

Journal of Eastern African Studies

[Volume 9, Issue 3, 2015](#)

Transitional justice and democracy in Uganda: between impetus and instrumentalisation

DOI:10.1080/17531055.2015.1089698

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pages 354-374

Abstract

While claims abound regarding transitional justice's importance for democracy building in transitioning countries, empirical investigations of these remain limited or have produced contradictory findings. This article seeks to contribute to these debates by investigating the relationship between transitional justice and democratic institution building in Uganda – looking in particular at the rule of law, the security forces and participation. It does so by exploring the causal mechanisms linking transitional justice to democracy, that is, the means through which transitional justice exerts its impact. Transitional justice is widely expected to impact democratic institution building through three mechanisms: (de)legitimation, reform, and empowerment. However, this article finds that in Uganda, transitional justice's impact through these is more circumscribed than has so far been assumed, and that it sometimes impacts democratic institution building negatively. The Ugandan experience furthermore suggests that in contexts of armed conflict and a hybrid regime, expectations about the extent to which transitional justice can support democratic institution building should be lowered.

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