

**Judicial Reform and Human Security in West Africa:  
Comparative Lessons from Ghana and Sierra Leone**

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**Abstract**

This article examines the relationship between judicial reform, access to justice, and human security through a comparative analysis of Sierra Leone and Ghana between 2010 and 2024. Existing scholarship on African judicial reform has largely focused on institutional modernization, legal independence, and governance efficiency, while giving comparatively limited attention to how judicial performance shapes broader human-security outcomes such as public trust, legal protection, and procedural inclusion. Drawing on the Human Security Framework and Access to Justice Theory, the study employs a qualitative comparative methodology based on doctrinal analysis, policy documents, judicial reform strategies, governance reports, and court-performance materials. The findings demonstrate significant divergence in reform outcomes between the two countries. Ghana's investments in digital case management, procedural transparency, and judicial administration have improved institutional responsiveness and public confidence, although challenges of digital inequality and uneven accessibility remain. By contrast, Sierra Leone continues to face structural constraints linked to limited institutional capacity, weak enforcement mechanisms, underfunding, and low technological integration. The article argues that judicial reform contributes to human security only when institutional modernization is accompanied by accessible, enforceable, and socially inclusive justice systems. It contributes to comparative governance scholarship by linking justice-sector reform to human-security outcomes in post-conflict African democracies.

**Keywords:** judicial reform; human security; access to justice; judicial governance; Sierra Leone; Ghana; West Africa

## Introduction

Judicial institutions across West Africa continue to face persistent structural challenges, including prolonged case delays, weak enforcement of judgments, limited legal-aid access, and declining public confidence in formal justice systems.<sup>1</sup>In Sierra Leone, insufficient court infrastructure, low judicial capacity, and uneven rural access to courts continue to undermine procedural efficiency and rights protection.<sup>2</sup>Afrobarometer surveys have repeatedly shown low public trust in judicial institutions, with concerns centered on corruption, delays, and unequal access to justice.<sup>3</sup>By contrast, Ghana has implemented major judicial modernization reforms, including digital case-management systems, automated court processes, and procedural transparency mechanisms, contributing to relatively stronger institutional performance and public confidence.<sup>4</sup> Despite these reforms, disparities in accessibility, digital inclusion, and enforcement capacity remain significant across both countries.

Existing scholarship on judicial reform in Africa has largely focused on constitutional design, judicial independence, anti-corruption initiatives, and institutional modernization.<sup>5</sup> Comparatively less attention has been devoted to how judicial reforms shape broader human-security outcomes,

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<sup>1</sup> Adedeji Adekunle, Suzzie Onyeka Oyakhire, and Osatohanmwun Eruaga, *Criminal Justice Reform in Sub-Saharan Africa* (London: Routledge, 2026), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003561927>.

<sup>2</sup> Mojeed A. Olujinmi Alabi, "ECOWAS Court and Emerging Community Legal Order in West Africa," in *Promoting Efficiency in Jurisprudence and Constitutional Development in Africa* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 7–33, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13814-0\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13814-0_2); Ezequiel Jimenez, "The Premise of Capacity Building in the Special Court for Sierra Leone, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, and the Bosnian War Crimes Chamber," in *Hybrid Justice* (Oxford University Press/Oxford, 2025), 352–74, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192893758.003.0017>; Augustine Sorie-Sengbe Marrah, "The Protector Becomes the Predator: The Perception of Judicial Corruption and Demand for Judicial Accountability in Sierra Leone," in *The Diverse Facets of Corruption in Sierra Leone* (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024), 161–78, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-52958-0\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-52958-0_9).

<sup>3</sup> Sarah K. Dreier and Milli Lake, "Institutional Legitimacy in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Democratization* 26, no. 7 (October 3, 2019): 1194–1215, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2019.1613377>; Paul Jackson, "Whose Justice in Sierra Leone? Power, Security and Justice in Post-Conflict Reconstruction," in *Evaluating Transitional Justice* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), 197–215, [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137468222\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137468222_10).

<sup>4</sup> Rozha K. Ahmed et al., "The Role of Digital Transformation in Fostering Transparency: An e-Court System Case Study," 2022, 219–30, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-15342-6\\_17](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-15342-6_17); Maud Adjeley Ashong Elliot, John Effah, and Richard Boateng, "Institutional Influence on E-Justice System Usage: The Case of Ghana's Judicial Sector," *30th Americas Conference on Information Systems, AMCIS 2024*, 2024, <https://remote-lib.ui.ac.id:2120/pages/publications/85213014269?origin=scopusAI>; Bright Kwadwo Oduro and Akpeko Agbevade, "The Role of E-Governance in Promoting Government Accountability and Transparency in Ghana," *THE ELECTRONIC JOURNAL OF INFORMATION SYSTEMS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES* 92, no. 2 (March 2, 2026), <https://doi.org/10.1002/isd2.70053>.

<sup>5</sup> Nic Cheeseman, David M. Anderson, and Andrea Scheibler, eds., *Routledge Handbook of African Politics* (Routledge, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315088563>.

particularly through procedural accessibility, public trust, and institutional responsiveness.<sup>6</sup> Much of the literature treats judicial efficiency and human security as separate governance concerns rather than examining their institutional interrelationship. Moreover, comparative studies rarely assess how digital judicial reforms, enforcement capacity, and procedural transparency affect citizens' experiences of legal protection and insecurity in post-conflict and developing democratic contexts.<sup>7</sup>

This article addresses these gaps through a comparative analysis of Sierra Leone and Ghana between 2010 and 2024. Rather than evaluating judicial reform broadly, the study focuses specifically on three institutional dimensions: judicial independence, procedural transparency, and technological integration. The article examines how these dimensions affect access to justice and contribute to wider human-security outcomes, including public trust, legal protection, and perceptions of institutional legitimacy. The analysis is guided by two research questions: (1) to what extent have judicial reforms improved access to justice in Sierra Leone and Ghana; and (2) how do differences in institutional performance shape human-security outcomes across the two countries?.

The study adopts a qualitative comparative approach based on doctrinal analysis, governance reports, judicial reform strategies, court-performance assessments, and secondary institutional data. The analysis concentrates on formal judicial institutions and state-led reform processes. Although informal and customary justice systems remain highly significant particularly in Sierra Leone their exclusion reflects both methodological and analytical constraints. Informal justice mechanisms often operate through localized and non-standardized practices for which reliable comparative datasets remain limited.<sup>8 9</sup>. Consequently, the article does not claim to provide a

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<sup>6</sup> Livia Lúcia Oliveira Borba, Fabrício Castagna Lunardi, and Tomas de Aquino Guimaraes, "The Influence of Judges' Managerial Competences on Judicial Performance: A Statistical Analysis," *International Journal for Court Administration* 16, no. 2 (October 8, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.36745/ijca.609>.

<sup>7</sup> Timothy Donais and Ahmet Barbak, "The Rule of Law, the Local Turn, and Re-Thinking Accountability in Security Sector Reform Processes," *Peacebuilding* 9, no. 2 (April 3, 2021): 206–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2021.1895622>; Manuel Ramos-Maqueda and Daniel L. Chen, "Justice, Growth, and Governance: Causal Evidence on How Courts Shape Economic Outcomes and Conflict," *Journal of Economic Surveys*, March 10, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.1111/joes.70085>.

<sup>8</sup> Mohamed Sesay, "Informal Institutional Change and the Place of Traditional Justice in Sierra Leone's Post-War Reconstruction," *African Affairs* 118, no. 470 (January 1, 2019): 1–23, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/ady038>.

<sup>9</sup> (Sesay, 2019)

comprehensive account of justice delivery in either country, but rather a focused assessment of formal judicial reform and institutional performance.

The article argues that judicial reform contributes to human security not simply through institutional modernization, but through the development of accessible, enforceable, and procedurally legitimate justice systems. By linking judicial governance to human-security outcomes, the study contributes to comparative socio-legal scholarship on institutional reform, digital justice, and governance transformation in post-conflict African democracies.

## II. Literature Review

Human security emerged in the post-Cold War period as a critique of state-centric approaches to security, shifting attention from territorial protection toward the protection of individuals from structural violence, insecurity, and institutional exclusion.<sup>10</sup> Early human-security scholarship emphasized freedom from fear and freedom from want as core dimensions of human well-being.<sup>11</sup> Subsequent studies expanded the framework to include legal protection, institutional accountability, and access to justice as central components of democratic security governance.<sup>12</sup> However, the concept remains contested. Critics argue that human security suffers from excessive conceptual breadth and analytical ambiguity, making it difficult to operationalize empirically or distinguish from broader development agendas.<sup>13</sup> Others contend that the framework risks depoliticizing structural inequalities by framing governance failures primarily as technical security deficits rather than manifestations of power asymmetries, institutional weakness, and

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<sup>10</sup> Mentor Isufaj, “The Fractured Peace: Human Security, Social Cohesion, and Educational Division in the Post-Conflict Western Balkans,” *European Journal of Social Science Education and Research* 12, no. 3 (September 28, 2025): 18–30, <https://doi.org/10.26417/064qyb63>.

<sup>11</sup> Gjon Culaj, Elton Tota, and Gramos Sejdiu, “Human Security: A Precondition for Peace, Dignity and Development,” *JANUS NET E-Journal of International Relation* 15, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.26619/1647-7251.15.2.6>; Sujit Lahiry, “The Changing Narrative of Security Discourse: From State Security to Human Security in South Asia?,” *World Affairs* 183, no. 2 (June 29, 2020): 183–205, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0043820020921153>.

<sup>12</sup> Claire Hamilton and Randy K. Lippert, “Governing Through Human Rights in Counter-Terrorism: Proofing, Problematization and Securitization,” *Critical Criminology* 28, no. 1 (March 16, 2020): 127–45, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-020-09496-3>.

<sup>13</sup> Nergis Canefe, “Death of the Refugee: The Silence of Numbers,” in *Migration, Refugees and Human Security in the Mediterranean and MENA* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 21–49, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-70775-4\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-70775-4_2); Pederis M. Orencio et al., “Using Thresholds of Severity to Threats to and the Resilience of Human Systems in Measuring Human Security,” *Social Indicators Research* 129, no. 3 (December 26, 2016): 979–99, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-015-1152-x>.

political exclusion.<sup>14</sup> These debates are particularly relevant in African governance contexts, where judicial institutions often operate within conditions of limited state capacity, uneven territorial authority, and post-conflict fragility.<sup>15</sup>

Access to Justice Theory complements these debates by focusing on the institutional and procedural conditions under which individuals can meaningfully exercise legal rights.<sup>16</sup> Classical approaches conceptualize access to justice in terms of affordability, procedural fairness, legal representation, and timely adjudication. More recent scholarship, however, has shifted toward broader socio-legal understandings that emphasize institutional legitimacy, legal empowerment, and distributive inequality.<sup>17</sup> Some scholars argue that judicial accessibility cannot be reduced to formal legal availability because marginalized populations frequently encounter structural barriers linked to poverty, geography, language, and social exclusion.<sup>18</sup> Others maintain that procedural reforms and legal modernization can significantly enhance institutional trust and democratic accountability when supported by effective implementation mechanisms. Within West Africa, these debates are intensified by persistent disparities in legal infrastructure, uneven legal-aid provision, and the coexistence of formal and customary justice systems.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Reda El Fellah and Mohamed Behnassi, "Global Environmental Change and the Crisis of Dominant Development Models: A Human Security-Centered Analysis," in *Environmental Change and Human Security in Africa and the Middle East* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 25–47, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-45648-5\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-45648-5_2); Edward Newman, "Covid-19: A Human Security Analysis," *Global Society* 36, no. 4 (October 2, 2022): 431–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2021.2010034>.

<sup>15</sup> Suat Kara et al., "The Spatial Spillover Effects of Public Sector Transparency on Advancing Africa's Sustainable Development Goals," *Sustainable Development*, December 21, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.70589>.

<sup>16</sup> Marina Aksenova, "Global Citizenship and the Right of Access to Justice: Adapting T.H. Marshall's Ideas to the Interconnected World," *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 14, no. 2 (June 2023): 169–85, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hum.2023.a916995>; David Allen Larson, "Access to Justice," in *Encyclopedia of Law and Economics* (New York, NY: Springer New York, 2019), 11–17, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-7753-2\\_570](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-7753-2_570).

<sup>17</sup> Earl Johnson, "Justice, Access To," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Elsevier, 2015), 919–27, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.86044-4>; Carlos Joel Tchawouo Mbiada, "Structural Barriers and the Erosion of Access to Justice in the South African Labour Court and Labour Appeal Court," *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal* 28 (October 15, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.17159/1727-3781/2025/v28i0a18231>.

<sup>18</sup> Vladyslav Teremetskyi et al., "Access To Justice And Legal Aid For Vulnerable Groups: New Challenges Caused By The Covid-19 Pandemic," *Journal of Legal, Ethical and Regulatory Issues*, 2021, <https://remote-lib.ui.ac.id:2120/pages/publications/85113145391?origin=scopusAI>.

<sup>19</sup> Elvis David Damalie and Tolgay Karanfiller, "The Impact of Information and Communication Technology and Institutional Quality on Social Sustainability: Evidence From West African Countries," *Sustainable Development*, December 26, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.70580>.

The literature on judicial reform in Africa has primarily concentrated on judicial independence, anti-corruption mechanisms, constitutional reform, and institutional modernization.<sup>20</sup> Reform-oriented scholarship generally argues that merit-based judicial appointments, financial autonomy, procedural transparency, and institutional oversight improve judicial credibility and governance performance.<sup>21</sup> By contrast, more critical institutional perspectives caution that formal reforms often fail to transform deeper political and structural constraints.<sup>22</sup> In post-conflict contexts such as Sierra Leone, donor-driven reform programs frequently encounter weak implementation capacity, resource dependency, political interference, and limited administrative reach.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, institutional modernization does not necessarily translate into improved access to justice or enhanced public trust.<sup>24</sup> Comparative governance scholarship therefore increasingly emphasizes the importance of institutional resilience, enforcement capacity, and political legitimacy rather than formal reform adoption alone.<sup>25</sup>

Debates surrounding judicial digitalization further illustrate these tensions.<sup>26</sup> Optimistic accounts of digital justice argue that electronic filing systems, virtual hearings, automated case management, and online court services improve efficiency, reduce delays, and expand procedural accessibility.<sup>27</sup> Ghana is frequently cited as a regional example of successful judicial

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<sup>20</sup> Adekunle, Oyakhire, and Eruaga, *Criminal Justice Reform in Sub-Saharan Africa*; Alabi, “ECOWAS Court and Emerging Community Legal Order in West Africa.”

<sup>21</sup> Raymond A Atuguba and Katharine G Young, “Developmental Constitutionalism and the Fourth Branch: Ghana’s Independent Constitutional Bodies and the Redress of Poverty and Inequality,” *Federal Law Review* 51, no. 4 (December 1, 2023): 399–421, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0067205X231206622>; Borba, Castagna Lunardi, and de Aquino Guimaraes, “The Influence of Judges’ Managerial Competences on Judicial Performance: A Statistical Analysis.”

<sup>22</sup> Donais and Barbak, “The Rule of Law, the Local Turn, and Re-Thinking Accountability in Security Sector Reform Processes.”

<sup>23</sup> Lisa Denney, *Justice and Security Reform* (Routledge, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203797273>; Jackson, “Whose Justice in Sierra Leone? Power, Security and Justice in Post-Conflict Reconstruction.”

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Sheku Marah, “THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE MECHANISMS,” *Journal of Governance and Public Administration* 2, no. 2 (March 30, 2025): 530–41, <https://doi.org/10.70248/jogapa.v2i2.1723>; Dreier and Lake, “Institutional Legitimacy in Sub-Saharan Africa”; Amalina Yasmin Mohd Sokri, “Rethinking Judicial Legitimacy: A Process-Based Perspective from Malaysian Corruption Trials,” *Asian Journal of Law and Society*, March 25, 2026, 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1017/als.2026.10048>.

<sup>25</sup> Donais and Barbak, “The Rule of Law, the Local Turn, and Re-Thinking Accountability in Security Sector Reform Processes”; Ramos-Maqueda and Chen, “Justice, Growth, and Governance: Causal Evidence on How Courts Shape Economic Outcomes and Conflict.”

<sup>26</sup> Ikhtiyor Djuraev et al., “The Impact of Digitization on Legal Systems in Developing Countries,” *Qubahan Academic Journal* 5, no. 1 (January 24, 2025): 81–117, <https://doi.org/10.48161/qaj.v5n1a1246>.

<sup>27</sup> Ahmed et al., “The Role of Digital Transformation in Fostering Transparency: An e-Court System Case Study”; Ashong Elliot, Effah, and Boateng, “Institutional Influence on E-Justice System Usage: The Case of Ghana’s Judicial Sector.”

modernization through digital infrastructure and procedural automation.<sup>28</sup> However, critical scholarship challenges the assumption that digitalization automatically democratizes access to justice.<sup>29</sup> Digital reforms may reproduce existing inequalities where internet access, electricity infrastructure, technological literacy, and financial resources remain unevenly distributed.<sup>30</sup> In many African states, rural populations, low-income groups, and legally marginalized communities continue to face exclusion from technologically mediated justice systems.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, digital reforms introduce additional concerns relating to cybersecurity, institutional maintenance costs, bureaucratic adaptation, and uneven implementation capacity.<sup>32</sup> These limitations are particularly visible in Sierra Leone, where weak technological infrastructure and limited institutional resources continue to constrain digital integration within the judiciary.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the growing scholarship on judicial reform and governance in Africa, three important gaps remain. First, much of the existing literature evaluates judicial reform primarily through administrative or institutional-performance indicators while paying comparatively limited attention to broader human-security outcomes such as public trust, procedural inclusion, and perceptions of legal protection.<sup>34</sup> Second, comparative studies rarely examine how judicial modernization interacts with institutional capacity and digital inequality to shape access to justice in post-conflict democracies.<sup>35</sup> Third, existing analyses often treat judicial reform and human security as analytically separate domains rather than examining their institutional

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<sup>28</sup> Ashong Elliot, Effah, and Boateng, “Institutional Influence on E-Justice System Usage: The Case of Ghana’s Judicial Sector”; Oduro and Agbevade, “The Role of E-Governance in Promoting Government Accountability and Transparency in Ghana.”

<sup>29</sup> Tchawouo Mbiada, “Structural Barriers and the Erosion of Access to Justice in the South African Labour Court and Labour Appeal Court.”

<sup>30</sup> Damalie and Karanfiller, “The Impact of Information and Communication Technology and Institutional Quality on Social Sustainability: Evidence From West African Countries.”

<sup>31</sup> Teremetskyi et al., “Access To Justice And Legal Aid For Vulnerable Groups: New Challenges Caused By The Covid-19 Pandemic”; Tchawouo Mbiada, “Structural Barriers and the Erosion of Access to Justice in the South African Labour Court and Labour Appeal Court.”

<sup>32</sup> Djuraev et al., “The Impact of Digitization on Legal Systems in Developing Countries.”

<sup>33</sup> UNDP, “UNDP Sierra Leone Rule of Law and Justice Sector Reports,” 2025, <https://www.undp.org/sierra-leone?utm;> World Bank Group, “World Bank – Sierra Leone Justice Sector and Governance Assessments,” 2025, <https://www.worldbank.org/ext/en/country/sierraleone?utm.>

<sup>34</sup> Culaj, Tota, and Sejdiu, “Human Security: A Precondition for Peace, Dignity and Development”; Newman, “Covid-19: A Human Security Analysis.”

<sup>35</sup> Djuraev et al., “The Impact of Digitization on Legal Systems in Developing Countries”; Donais and Barbak, “The Rule of Law, the Local Turn, and Re-Thinking Accountability in Security Sector Reform Processes.”

interrelationship.<sup>36</sup>This article addresses these gaps through a comparative analysis of Sierra Leone and Ghana, focusing on how judicial independence, procedural transparency, and technological integration influence both access to justice and wider human-security outcomes. In doing so, the study contributes to comparative socio-legal and governance scholarship by linking justice-sector reform to questions of institutional legitimacy, digital inclusion, and citizen security in West African democracies.

### III. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

#### 3.1 Theoretical Framework

This study integrates the Human Security Framework with Access to Justice Theory to explain how judicial reform influences broader conditions of institutional legitimacy, legal protection, and citizen security.<sup>37</sup>Rather than treating these frameworks as separate analytical approaches, the article conceptualizes access to justice as the institutional mechanism through which judicial reforms shape human-security outcomes.

The Human Security Framework emerged as a critique of state-centric understandings of security that prioritized territorial sovereignty over individual welfare and protection.<sup>38</sup>Human-security scholarship instead emphasizes the protection of individuals from structural violence, institutional exclusion, arbitrary governance, and conditions that undermine dignity and social stability.<sup>39</sup>Within this framework, security is not limited to physical safety but also encompasses procedural fairness, legal protection, and access to accountable institutions capable of safeguarding rights.<sup>40</sup>Weak judicial institutions therefore constitute a form of structural insecurity because

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<sup>36</sup> Sara de Simone, "Beyond Normativity and Benchmarking: Applying a Human Security Approach to Refugee-Hosting Areas in Africa," *Third World Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 168–83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2019.1660635>; Lahiry, "The Changing Narrative of Security Discourse: From State Security to Human Security in South Asia?"

<sup>37</sup> Oleg Gariaga et al., "Protection of Human Rights in the Framework of Global Judicial Reforms," *Mazahib* 24, no. 1 (June 10, 2025): 38–61, <https://doi.org/10.21093/mj.v24i1.9403>; Mohd Sokri, "Rethinking Judicial Legitimacy: A Process-Based Perspective from Malaysian Corruption Trials."

<sup>38</sup> Lahiry, "The Changing Narrative of Security Discourse: From State Security to Human Security in South Asia?"

<sup>39</sup> Aniceto Masferrer and Emilio García-Sánchez, "Vulnerability and Human Dignity in the Age of Rights," 2016, 1–25, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-32693-1\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-32693-1_1).

<sup>40</sup> de Simone, "Beyond Normativity and Benchmarking: Applying a Human Security Approach to Refugee-Hosting Areas in Africa."

delayed adjudication, unequal legal access, corruption, and ineffective enforcement expose citizens to legal vulnerability, social exclusion, and diminished public trust.<sup>41</sup>

However, the Human Security Framework alone does not sufficiently explain the institutional processes through which legal systems produce or mitigate insecurity.<sup>42</sup> To address this limitation, the study incorporates Access to Justice Theory as a complementary institutional framework.<sup>43</sup> Access to Justice Theory focuses on the practical conditions under which individuals can effectively exercise legal rights through affordable, transparent, timely, and non-discriminatory legal systems.<sup>44</sup> Contemporary socio-legal scholarship further emphasizes that access to justice depends not only on formal legal rights but also on institutional capacity, procedural accessibility, enforcement effectiveness, technological inclusion, and public confidence in judicial systems.<sup>45</sup>

The integration of these frameworks provides the article's central causal argument: judicial reform contributes to human security only when institutional modernization improves substantive access to justice. In this framework, judicial independence, procedural transparency, technological integration, and enforcement capacity function as institutional variables that shape citizens' ability to obtain legal protection and equitable treatment. Where reforms improve procedural accessibility and institutional legitimacy, they may strengthen public trust, reduce perceptions of arbitrariness, and enhance legal security.<sup>46</sup> Conversely, where reforms remain weakly implemented or socially exclusionary, institutional modernization may fail to produce meaningful human-security gains.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Elijah Tukwariba Yin, "Organised Crime and the Role of Law and Law Enforcement Agencies in Ghana," 2024, 100–131, <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-0327-6.ch005>.

<sup>42</sup> Lahiry, "The Changing Narrative of Security Discourse: From State Security to Human Security in South Asia?"; Newman, "Covid-19: A Human Security Analysis."

<sup>43</sup> Johnson, "Justice, Access To"; Larson, "Access to Justice."

<sup>44</sup> Johnson, "Justice, Access To"; Aksenova, "Global Citizenship and the Right of Access to Justice: Adapting T.H. Marshall's Ideas to the Interconnected World."

<sup>45</sup> Teremetskyi et al., "Access To Justice And Legal Aid For Vulnerable Groups: New Challenges Caused By The Covid-19 Pandemic"; Esther Fernández-Molina and Áurea Esther Grijalva-Eternod, "Expectations versus Experience: What Do Citizens Demand When Dealing with Criminal Courts?," *Criminology & Criminal Justice* 26, no. 1 (February 3, 2026): 66–84, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17488958241257854>.

<sup>46</sup> Dreier and Lake, "Institutional Legitimacy in Sub-Saharan Africa"; Mohd Sokri, "Rethinking Judicial Legitimacy: A Process-Based Perspective from Malaysian Corruption Trials."

<sup>47</sup> Donais and Barbak, "The Rule of Law, the Local Turn, and Re-Thinking Accountability in Security Sector Reform Processes"; de Simone, "Beyond Normativity and Benchmarking: Applying a Human Security Approach to Refugee-Hosting Areas in Africa."

This integrated framework is particularly relevant in the comparative context of Ghana and Sierra Leone. Ghana's relatively advanced judicial modernization allows examination of how digitalization and procedural reform may enhance institutional responsiveness,<sup>48</sup> while Sierra Leone illustrates how post-conflict institutional fragility, infrastructural limitations, and weak enforcement constrain the relationship between judicial reform and human security.<sup>49</sup> The framework therefore enables analysis not only of whether reforms occur, but also of how institutional conditions mediate their effects on citizen security and access to justice.

### 3.2 Conceptual Model

This study conceptualizes the relationship between judicial reform and human security as institutionally mediated rather than linear. The model proceeds from the premise that judicial reforms do not automatically produce improved human-security outcomes.<sup>50</sup> Instead, the effects of reform depend on how institutional modernization interacts with political, infrastructural, and governance conditions that shape substantive access to justice.<sup>51</sup>

The model identifies four primary dimensions of judicial reform: judicial independence, procedural transparency, technological integration, and professional institutional capacity. These reforms are expected to influence access to justice by improving procedural efficiency, affordability, legal accessibility, enforcement reliability, and public confidence in judicial institutions.<sup>52</sup> However, the relationship between reform and human-security outcomes is mediated by several intervening variables, including corruption, political interference, infrastructural inequality, fiscal capacity, digital literacy, and uneven territorial access to legal institutions.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ashong Elliot, Effah, and Boateng, "Institutional Influence on E-Justice System Usage: The Case of Ghana's Judicial Sector"; Ahmed et al., "The Role of Digital Transformation in Fostering Transparency: An e-Court System Case Study."

<sup>49</sup> Denney, *Justice and Security Reform*; Jackson, "Whose Justice in Sierra Leone? Power, Security and Justice in Post-Conflict Reconstruction."

<sup>50</sup> Donais and Barbak, "The Rule of Law, the Local Turn, and Re-Thinking Accountability in Security Sector Reform Processes"; de Simone, "Beyond Normativity and Benchmarking: Applying a Human Security Approach to Refugee-Hosting Areas in Africa."

<sup>51</sup> Djuraev et al., "The Impact of Digitization on Legal Systems in Developing Countries"; Dreier and Lake, "Institutional Legitimacy in Sub-Saharan Africa."

<sup>52</sup> Johnson, "Justice, Access To"; Larson, "Access to Justice."

<sup>53</sup> Moses Agaawena Amagnya, "The Whiteman and Gifts: Underlying Concepts Influencing Ghanaian Officials' Explanation of Corruption," *Criminology & Criminal Justice* 26, no. 2 (April 21, 2026): 567–87, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17488958241239789>; Damalie and Karanfiller, "The Impact of Information and Communication Technology and Institutional Quality on Social Sustainability: Evidence From West African

In this framework, access to justice functions as the central institutional mechanism linking judicial reform to human security.<sup>54</sup> Where reforms strengthen procedural accessibility and institutional legitimacy, they may reduce legal exclusion, improve rights protection, and enhance civic confidence.<sup>55</sup> Conversely, where reforms are constrained by weak institutional capacity or unequal technological access, modernization efforts may fail to generate meaningful improvements in legal security or public trust.<sup>56</sup>

The comparative design enables assessment of how differing institutional conditions shape reform outcomes in Ghana and Sierra Leone. Ghana's relatively advanced judicial modernization provides a basis for examining the effects of digital integration and procedural reform under stronger institutional conditions,<sup>57</sup> while Sierra Leone illustrates how post-conflict institutional fragility and infrastructural limitations constrain reform effectiveness.<sup>58</sup> Figure 1 presents the study's integrated conceptual framework, illustrating how judicial reform influences human-security outcomes through access-to-justice mechanisms. The model emphasizes that the relationship is institutionally mediated rather than linear, with intervening factors such as corruption, infrastructural capacity, and digital inequality shaping reform effectiveness.

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Countries"; Marrah, "The Protector Becomes the Predator: The Perception of Judicial Corruption and Demand for Judicial Accountability in Sierra Leone."

<sup>54</sup> Aksenova, "Global Citizenship and the Right of Access to Justice: Adapting T.H. Marshall's Ideas to the Interconnected World"; Johnson, "Justice, Access To."

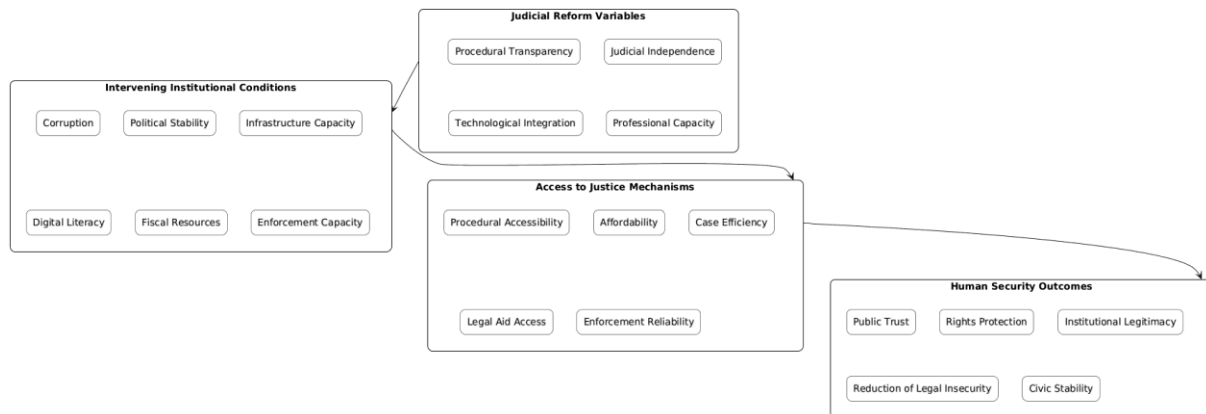
<sup>55</sup> Dreier and Lake, "Institutional Legitimacy in Sub-Saharan Africa"; Mohd Sokri, "Rethinking Judicial Legitimacy: A Process-Based Perspective from Malaysian Corruption Trials."

<sup>56</sup> Teremetskyi et al., "Access To Justice And Legal Aid For Vulnerable Groups: New Challenges Caused By The Covid-19 Pandemic"; Tchawouo Mbiada, "Structural Barriers and the Erosion of Access to Justice in the South African Labour Court and Labour Appeal Court."

<sup>57</sup> Ashong Elliot, Effah, and Boateng, "Institutional Influence on E-Justice System Usage: The Case of Ghana's Judicial Sector"; Ahmed et al., "The Role of Digital Transformation in Fostering Transparency: An e-Court System Case Study."

<sup>58</sup> Denney, *Justice and Security Reform*; Jackson, "Whose Justice in Sierra Leone? Power, Security and Justice in Post-Conflict Reconstruction."

**Figure 1 — Integrated Conceptual Framework of Judicial Reform and Human Security**



Source: Author’s illustration (2026).

### 3.3 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative comparative case-study design to examine the relationship between judicial reform, access to justice, and human-security outcomes in Ghana and Sierra Leone between 2010 and 2024. The comparative framework was selected because the two countries represent contrasting trajectories of judicial reform within the West African governance context. Ghana reflects a relatively institutionalized reform pathway characterized by greater procedural modernization and digital integration, whereas Sierra Leone represents a post-conflict judicial environment marked by weaker institutional capacity, infrastructural constraints, and uneven reform implementation. The comparative structure therefore enables analysis of how differing institutional conditions shape the effectiveness of judicial reform and its implications for human security.

The study draws on four principal categories of sources: peer-reviewed academic literature, judicial reform policies and strategic plans, governance and rule-of-law reports produced by international and regional organizations, and institutional performance materials including court-administration assessments and public-trust surveys. These materials were selected to capture both formal reform processes and broader governance outcomes related to judicial accessibility, procedural legitimacy, and institutional effectiveness.

The analytical framework combines qualitative thematic analysis with structured cross-case comparison. Thematic coding was used to identify recurring institutional patterns across the

datasets, particularly in relation to judicial independence, procedural transparency, technological integration, enforcement capacity, and public trust. Codes were developed deductively from the theoretical framework and refined through repeated engagement with the source materials. Comparative analysis was then conducted across both cases to identify similarities, divergences, and institutional constraints affecting reform outcomes.

To enhance analytical consistency, the study employs a set of comparative indicators organized into three dimensions: judicial reform, access to justice, and human-security outcomes. Judicial reform indicators include judicial independence, digital infrastructure, anti-corruption mechanisms, and professional capacity. Access-to-justice indicators include case-processing efficiency, affordability, legal-aid accessibility, and enforcement reliability. Human-security indicators include public trust, rights protection, institutional legitimacy, and perceptions of legal security. Table 1 presents the study’s analytical dimensions and comparative evaluation criteria. The framework operationalizes the relationship between judicial reform, access to justice, and human-security outcomes through a set of institutional and procedural indicators used to structure the cross-case analysis of Ghana and Sierra Leone.

**Table 1. Analytical Dimensions, Operational Indicators, and Comparative Evaluation Criteria**

Analytical Dimension	Core Variables	Operational Indicators	Comparative Evaluation Criteria
<b>Judicial Reform Capacity</b>	Judicial independence	Merit-based appointments; judicial autonomy; financial independence; oversight mechanisms	Degree of institutional autonomy and insulation from political interference
	Procedural transparency	Public reporting systems; case-tracking mechanisms; transparency of proceedings	Accessibility and openness of judicial procedures
	Digital infrastructure	E-filing systems; virtual hearings; automated case management; ICT integration	Extent and effectiveness of technological modernization
	Professional institutional capacity	Judicial training; staffing adequacy; administrative coordination	Administrative efficiency and institutional responsiveness
<b>Access to Justice</b>	Procedural efficiency	Case duration; backlog reduction; frequency of adjournments	Timeliness and predictability of adjudication

	Legal accessibility	Geographic court access; rural accessibility; affordability of legal services	Inclusiveness and territorial reach of formal justice systems
	Legal-aid provision	Availability of legal aid; pro bono services; support for vulnerable populations	Capacity to provide equitable legal representation
	Enforcement effectiveness	Enforcement of judgments; compliance mechanisms; implementation reliability	Practical enforceability of judicial decisions
<b>Human-Security Outcomes</b>	Institutional legitimacy	Public confidence in judiciary; perceptions of fairness and accountability	Degree of trust in formal judicial institutions
	Rights protection	Protection against arbitrary treatment; procedural fairness; legal safeguards	Effectiveness of legal protection mechanisms
	Civic stability	Reduction in legal insecurity; dispute-resolution effectiveness	Contribution of judicial systems to social stability
	Social inclusion	Accessibility for marginalized groups; procedural equality	Extent of inclusive participation in justice processes

**Source:** Author’s reconstruction based on comparative governance and socio-legal analytical frameworks (2026).

The study adopts multiple strategies to strengthen reliability and validity. First, triangulation was conducted across legal documents, governance datasets, institutional reports, and secondary scholarly analyses in order to minimize reliance on single-source interpretations. Second, comparative findings were cross-validated using overlapping indicators from international governance assessments, Afrobarometer surveys, judicial-performance reports, and policy evaluations where available. Third, the study employs consistent analytical criteria across both cases to reduce interpretive asymmetry in the comparative process.

Several limitations remain. The analysis relies substantially on secondary institutional data because publicly accessible judicial-performance datasets in Sierra Leone remain limited and inconsistently digitized. In addition, the study focuses primarily on formal judicial institutions and therefore does not comprehensively capture the operation of informal and customary justice mechanisms, which remain significant in many rural areas. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted as an institutional analysis of formal justice-sector reform rather than a comprehensive account of all justice practices within the two countries.

#### IV. Findings and Comparative Analysis

The comparative findings reveal significant divergence in the implementation and institutional effects of judicial reform in Ghana and Sierra Leone. Although both countries formally adopted justice-sector modernization initiatives between 2010 and 2024, differences in institutional capacity, enforcement capability, digital infrastructure, and governance stability have produced uneven outcomes in access to justice and human security.<sup>59</sup>The analysis is organized around four dimensions: (1) institutional independence and governance capacity; (2) procedural transparency and public trust; (3) technological integration and digital justice; and (4) access to justice and human-security outcomes.

##### Institutional Independence and Governance Capacity

Judicial reform trajectories in Ghana and Sierra Leone demonstrate differing levels of institutional consolidation and administrative effectiveness.<sup>60</sup>In Ghana, reforms emphasizing merit-based judicial appointments, judicial training, financial autonomy, and institutional oversight mechanisms have contributed to comparatively stronger perceptions of judicial independence and administrative coherence.<sup>61</sup>Governance assessments by the World Justice Project and regional rule-of-law evaluations consistently rank Ghana above many West African states in judicial effectiveness and regulatory enforcement.<sup>62</sup>Institutional modernization has also been supported through structured court-administration reforms and performance-monitoring systems designed to reduce procedural delays and improve accountability.

By contrast, Sierra Leone's judiciary continues to face structural limitations associated with post-conflict institutional fragility, limited fiscal resources, and weak enforcement capacity. Court delays, irregular adjournments, shortages of judicial personnel, and uneven territorial access to

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<sup>59</sup> Samuel Affran et al., "Implementation of Digital Health Innovations in Ghana: A Systematic Review," *Discover Social Science and Health* 6, no. 1 (March 14, 2026): 67, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44155-026-00394-7>; Andrews Jack Dotsey, "Competencies and Capabilities of Local and Traditional Leaders in Ghana," in *Sustainable Community Development in Ghana* (London: Routledge, 2024), 154–74, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003366041-12>; Oduro and Agbevade, "The Role of E-Governance in Promoting Government Accountability and Transparency in Ghana."

<sup>60</sup> Ashong Elliot, Effah, and Boateng, "Institutional Influence on E-Justice System Usage: The Case of Ghana's Judicial Sector"; Djuraev et al., "The Impact of Digitization on Legal Systems in Developing Countries."

<sup>61</sup> Joseph Ofori Acheampong and Damon M. Cann, "Assessing Public Trust in Ghana's Courts," *Journal of Law and Courts* 13, no. 1 (April 13, 2025): 184–94, <https://doi.org/10.1017/jlc.2024.24>; Amagnya, "The Whiteman and Gifts: Underlying Concepts Influencing Ghanaian Officials' Explanation of Corruption."

<sup>62</sup> World Justice Project, "WJP Rule of Law Index | Ghana Insights," 2025, <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/country/2025/Ghana?utm>.

courts remain persistent institutional problems.<sup>63</sup> Reports from governance and justice-sector assessments indicate that case backlogs and administrative inefficiencies continue to undermine judicial responsiveness, particularly in rural jurisdictions where access to formal courts remains limited.<sup>64</sup> These weaknesses constrain institutional legitimacy because legal protections become unevenly enforceable across socio-economic and geographic groups.

Importantly, the comparison demonstrates that formal judicial reform alone does not guarantee institutional independence. Ghana's relatively stronger outcomes are linked not only to reform adoption but also to greater administrative capacity and more consistent implementation mechanisms.<sup>65</sup> Sierra Leone's experience illustrates how institutional fragility and limited infrastructural support can weaken the effectiveness of formal judicial reforms despite constitutional commitments to judicial autonomy.<sup>66</sup>

### **Procedural Transparency and Public Trust**

Differences in procedural transparency significantly shape public perceptions of judicial legitimacy in both countries. Ghana has introduced several procedural-accountability mechanisms, including digital case-tracking systems, publication of judicial-performance information, and periodic administrative reviews intended to improve transparency and reduce procedural opacity.<sup>67</sup> These measures have contributed to comparatively higher levels of institutional trust and procedural predictability within the formal justice sector.

In Sierra Leone, however, procedural transparency remains constrained by administrative inconsistency, limited public access to judicial information, and prolonged delays in adjudication.<sup>68</sup> Afrobarometer surveys and governance assessments repeatedly identify public concerns regarding corruption, unequal treatment, and delayed justice delivery within the

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<sup>63</sup> UNDP, "UNDP Sierra Leone Rule of Law and Justice Sector Reports"; World Bank Group, "World Bank – Sierra Leone Justice Sector and Governance Assessments."

<sup>64</sup> UNDP, "UNDP Sierra Leone Rule of Law and Justice Sector Reports."

<sup>65</sup> Atuguba and Young, "Developmental Constitutionalism and the Fourth Branch: Ghana's Independent Constitutional Bodies and the Redress of Poverty and Inequality."

<sup>66</sup> Denney, *Justice and Security Reform*.

<sup>67</sup> Fernández-Molina and Grijalva-Eternod, "Expectations versus Experience: What Do Citizens Demand When Dealing with Criminal Courts?"

<sup>68</sup> Emmanuel Saffa Abdulai, *Freedom of Information Law and Good Governance* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-83658-0>; Proscovia Svärd, "Freedom of Information Laws and Information Access," *Information Development* 33, no. 2 (March 9, 2017): 190–98, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266666916642829>.

judiciary.<sup>69</sup>Public distrust is particularly pronounced among lower-income and rural populations that experience greater barriers to legal representation and court accessibility. In many cases, prolonged case processing and inconsistent enforcement reduce confidence in the judiciary's ability to provide effective legal protection.

The comparative findings suggest that procedural transparency influences human security through institutional legitimacy. Where judicial procedures are perceived as inaccessible, delayed, or politically uneven, citizens are less likely to view formal institutions as reliable mechanisms for rights protection and dispute resolution. Procedural opacity therefore contributes to broader perceptions of insecurity and institutional exclusion.

### **Technological Integration and Digital Justice**

The comparative analysis reveals significant asymmetry in technological integration between the two judicial systems. Ghana has implemented relatively advanced digital reforms, including electronic filing systems, automated case management, online scheduling platforms, and virtual hearing procedures introduced during and after the COVID-19.<sup>70</sup>These reforms have improved administrative efficiency, reduced some procedural delays, and expanded access for urban users with digital connectivity.<sup>71</sup>Digital systems have also strengthened record management and procedural monitoring within segments of the judiciary.<sup>72</sup>

However, the evidence also demonstrates that digitalization has not produced uniformly inclusive outcomes. Significant disparities persist between urban and rural regions in internet access, digital literacy, and technological infrastructure.<sup>73</sup>The financial costs of maintaining digital systems, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, and uneven technological training within judicial institutions continue to create implementation challenges.<sup>74</sup>Consequently, digital justice reforms

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<sup>69</sup> Afrobarometer, "Sierra Leone – Afrobarometer," 2023, <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/sierra-leone?utm>.

<sup>70</sup> Ahmed et al., "The Role of Digital Transformation in Fostering Transparency: An e-Court System Case Study"; Ashong Elliot, Effah, and Boateng, "Institutional Influence on E-Justice System Usage: The Case of Ghana's Judicial Sector."

<sup>71</sup> Ashong Elliot, Effah, and Boateng, "Institutional Influence on E-Justice System Usage: The Case of Ghana's Judicial Sector"; Djuraev et al., "The Impact of Digitization on Legal Systems in Developing Countries."

<sup>72</sup> Ahmed et al., "The Role of Digital Transformation in Fostering Transparency: An e-Court System Case Study."

<sup>73</sup> Damalie and Karanfiller, "The Impact of Information and Communication Technology and Institutional Quality on Social Sustainability: Evidence From West African Countries."

<sup>74</sup> Djuraev et al., "The Impact of Digitization on Legal Systems in Developing Countries."

may simultaneously improve procedural efficiency while reproducing exclusion for populations lacking reliable digital access or technological competence.<sup>75</sup>

Sierra Leone's digital integration remains comparatively limited.<sup>76</sup> Many court procedures continue to operate through manual administrative systems, contributing to slower case processing, weaker data management, and inconsistent procedural tracking.<sup>77</sup> Limited electricity infrastructure, insufficient technological investment, and uneven internet penetration further constrain nationwide implementation of digital judicial reforms.<sup>78</sup> As a result, technological modernization has progressed unevenly and remains heavily concentrated within urban institutional centers.<sup>79</sup>

The findings therefore challenge technologically deterministic assumptions within judicial-reform discourse. Digitalization may improve judicial administration under conditions of institutional capacity and infrastructural support, but technological reform alone cannot resolve deeper structural inequalities affecting access to justice.<sup>80</sup> Figure 2 illustrates the contrasting trajectories of judicial reform in Ghana and Sierra Leone. The diagram highlights how differences in institutional capacity, digital integration, and procedural governance contribute to divergent outcomes in public trust, judicial effectiveness, and access to justice.

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<sup>75</sup> Tchawouo Mbiada, "Structural Barriers and the Erosion of Access to Justice in the South African Labour Court and Labour Appeal Court"; Teremetskyi et al., "Access To Justice And Legal Aid For Vulnerable Groups: New Challenges Caused By The Covid-19 Pandemic."

<sup>76</sup> UNDP, "UNDP Sierra Leone Rule of Law and Justice Sector Reports"; World Bank Group, "World Bank – Sierra Leone Justice Sector and Governance Assessments."

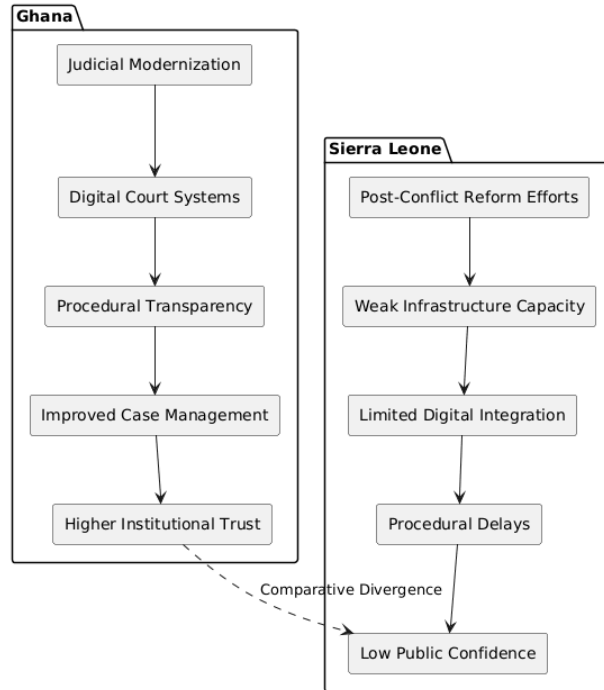
<sup>77</sup> World Bank Group, "World Bank – Sierra Leone Justice Sector and Governance Assessments."

<sup>78</sup> UNDP, "UNDP Sierra Leone Rule of Law and Justice Sector Reports"; Damalie and Karanfiller, "The Impact of Information and Communication Technology and Institutional Quality on Social Sustainability: Evidence From West African Countries."

<sup>79</sup> World Bank Group, "World Bank – Sierra Leone Justice Sector and Governance Assessments."

<sup>80</sup> Djuraev et al., "The Impact of Digitization on Legal Systems in Developing Countries"; Tchawouo Mbiada, "Structural Barriers and the Erosion of Access to Justice in the South African Labour Court and Labour Appeal Court."

**Figure 2 — Comparative Judicial Reform Trajectories: Ghana vs Sierra Leone**



Source: Author’s illustration (2026).

**Access to Justice and Human-Security Outcomes**

The findings demonstrate that the relationship between judicial reform and human security operates through concrete institutional mechanisms rather than abstract normative principles. In Ghana, procedural modernization, improved administrative transparency, and partial digital integration have contributed to greater institutional responsiveness and enhanced public confidence in segments of the judiciary.<sup>81</sup> Reduced procedural delays, improved case management, and expanded procedural accessibility have lowered some barriers to legal protection, particularly for urban populations with greater access to formal institutions.<sup>82</sup>

These institutional improvements affect human security by reducing procedural uncertainty and strengthening citizens’ expectations of legal protection. More efficient adjudication and stronger enforcement mechanisms reduce vulnerability to arbitrary treatment, unresolved disputes,

<sup>81</sup> Acheampong and Cann, “Assessing Public Trust in Ghana’s Courts”; Oduro and Agbevade, “The Role of E-Governance in Promoting Government Accountability and Transparency in Ghana.”

<sup>82</sup> Ashong Elliot, Effah, and Boateng, “Institutional Influence on E-Justice System Usage: The Case of Ghana’s Judicial Sector”; Ahmed et al., “The Role of Digital Transformation in Fostering Transparency: An e-Court System Case Study.”

and prolonged legal insecurity.<sup>83</sup>In this sense, judicial reform contributes to human security by improving institutional predictability, legal inclusion, and procedural legitimacy.

In Sierra Leone, however, persistent institutional weaknesses continue to generate forms of legal insecurity that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations.<sup>84</sup>Limited legal-aid provision, weak enforcement capacity, delayed adjudication, and uneven territorial access to courts reduce citizens' ability to obtain timely legal remedies.<sup>85</sup>Afrobarometer findings indicating low public trust in judicial institutions reflect broader concerns regarding institutional reliability and unequal access to legal protection.<sup>86</sup>Where formal judicial institutions are perceived as inaccessible or ineffective, individuals may experience heightened vulnerability to rights violations, economic exclusion, and unresolved conflict.<sup>87</sup>

The comparative evidence therefore suggests that judicial reform contributes to human security only when institutional modernization produces substantive improvements in procedural accessibility, enforcement reliability, and institutional legitimacy. Reforms that remain administratively incomplete or socially exclusionary are less likely to generate meaningful human-security gains, particularly within post-conflict governance environments characterized by infrastructural fragility and uneven state capacity.<sup>88</sup>

### **Comparative Synthesis and Interpretation**

The comparative findings demonstrate that judicial reform outcomes in Ghana and Sierra Leone differ not merely in degree of implementation, but in the broader institutional conditions through which reforms are operationalized and sustained. Although both countries formally adopted judicial modernization strategies between 2010 and 2024, variations in institutional capacity, infrastructural development, enforcement effectiveness, and procedural accessibility

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<sup>83</sup> Ramos-Maqueda and Chen, "Justice, Growth, and Governance: Causal Evidence on How Courts Shape Economic Outcomes and Conflict"; Gariaga et al., "Protection of Human Rights in the Framework of Global Judicial Reforms."

<sup>84</sup> Jackson, "Whose Justice in Sierra Leone? Power, Security and Justice in Post-Conflict Reconstruction"; Denney, *Justice and Security Reform*.

<sup>85</sup> Johnson, "Justice, Access To"; Teremetskyi et al., "Access To Justice And Legal Aid For Vulnerable Groups: New Challenges Caused By The Covid-19 Pandemic."

<sup>86</sup> Afrobarometer, "Sierra Leone – Afrobarometer"; Marrah, "The Protector Becomes the Predator: The Perception of Judicial Corruption and Demand for Judicial Accountability in Sierra Leone."

<sup>87</sup> Masferrer and García-Sánchez, "Vulnerability and Human Dignity in the Age of Rights"; Newman, "Covid-19: A Human Security Analysis."

<sup>88</sup> Donais and Barbak, "The Rule of Law, the Local Turn, and Re-Thinking Accountability in Security Sector Reform Processes"; Jackson, "Whose Justice in Sierra Leone? Power, Security and Justice in Post-Conflict Reconstruction."

produced substantially different consequences for access to justice and human-security outcomes.<sup>89</sup>

Ghana's comparatively stronger performance reflects a more institutionalized reform trajectory characterized by greater investment in judicial administration, digital infrastructure, procedural monitoring, and court-management systems.<sup>90</sup> These reforms contributed to relatively improved case-processing efficiency, higher levels of procedural transparency, and greater public confidence in segments of the judiciary.<sup>91</sup> However, the findings also indicate that Ghana's reform trajectory remains uneven, particularly in relation to rural accessibility, digital inequality, and long-term institutional sustainability.<sup>92</sup> Consequently, the Ghanaian case should not be interpreted as evidence of fully consolidated judicial transformation, but rather as an example of comparatively stronger institutional adaptation within a constrained governance environment.

By contrast, Sierra Leone's reform trajectory remains shaped by post-conflict institutional fragility, limited fiscal capacity, infrastructural deficits, and weaker enforcement mechanisms.<sup>93</sup> The persistence of manual court administration, delayed adjudication, inconsistent territorial access to legal institutions, and limited legal-aid provision constrains procedural accessibility and weakens institutional legitimacy.<sup>94</sup> These limitations reduce the capacity of formal judicial institutions to generate meaningful human-security outcomes, particularly for rural and socio-economically marginalized populations.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> World Justice Project, "WJP Rule of Law Index | Ghana Insights"; UNDP, "UNDP Sierra Leone Rule of Law and Justice Sector Reports"; World Bank Group, "World Bank – Sierra Leone Justice Sector and Governance Assessments."

<sup>90</sup> Ashong Elliot, Effah, and Boateng, "Institutional Influence on E-Justice System Usage: The Case of Ghana's Judicial Sector"; Ahmed et al., "The Role of Digital Transformation in Fostering Transparency: An e-Court System Case Study."

<sup>91</sup> Acheampong and Cann, "Assessing Public Trust in Ghana's Courts"; World Justice Project, "WJP Rule of Law Index | Ghana Insights."

<sup>92</sup> Damalie and Karanfiller, "The Impact of Information and Communication Technology and Institutional Quality on Social Sustainability: Evidence From West African Countries"; Oduro and Agbevade, "The Role of E-Governance in Promoting Government Accountability and Transparency in Ghana."

<sup>93</sup> Denney, *Justice and Security Reform*; Jackson, "Whose Justice in Sierra Leone? Power, Security and Justice in Post-Conflict Reconstruction."

<sup>94</sup> World Bank Group, "World Bank – Sierra Leone Justice Sector and Governance Assessments"; UNDP, "UNDP Sierra Leone Rule of Law and Justice Sector Reports."

<sup>95</sup> Sesay, "Informal Institutional Change and the Place of Traditional Justice in Sierra Leone's Post-War Reconstruction"; Marrah, "The Protector Becomes the Predator: The Perception of Judicial Corruption and Demand for Judicial Accountability in Sierra Leone."

The comparison further demonstrates that judicial modernization alone is insufficient to produce substantive improvements in access to justice or citizen security. Rather, reform effectiveness depends on the interaction between institutional governance, technological capacity, procedural accessibility, and implementation consistency.<sup>96</sup>In both cases, institutional legitimacy appears closely linked to citizens’ perceptions of procedural fairness, enforcement reliability, and equitable access to legal protection.<sup>97</sup>To strengthen analytical comparability, Table 2 evaluates the two countries across standardized Judicial Reform and Human-Security Indicators derived from the study’s conceptual framework.

**Table 2. Comparative Judicial Reform and Human-Security Indicators in Ghana and Sierra Leone**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Ghana</b>	<b>Sierra Leone</b>	<b>Human-Security Implication</b>
<b>Court Digitalization</b>	Nationwide e-filing and virtual hearing systems implemented in major courts	Limited digitalization; predominantly manual court administration	Uneven digital access affects procedural accessibility
<b>Case Processing Efficiency</b>	Reduced case backlog in urban jurisdictions; faster administrative processing through automated systems	Persistent case delays and frequent adjournments due to administrative and infrastructural limitations	Delayed adjudication increases legal insecurity and procedural exclusion
<b>Judicial Independence</b>	Greater institutional autonomy and structured judicial oversight mechanisms	Continued dependence on limited fiscal and administrative resources	Weak institutional autonomy undermines public confidence
<b>Enforcement Capacity</b>	Comparatively stronger enforcement of judicial decisions	Weak enforcement and inconsistent implementation of court judgments	Limited enforcement reduces effectiveness of legal protection
<b>Public Trust in Judiciary</b>	Moderate institutional trust reflected in governance and survey assessments	Low public confidence linked to corruption and inefficiency perceptions	Public distrust weakens institutional legitimacy

<sup>96</sup> Donais and Barbak, “The Rule of Law, the Local Turn, and Re-Thinking Accountability in Security Sector Reform Processes”; Djuraev et al., “The Impact of Digitization on Legal Systems in Developing Countries.”

<sup>97</sup> Dreier and Lake, “Institutional Legitimacy in Sub-Saharan Africa”; Mohd Sokri, “Rethinking Judicial Legitimacy: A Process-Based Perspective from Malaysian Corruption Trials.”

<b>Legal-Aid Accessibility</b>	Expanding legal-support mechanisms in urban areas	Limited legal-aid coverage, particularly in rural districts	Unequal legal access increases vulnerability of marginalized populations
<b>Transparency Mechanisms</b>	Public reporting systems and procedural monitoring increasingly institutionalized	Limited procedural transparency and inconsistent public access to judicial information	Procedural opacity contributes to perceptions of arbitrariness
<b>Infrastructure Capacity</b>	Relatively stronger ICT and court infrastructure in major cities	Inadequate electricity, internet access, and court infrastructure in several regions	Infrastructural inequality constrains justice delivery
<b>Rural Accessibility</b>	Improved procedural access in some regions but still uneven	Significant territorial barriers to court access in rural communities	Geographic exclusion limits substantive access to justice

**Source: Author’s reconstruction (2026).**

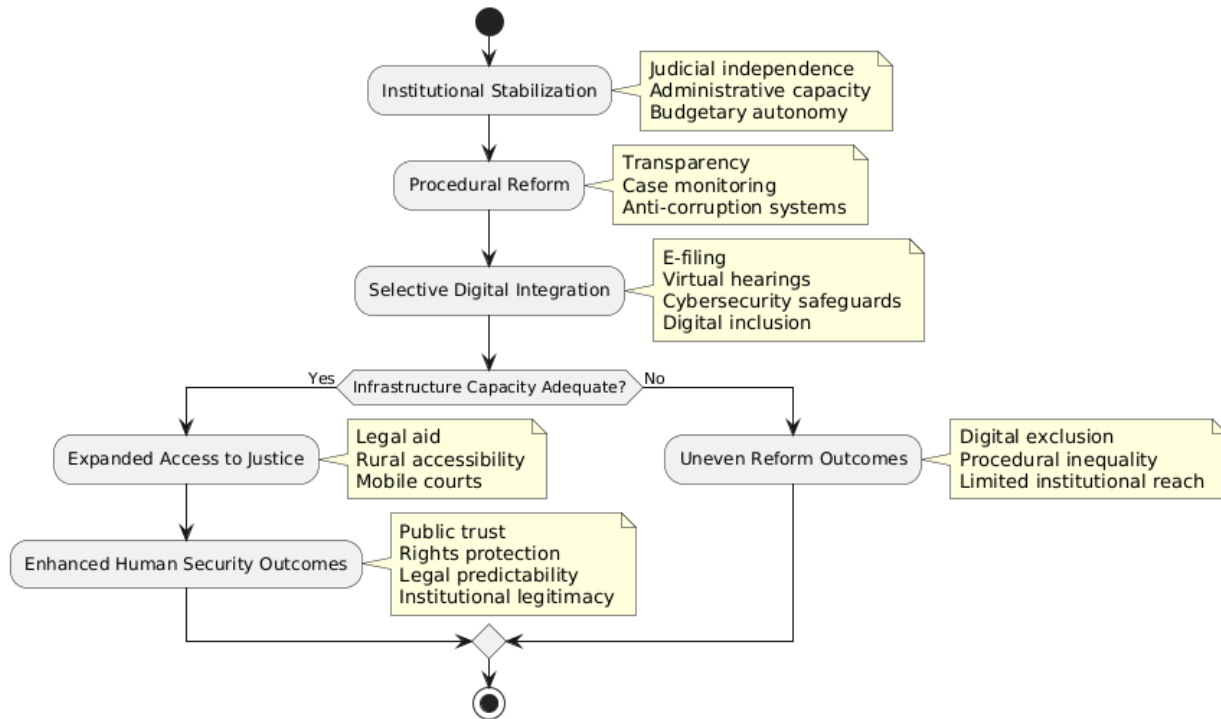
The comparative evidence therefore suggests that the relationship between judicial reform and human security is institutionally contingent rather than linear. Reforms are more likely to generate meaningful human-security outcomes where judicial modernization is supported by administrative capacity, procedural inclusion, technological accessibility, and consistent enforcement structures. Conversely, reforms implemented under conditions of institutional fragility and infrastructural inequality may produce limited or uneven gains despite formal modernization efforts.

## V. Policy Recommendations

The comparative findings suggest that judicial reform contributes to human security only when institutional modernization is accompanied by implementation capacity, procedural accessibility, and socially inclusive governance structures. Consequently, policy reform strategies in Sierra Leone and Ghana should move beyond formal institutional redesign and focus on the practical conditions necessary for sustainable and equitable justice delivery. Rather than treating judicial reform as a purely technical process, reform initiatives must account for fiscal limitations, infrastructural disparities, administrative capacity, and patterns of social exclusion that shape access to justice across different population groups. Figure 3 outlines the institutional pathways through which judicial reform may contribute to human-security outcomes. The model

demonstrates that sustainable reform depends on sequential institutional development, including administrative stabilization, procedural transparency, technological capacity, and inclusive access-to-justice mechanisms.

**Figure 3 — Institutional Pathways for Human-Security-Oriented Judicial Reform**



Source: Author’s illustration (2025).

**Strengthening Institutional Independence and Administrative Capacity**

In Sierra Leone, institutional autonomy remains constrained by limited fiscal resources, administrative dependency, and uneven enforcement capacity.<sup>98</sup>Sustainable reform therefore depends on strengthening judicial budgeting mechanisms, improving court administration, and expanding professional judicial training alongside formal legal safeguards. Merit-based appointment systems and transparent oversight procedures may improve institutional credibility, but implementation will remain limited without adequate financial support and administrative

<sup>98</sup> Denney, *Justice and Security Reform*; World Bank Group, “World Bank – Sierra Leone Justice Sector and Governance Assessments.”

coordination. Reform sequencing is therefore critical: institutional stabilization and resource allocation must precede more ambitious modernization initiatives.

### **Context-Sensitive Digital Justice Reform**

Digital judicial reform should be approached as a gradual institutional process rather than a universal solution to justice-sector inefficiency. Ghana's experience demonstrates that electronic filing systems, automated case management, and virtual hearings may improve procedural efficiency and administrative monitoring under relatively stronger infrastructural conditions.<sup>99</sup> However, the comparative findings also reveal significant limitations associated with uneven internet penetration, unreliable electricity infrastructure, digital illiteracy, and unequal territorial access to technological services.<sup>100</sup>

In Sierra Leone particularly, large-scale digitalization initiatives may produce uneven outcomes if implemented without parallel investment in telecommunications infrastructure, judicial training, and public digital accessibility. Rural populations and economically marginalized groups may remain excluded from technologically mediated justice systems where internet access and digital competence remain limited.<sup>101</sup> Policymakers should therefore prioritize phased and hybrid reform models that combine selective digital modernization with continued support for physically accessible court services. Investments in cybersecurity, system maintenance, and institutional technical capacity are also necessary to ensure long-term sustainability and public confidence in digital judicial platforms.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Ahmed et al., "The Role of Digital Transformation in Fostering Transparency: An e-Court System Case Study"; Ashong Elliot, Effah, and Boateng, "Institutional Influence on E-Justice System Usage: The Case of Ghana's Judicial Sector."

<sup>100</sup> Damalie and Karanfiller, "The Impact of Information and Communication Technology and Institutional Quality on Social Sustainability: Evidence From West African Countries"; Djuraev et al., "The Impact of Digitization on Legal Systems in Developing Countries."

<sup>101</sup> Teremetskyi et al., "Access To Justice And Legal Aid For Vulnerable Groups: New Challenges Caused By The Covid-19 Pandemic"; Tchawouo Mbiada, "Structural Barriers and the Erosion of Access to Justice in the South African Labour Court and Labour Appeal Court."

<sup>102</sup> Mu'adil Faizin et al., "Redefining Consent in Digital Contracts through Electronic Signatures in Islamic Law," *International Journal of Islamic Thought and Humanities* 4, no. 2 (October 7, 2025): 384–93, <https://doi.org/10.54298/ijith.v4i2.637>.

### **Expanding Inclusive Access to Justice**

The findings indicate that procedural accessibility remains central to the relationship between judicial reform and human security. Expanding legal-aid services, mobile courts, and community-based legal support mechanisms would help reduce barriers faced by rural and low-income populations. However, implementation feasibility depends heavily on financial sustainability and institutional coordination. Partnerships between state institutions, bar associations, civil-society organizations, and regional governance bodies may therefore provide more realistic pathways for expanding legal accessibility in resource-constrained environments.

The integration of customary and informal dispute-resolution mechanisms also requires careful institutional balancing. While customary systems remain socially significant in many communities, their incorporation into formal justice frameworks should occur within rights-based safeguards designed to prevent discriminatory or exclusionary practices.<sup>103</sup> Consequently, reform efforts should prioritize coordination rather than wholesale replacement of existing informal justice structures.

### **Anti-Corruption and Institutional Accountability**

Persistent perceptions of corruption continue to undermine institutional legitimacy in both countries, particularly in Sierra Leone.<sup>104</sup> Strengthening accountability therefore requires enforceable monitoring systems rather than symbolic oversight mechanisms alone. Transparent case-allocation procedures, publication of judicial-performance indicators, whistleblower protections, and independent disciplinary mechanisms may improve procedural accountability and reduce opportunities for administrative abuse. However, these reforms depend on political support and institutional enforcement capacity. Without credible implementation structures, anti-corruption reforms risk remaining formally adopted but operationally ineffective.

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<sup>103</sup> Sesay, “Informal Institutional Change and the Place of Traditional Justice in Sierra Leone’s Post-War Reconstruction”; Jackson, “Whose Justice in Sierra Leone? Power, Security and Justice in Post-Conflict Reconstruction.”

<sup>104</sup> Transparency International, “Transparency International – Corruption Perceptions and Governance Reports”; Marrah, “The Protector Becomes the Predator: The Perception of Judicial Corruption and Demand for Judicial Accountability in Sierra Leone.”

## Regional Cooperation and Reform Sustainability

Regional cooperation through ECOWAS, the African Union, and international justice-sector partnerships may support knowledge exchange, technical assistance, and institutional capacity-building across West Africa.<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, externally supported reform initiatives frequently encounter sustainability challenges when domestic institutional ownership remains weak.<sup>106</sup> Reform programs should therefore emphasize locally adaptable implementation strategies rather than externally standardized governance models. Long-term reform effectiveness depends not only on technical modernization but also on political commitment, administrative continuity, and responsiveness to local socio-legal conditions.

Overall, the findings suggest that judicial reform contributes to human security most effectively when reforms are institutionally feasible, procedurally inclusive, and adapted to the infrastructural and governance realities of developing democratic contexts.

## VI. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between judicial reform, access to justice, and human security through a comparative analysis of Ghana and Sierra Leone between 2010 and 2024. The findings demonstrate that judicial reform contributes to human security not simply through formal institutional modernization, but through the development of accessible, enforceable, and procedurally legitimate justice systems capable of reducing legal insecurity and strengthening institutional trust. The comparative evidence indicates that the effectiveness of judicial reform depends heavily on broader institutional conditions, including administrative capacity, enforcement reliability, technological infrastructure, and procedural accessibility.

The analysis further demonstrates that judicial modernization alone does not automatically generate equitable human-security outcomes. Ghana's comparatively stronger performance reflects not only investments in digital judicial infrastructure and procedural reform, but also relatively greater institutional capacity and implementation consistency. At the same time, the findings show that digital justice reforms remain constrained by uneven technological access,

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<sup>105</sup> Alabi, "ECOWAS Court and Emerging Community Legal Order in West Africa."

<sup>106</sup> Donais and Barbak, "The Rule of Law, the Local Turn, and Re-Thinking Accountability in Security Sector Reform Processes"; Denney, *Justice and Security Reform*.

infrastructural disparities, and socio-economic inequalities. In Sierra Leone, post-conflict institutional fragility, limited fiscal capacity, weak enforcement mechanisms, and restricted territorial access to courts continue to constrain the transformative potential of judicial reform. Consequently, formal legal reforms that are weakly implemented or socially exclusionary are unlikely to produce substantive improvements in legal protection or public confidence.

Conceptually, the study contributes to comparative governance and socio-legal scholarship by integrating Human Security Framework and Access to Justice Theory into a unified institutional analysis. The article demonstrates that access to justice functions as the critical mediating mechanism through which judicial reform shapes broader human-security outcomes. In doing so, the study moves beyond state-centric and purely administrative approaches to judicial reform by emphasizing the relationship between institutional legitimacy, procedural inclusion, and citizen security within developing democratic contexts.

Several limitations should nevertheless be acknowledged. First, the analysis relies substantially on secondary institutional and governance data due to the limited availability of comprehensive judicial-performance datasets, particularly in Sierra Leone. Second, the study focuses primarily on formal judicial institutions and therefore does not fully capture the role of informal and customary justice systems, which remain significant components of legal governance in many West African communities. Third, variations in data availability and institutional reporting standards between the two countries create constraints for direct comparative measurement across some indicators.

Future research may therefore benefit from incorporating field-based empirical methods, expanded quantitative governance indicators, and closer examination of the interaction between formal and informal justice systems in shaping human-security outcomes. Nevertheless, the findings underscore a broader regional implication: judicial reform is most likely to strengthen human security when institutional modernization is accompanied by procedural accessibility, social inclusion, and sustained implementation capacity.

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