



Centre for  
Human Rights and  
Restorative Justice

# HISTORY REFERENCES

Truth Commissions

[Abstract](#)

Notes on references to history in the truth commission reports.

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## Reports Analyzed

The following truth commissions were analyzed in regards to their discussions and number of references to history using NVivo software:

### Asia

1. Indonesia (2008)
2. South Korea (2010)
3. Timor-Lest (2013)

### Africa

4. South Africa (1998)
5. Nigeria (2002)
6. Sierra Leone (2004)
7. Ghana (2004)
8. Liberia (2009)
9. Mauritius (2011)
10. Kenya (2013)

### The Americas

11. Chile (1996)
12. Guatemala (1999)
13. Grenada (2006)
14. United States of America (2006)
15. Canada (2015)

## Summary of Findings

The following report summarizes the themes and coding references to history in the analyzed truth commission reports.

### History Themes

History was referenced in the truth commission reports in the following ways:

- historical context, background, or discussion of past events, colonialism, crimes, etc.
  - see: Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Canada, Chile, Grenada, Guatemala, US, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Mauritius, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa
- history as a contested site of knowledge (e.g., state histories versus forgotten or silence histories)
  - see: Canada, US, Mauritius
- the idea of true or inaccurate history
  - see: Timor-Leste, Canada, Chile, Grenada, Guatemala, US, Kenya, Mauritius, Sierra Leone, South Africa
- history as something to be learned from to avoid repeating past mistakes
  - see: South Korea, Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Canada
- the role institutions (e.g., archives and museums) in defining historical authority and accuracy
  - see: Canada, Mauritius, South Africa
- historical legacy
  - see: Canada, Chile, Guatemala, US, Kenya, Liberia, Mauritius, Nigeria, South Africa
- examining the past to determine accountability for human rights violations
  - see: Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Canada, Guatemala, US, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Sierra Leone, South Africa
- the idea that history needs to be rewritten
  - see: South Korea, Canada, Mauritius
- a need for increased history education and expanded history curriculums
  - see: Indonesia, Canada, Grenada, Guatemala, US, Ghana, Mauritius
- a need for broader practices and subjects of historical commemoration
  - see: Canada, Grenada, Liberia, Mauritius, Nigeria, Sierra Leone
- a divide between professional and public history
  - see: Canada, Mauritius
- historical land disputes
  - see: Kenya, Liberia, Mauritius, Nigeria, South Africa

The following reports have a chapter or section dedicated to contextual or background history:

- Canada
- Ghana
- Grenada

- Indonesia
- Kenya
- Liberia
- Mauritius
- Nigeria
- Sierra Leone
- South Africa
- Timor-Leste

## History and Truth

History was referenced in regards to truth in several ways:

- true, inaccurate, or genuine history
  - see: Timor-Leste, Canada, Chile, Grenada, Guatemala, US, Kenya, Mauritius, Sierra Leone, South Africa
- lost or forgotten voices of history being uncovered or revealed
  - see: Canada, US, Kenya, Mauritius, South Africa
- the need for truth from those who experienced the past
  - see: Timor-Leste, Canada, Mauritius
- countries needing to know the true history in order to move forward
  - see: Indonesia, US, Sierra Leone, South Africa
- a need to challenge state versions of the past and reveal the whole history
  - see: Canada, Mauritius, South Africa
- truth of the past being able to bring people together to heal
  - see: South Korea, Indonesia, Canada, Chile, Grenada, South Africa
- that we need truth of the past to learn from it
  - see: Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Canada, Grenada, Guatemala, US, Kenya
- we need to the true history to determine accountability for human rights violations
  - see: Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Canada, Sierra Leone, South Africa
- the idea that truth commissions reveal the true history of events
  - see: US

The following reports did not explicitly discuss history and truth, but did note the importance of determining what happened in the past in order to determine accountability or to heal and unite the nation:

- Ghana
- Liberia
- Nigeria

Several reports also noted that not everyone was prepared to discuss the truth of the past, with some preferring to ignore it or feelings resentful or ashamed about discussing it:

- Ghana
- Grenada
- Indonesia

The Indonesia report also noted a need to determine a truth of the past that all parties involved could agree upon.

## Number of References to History

The following reports made the most references to history in the content of their reports:

- Mauritius – 549
- Canada – 255
- South Africa – 157

All 3 reports shared the following:

- a detailed discussion of historical background
- a discussion of colonialism and its legacy
- a discussion of the role of archives and museums in preserving history
- the need for improved history curriculums
- the need for broader historical commemoration practices and monuments
- the need to reveal the true history and incorporate lost voices so that reconciliation can truly occur
- large pdf page count

The following reports made the least references to history in the content of their reports:

- South Korea – 2
- Guatemala – 16
- Chile – 19

All 3 reports shared the following:

- a brief historical background or context
- no chapter or section dedicated to history
- the assertion of the importance of revealing the truth of the past in order to learn from it and heal the nation

Additionally, both the South Korea and Guatemala reports were brief compared to the other reports analyzed (8 and 82 pages respectively).<sup>1</sup>

See charts 1-2 for a comparison of the number of references to history in the truth commission reports.

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<sup>1</sup> For comparison, the Mauritius Report is 2887 pages, the Liberia report is 491 pages, and the US Report is 563 pages.

Chart 1: References to History in the Truth Commission Reports

The following chart provides a breakdown of the number of broad references to history in the 15 truth commissions analyzed for this report. The y-axis represents the number of references to history, and the x-axis represents the truth commission reports. The data sets from left to right read the most to the least references to history. The chart shows that the reports for Mauritius, Canada, and South Africa make the most references to history, and that the reports for Chile, Grenada, and South Korea make the least references to history.

This chart only includes references to history in the content of the truth commission reports. References to history in bibliographies, notes, or chapter headers were not included as they had no bearing on discussions of history in the report and often skewed the number of references to history in the report. For example, including bibliography, chapter headers, and notes, the Liberia report had 74 references to history. However, within the content of the report itself, history was only discussed 54 times.

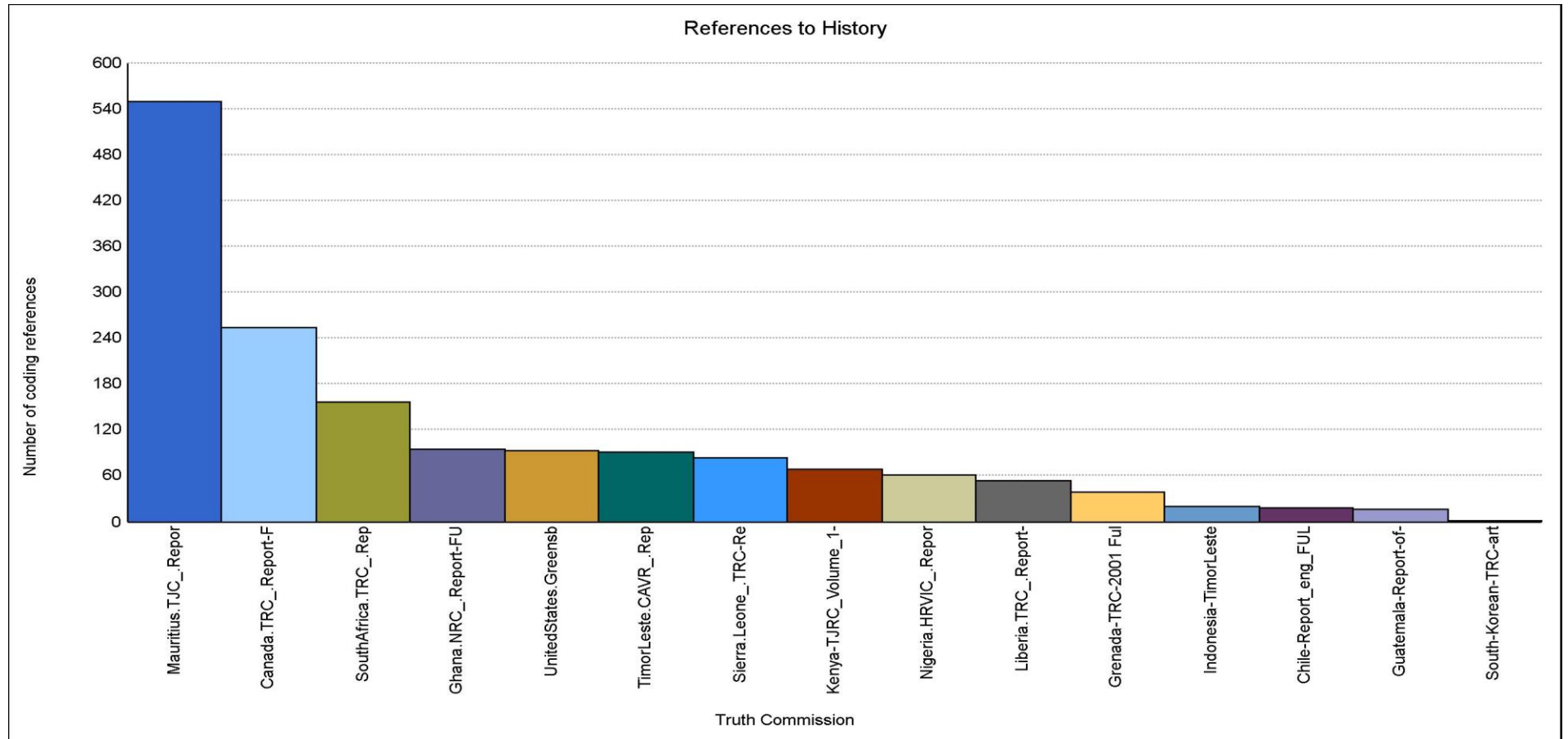
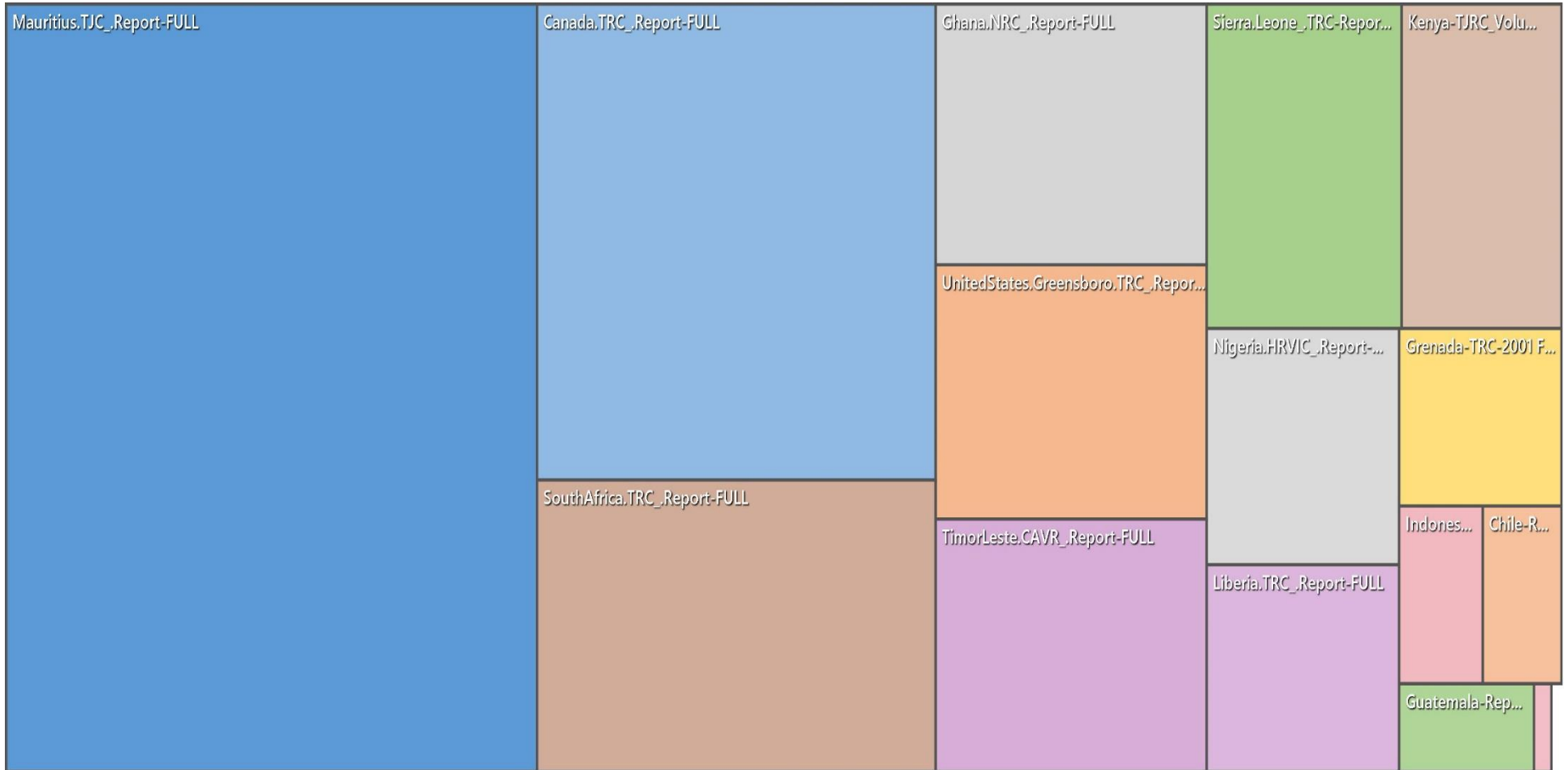




Chart 2: History Hierarchy Coding Comparisons Chart

The chart is a diagram that compares the number of coding of broad references to history in the 15 truth commissions analyzed for this report. References are scaled by rectangle size – the bigger the rectangle the more references it has compared to smaller rectangles.



## Data Visualization

The following section contains links to data visualization of history references by truth commission report created using NVivo software. Data visualizations include:

- **word frequency clouds** – a visual way to show the top 30 words referenced in the report. More frequently occurring words appear in larger fonts and less frequently appearing words in progressively smaller fonts
- **word trees** – display NVivo search results for the term history as a tree with branches representing the various contexts in which the word occurs<sup>2</sup>
- **hierarchy coding charts** – a diagram that shows hierarchical data as a set of nested rectangles of varying sizes. Here it is used to represent the total references to history in comparison to the amount of coding for references to history organized by child nodes. References are scaled by rectangle size – the bigger the rectangle the more references it has compared to smaller rectangles.

### Africa

#### Ghana

- word frequency cloud
- excel sheet of word frequency cloud findings
- history hierarchy coding chart
- excel sheet of history hierarchy coding chart results
- history

#### Kenya

- word frequency cloud
- excel sheet of word frequency cloud findings
- history hierarchy coding chart
- excel sheet of history hierarchy coding chart results
- history

#### Liberia

- word frequency cloud
- excel sheet of word frequency cloud findings
- history hierarchy coding chart
- excel sheet of history hierarchy coding chart results
- history

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<sup>2</sup> NVivo software can only edit word trees by changing the central search term and branch sizes. Word trees includes references from bibliography, headers, and notes that cannot be edited out using NVivo software. Researchers will need to manually remove unsightly branches using editing software (e.g., paint, photoshop, etc.).

## Mauritius

- word frequency cloud
- excel sheet of word frequency cloud findings
- history hierarchy coding chart
- excel sheet of history hierarchy coding chart results
- history

## Nigeria

- word frequency cloud
- excel sheet of word frequency cloud findings
- history hierarchy coding chart
- excel sheet of history hierarchy coding chart results
- history

## Sierra Leone

- word frequency cloud
- excel sheet of word frequency cloud findings
- history hierarchy coding chart
- excel sheet of history hierarchy coding chart results
- history

## South Africa

- word frequency cloud
- excel sheet of word frequency cloud findings
- history hierarchy coding chart
- excel sheet of history hierarchy coding chart results
- history

## The Americas

### Canada

- word frequency cloud
- excel sheet of word frequency cloud findings
- history hierarchy coding chart
- excel sheet of history hierarchy coding chart results
- history

## Chile

- word frequency cloud
- excel sheet of word frequency cloud findings
- history hierarchy coding chart
- excel sheet of history hierarchy coding chart results
- history

## Grenada

- word frequency cloud
- excel sheet of word frequency cloud findings
- history hierarchy coding chart
- excel sheet of history hierarchy coding chart results
- history

## Guatemala

- word frequency cloud
- excel sheet of word frequency cloud findings
- history hierarchy coding chart
- excel sheet of history hierarchy coding chart results
- history

## US

- word frequency cloud
- excel sheet of word frequency cloud findings
- history hierarchy coding chart
- excel sheet of history hierarchy coding chart results
- history

## Asia

## Indonesia

- word frequency cloud
- excel sheet of word frequency cloud findings

- history hierarchy coding chart
- excel sheet of history hierarchy coding chart results
- history

### South Korea<sup>3</sup>

- word frequency cloud
- excel sheet of history hierarchy coding chart results
- history

### Timor-Leste

- word frequency cloud
- excel sheet of word frequency cloud findings
- history hierarchy coding chart
- excel sheet of history hierarchy coding chart results
- history

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<sup>3</sup> The South Korea report had too few references to history to create a hierarchy coding chart.