11	9	16	13	12	10	11	7
Restoring harmony and peace	46	16	1	2	8		10	4	5
Fulfilling moral obligation	28	1	2	2	3	4	3	4	9
Achieving economic and social wellbeing	24	4	10	3	1	4	2		
Restoring reputation	22	6	3	2	1	2	4	4	
Upholding moral values	22	1	3		5	2	3	4	4
Restoring or maintaining moral worth	13			1		2	6	1	3
Restoring trust	6		1			4			1
Recognizing victims and their rights	6			1		1	1	3	
Restoring pride	6	1				4		1	
Restoring justice	5			1		1	1	1	1
Increasing loyalty	5					5			
Other reasons	25	1	5	3	4		2	4	6

Table 4

Selection of Quotes Illustrating Objectives for Why it is Important for Countries to 'Make Things Right'

MATERIAL OBJECTIVES	
Ensuring security and stability	<i>Of course, when the harmed country holds a negative feeling toward the country which harmed them, then, there are risks in terms of retaliation. The risks are smaller when the relationship between the countries is good. (22 year old woman, Japan)</i> <i>So that we do not wind up these young people, my grandchildren, my great-grandchildren, so that we do not pass it on. (56 year old woman, Poland)</i>
Achieving economic and social wellbeing	<i>Ideally, we want the country to prosper and that the people that live there are happy. (41 year old woman, Indonesia)</i>
SOCIAL OBJECTIVES	
Restoring harmony and peace	<i>Because it makes it possible to renew a new relationship of friendship on the international level and a new peaceful way of living together internally. (28 year old woman, Burkina Faso)</i> <i>Especially if you look to the future...you never know, they'll be trading partners or something like that...the economy runs on that. I think it's better to be friends than enemies. (24 year old man, Netherlands)</i>
Restoring reputation	<i>You don't want to be seen in a bad light...for example, if you are known as a country that has treated other countries very badly ... it only has a negative influence on your own economy. (19 year old woman, Netherlands)</i> <i>To cleanse its image, to give itself another image than what people have...to give a good image of the country. (25 year old woman, Burkina Faso)</i>
Restoring trust	<i>In our case, making things right is very important because it reflects on the country's image, plus people will feel proud and that will increase the trust in the country. (24 year old woman, Jordan)</i>
Restoring pride	<i>Because when a country makes things right, it becomes successful, its people will be proud of their country, they'll feel comfortable living in it and they'll feel that they are humans not slaves. (55 year old woman, Jordan)</i>
Increasing loyalty	<i>Because that is an indicator that the state respects its citizens and that will increase loyalty. (43 year old man, Jordan)</i>
MORAL OBJECTIVES	
Fulfilling a moral obligation	<i>We like to think that the country is free, we're equal, etc. I feel like if we're gonna hold that up as a value for our country, then we are responsible to make sure that it's true for the country. (29 year old man, United States)</i>
Upholding moral values	<i>That is perhaps still a bit of Christian conviction: I believe that when something has gone wrong, that that must be made right again. (67 year old woman, Netherlands)</i> <i>Because I believe in ideals connected to the universal human community. That here we are, a society that moves through the cosmos ... in such a unique space vehicle called the earth, and we should take care of ... of all those who travel though the universe in this cosmic vehicle. (63 year old man, Poland)</i>
Restoring or maintaining moral worth	<i>It's very important...[for] the integrity of you and your country in general... Countries want to be seen as powerful, strong, and dependable and you're not powerful, strong, and dependable if you automatically do something and then don't go back on it. (24 year old woman, United States)</i>
Recognizing victims (rights)	<i>Because that is perhaps the most important need that victims have, to be recognized in their victimhood. (67 year old woman, Netherlands)</i>
Restoring justice	<i>Because this will be causing the feeling of justice in people....That the victims are being admitted once again about the citizenship rights, the civilian rights. It means they are not higher, not lower and other civilians who were involved. (68 year old woman, Indonesia)</i>