

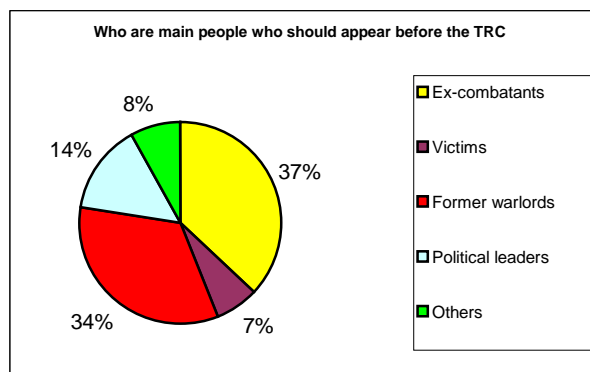
Public Polling on Perceptions of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Hearings in Liberia

SFCG is an international NGO with a mission to transform the way the world deals with conflict, away from adversarial approaches towards cooperative solutions. In Liberia, SFCG operates Talking Drum Studio, a multi media production studio, and a complementary outreach project to strengthen participation and inclusion in consolidating peace in the country. Recently, SFCG conducted a poll of Liberian citizens to gather information on public knowledge and perceptions of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings. Through this polling, an appropriate assessment of the public's understanding of the purpose of the TRC and views held regarding the impact of the TRC on the greater process of national reconciliation. More than 600 respondents, representing a cross section of Liberian society, participated in the polling.

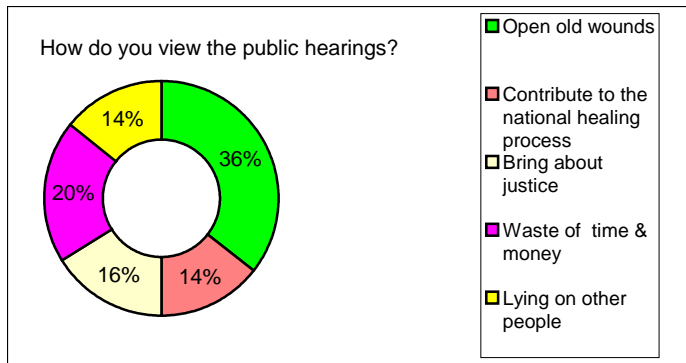
Public sentiment surrounding the potential positive effects and impacts of the TRC in establishing truth, bringing about national reconciliation, and creating and maintaining peace is resoundingly negative. Most respondents view the TRC process as a judicial mechanism developed not as a service to victims of civil war, but, instead, to its propagators. Confidence in the TRC's ability to achieve its stated goals is decidedly low. In addition, popular opinion perceives the TRC's reconciliation and justice function of greater importance to its organizers and participants than the establishment of an accurate, inclusive, and truthful account of the war. The survey illustrates the uphill battle faced by the TRC's with regard to public communication efforts. It also demonstrates a possible need for increased national media coverage of the TRC's work – a need able to be potentially met via radio-media outlets, as it is the method by which most Liberians receive TRC-related information. In addition, the productive use of public feedback received through the press, media programming, and other means can also help to improve the work and perception of the TRC as its aims to promote national reconciliation.

Specifically, the key findings from the survey revealed the following:

- When asked who should appear before the TRC, respondents overwhelmingly identified former combatants and warlords (37% and 34% respectively), while only 7% said that victims should appear. Politicians were a group identified by 14% of the surveyed as one they believed should appear at the hearings.
 - These responses indicate that the public views the TRC as a judicial mechanism by which culprits from the civil war could be brought to justice - rather than a tool for healing or historical truth establishment. Also fueling these responses could be a perception of a lack of need for victims and other non-participants to be directly involved in processes of establishing truth and bringing about post-war reconciliation.



- Overall perceptions of the TRC hearings are negative. When each responder was questioned as to his or her general views of the TRC public hearings, 36% of respondents feel the TRC public hearings were “reopening old wounds,” 14% view the hearings as a chance to lie about other people, and 20% see them as a waste of time and money. In all, a full 70% of responses were negative in their assessment of the TRC.



- Less than one-third believe the hearings will achieve the stated goals of the TRC. Only 16% of respondents said the hearings will bring justice, and 14% believe it will contribute to national healing.

- In response to questions about perception of the TRC, responses across different locations were varied and did not follow any specific pattern. The pro-government stronghold of Tubmanburg recorded similarly negative perceptions of the TRC

to the opposition base of Zwedru. Sinkor (Monrovia) and Ganta seemed to have the worst opinions of the TRC (less than 10% positive), while Duport Road (Monrovia), Gbanga, and Buchanan all recorded over 50% positive (respondents describe the TRC as bringing about justice and contributing to national healing). The opinion consistently reported throughout all 10 localities is the belief the TRC plays a fundamental role in “reopening old wounds.”

- There were no significant differences between male and female respondents in their views and perceptions of the TRC.
- In response to the question: “What will bring about justice, peace and reconciliation,” 42% of respondents identified the TRC as a mechanism that will bring about justice, peace, and reconciliation. Only 8% identified it in conjunction with the War Crimes Tribunal, and almost one fifth said neither.
 - While overall public confidence in the TRC’s ability to achieve its goals is low, these particular findings indicate; nonetheless, a significant portion of the public views the TRC as one of the best available mechanisms for peace and reconciliation.
- Fewer women than men (67% vs. 80%) identified the TRC or War Crimes Tribunal as mechanisms for bringing about justice, peace, and reconciliation in Liberia. Most female respondents reported believing neither will accomplish these goals, or stated reconciliation would only be possible by way of an entirely different process (33% vs. 21%).
- Radio is the method by which most respondents receive TRC-related information. Almost half (49%) of all respondents report learning and keeping abreast of the TRC process through radio. Those reporting primary use of television (1%) and newspaper (10%) outlets for TRC-related information make up only 11% of those polled.