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The Bureaucracy of Reparations and Political Engagement

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Countries increasingly implement transitional justice measures following civil wars. These policies include prosecuting perpetrators of human rights violations, establishing truth commissions to reveal past abuses, providing victims with symbolic and administrative reparations, and implementing institutional reforms to prevent future abuses.[1] More than forty countries have created truth commissions, including Chile, Guatemala, South Africa, and Rwanda. Reparations programs have provided benefits to victims in Peru, Colombia, the Philippines, and Canada. As of 2016, at least fourteen states had managed victims' registries, among them Argentina, South Africa, Sierra Leone, Peru, Nepal, and Spain.[2] The international community spends "hundreds of millions of dollars" each year supporting transitional justice processes, including but not limited to "ad hoc tribunals, trials in national courts, commissions, reparations, and rule of law initiatives in transitioning countries."[3]

The success of transitional justice institutions depends, in part, on interactions with victims. Truth commissions rely on victims to share testimony and participate in depositions, where they recount experiences of abuse and violence. Institutional reforms, such as modifications to the electoral system or the establishment of more inclusive state institutions, often necessitate citizen input through public fora, plebiscites, or referenda. Reparations programs typically require victims to submit declarations and supporting evidence to the state in order to determine their eligibility for benefits.[4] Despite the prevalence of transitional justice institutions in post-conflict and post-authoritarian environments,[5] and the frequency of victims' interactions with them, we know little about what effects these interactions have on victims.

This article studies whether victims' contact with state bureaucracies that provide reparations affects victims' political engagement. A large literature has shown that victims tend to participate more than non-victims by voting, contacting political

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leaders, joining communal organizations, and participating in protests.[6] Studying political engagement by victims in post-conflict contexts with large victim populations—as in Iraq, Sierra Leone, Uganda, or Colombia—is crucial: any increases in voting or community engagement attributable to interactions with state bureaucracies providing reparations may deepen civic engagement.

We argue that victims' interactions with state bureaucracies providing reparations could increase political engagement via multiple mechanisms. First, these interactions produce information for victims about how the state functions and how to achieve both individual and collective goals vis-à-vis the state. If these interactions yield successful outcomes—gaining access to benefits—positive feedback loops and self-reinforcing behavior might motivate additional investments in political action. Second, and in contrast, victims' frustration and anger with the inefficiencies or injustice of reparations programs may motivate them to voice their grievances, seek redress, or demand change. Others may respond by disengaging altogether. Third, participating in reparations programs may reduce transaction and search costs related to political engagement. Eligibility requirements for reparations often demand that victims gather legal documents needed for other political activities, such as voter registration.[7] Finally, given that the state claims unique authority to grant agency and citizenship,[8] interactions with reparations institutions may activate victims' political identities.

We study this relationship using two waves of a large, original panel survey in Colombia. Our survey was fielded in the sixteen regions prioritized for peace agreement implementation following the signing of a 2016 peace agreement between the Colombian government and the country's largest rebel group, the FARC-EP. These regions—"Programs for Development with a Territorial Focus" (PDETs, for its acronym in Spanish)—were determined given historic exposure to violence and poverty levels, and together cover 36 percent of Colombian territory, an area larger than Japan, Norway, or Zimbabwe. The first wave of the survey, implemented in late 2019, included 12,052 individuals, while the second wave, implemented in summer 2021, included 11,777 respondents, of whom nearly two-thirds participated in the first wave.

The relationship between contact with reparations bureaucracies and political engagement is difficult to causally identify in part because victimization appears to increase political engagement,[9] and because some victims are targeted based on their political behaviors.[10] To overcome these challenges, we compare victims who interacted with Colombia's reparations program and registered with the country's ambitious Unified Victims' registry (RUV)—which is required to gain access to individual administrative reparations—to those who identify as victims but did not register. We also compare registered victims to non-victims and control for any observable, systematic differences between them. We find that newly registered victims—those who first interacted with the state's reparations bureaucracy between the first and second survey wave— are more likely to contact a local leader or a politician in the prior six months and to report plans to vote in the next election. These results are consistent when using each wave of our survey data separately. We find some evidence that registered victims are also more likely to report grassroots organizational participation, but these results hold only when analyzing

the first and second wave data separately, not using the first-differences analysis. We then employ mediation analysis to understand whether this effect is driven solely by victimization, or registration with the RUV. Victimization accounts more for engagement, but registration is also independently associated with increases in intent to vote.

Our study contributes to research on the legacies of violence,[11] post-conflict peacebuilding,[12] transitional justice,[13] and the relationship between violence and political engagement.[14] Existing work has not examined how interactions with the state bureaucracy of reparations, specifically, and transitional justice institutions, more broadly, chart diverse paths for victims' political participation. Explaining victims' engagement with politics—and how the state shapes such engagement through transitional justice efforts—has important implications for the consolidation of democracy and regime transitions following civil wars and the potential success or collapse of peace agreements. Engagement could empower victims, fostering a sense of justice and inclusion while building trust in state institutions, all of which could help contribute to more stable transitions to national peace.

Theoretical framework

Transitional justice measures seek to provide redress for human rights abuses occurring during armed conflict, authoritarian rule, or other periods of systemic oppression or violence.[15] These measures are widespread globally[16] and, while there is variation in how they are applied, some core elements unite them.[17] Prosecutions of human rights abusers are typically carried out to punish perpetrators and to deter future abuses.[18] Truth commissions are tasked with discovering and publicly revealing past violations of human rights.[19] Broad-based institutional reforms—including power-sharing,[20] security sector reform,[21] and electoral reforms[22]—seek to protect minority rights and transform state institutions that perpetrated or allowed abuses to occur. Reparations for victims are frequently granted to acknowledge and repair the consequences of past human rights violations.[23]

Many transitional institutions require repeated contact with victims to function and achieve their goals. Given that "transitional leaders must build consensus across deep divisions and with previously excluded citizens through national dialogue, public consultations, and civic education,"[24] engagement with victims is important to ensure the legitimacy of institutional reforms. Truth commissions require that victims provide testimony and participate in depositions,[25] discussing their experiences of violence and expectations for future redress. The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for example, included public hearings, which involved amplifying victims' voices via town hall meetings and gatherings in school assembly halls.[26]

Reparations programs—the focus of this article—ask victims to provide declarations to the state, along with supporting evidence, to determine their eligibility for symbolic and material benefits. Once officially recognized as victims, individuals and communities (if reparations are collective) are entitled to symbolic recognition, financial

compensation, in-kind support, and professional training for the labor market. Reparations for human rights abuses have been widely implemented. In 1988, the German government allocated 125 million USD for reparations, allowing Holocaust survivors to receive monthly payments in perpetuity. Sierra Leone adopted a more limited reparations program, which provided interim relief payments to almost 30,000 victims of its civil war.[27] In 2003, Guatemala created the National Reparation Programme (PNR) for victims of its armed conflict.[28]

Given the material and symbolic benefits associated with many of these measures, victims have incentives to engage with state agencies responsible for implementing transitional justice policies.[29] Yet institutional fragmentation over providing reparations frequently means multiple bureaucratic requirements that vary within and across transitional justice institutions: victims may have to engage many times with multiple agencies, all with uncertain payoffs.[30] To ensure that states provide the benefits to which they are entitled, victims may bring lawsuits to compel the government to provide them. And to gain access to even the most basic information about how their reparations requests are proceeding, victims may need to file Freedom of Information Act-like requests.

What effects might victims' contact with reparations institutions have on their political engagement? We propose four mechanisms predicting greater political engagement stemming from such contact and address each in turn: positive feedback loops, anger, lower transaction costs, and empowerment.

First, if interactions with reparations institutions reveal state processes to be fair and transparent, this may increase faith in and satisfaction with the state.[31] Success in obtaining reparations—whether material or symbolic—can create positive feedback loops of trust that motivate further political action. After receiving reparations, individuals may be more likely to "adopt an orientation to government that the political game is open, fair, and winnable, and thus to participate in conventional forms of participation at high levels."[32] This could create a virtuous cycle: citizens' active participation improves government performance, further enhancing trust in government.[33]

Second, if interactions with the state bureaucracy of reparations are characterized by inefficiencies and injustices, victims may become mobilized out of frustration and anger, seeking change. When individuals feel frustrated or dissatisfied with the status quo, they are more likely to participate in political activities, such as voting, protest, or advocacy, to voice their grievances or demand change.[34] Anger in particular has been shown to mobilize individuals to vote.[35] However, frustration can also lead to disengagement or produce heterogeneous effects, where some victims become politically activated while others become deactivated. [36]

Third, victims' participation in reparations programs can lower transaction and search costs associated with political engagement,[37] decreasing barriers or costs they may face when undertaking political activities. The path to obtaining reparations often requires that victims gather legal documents,[38] which can also be beneficial for other political activities like voter registration. Given that attending political rallies or meetings may require significant travel costs—particularly for low-income citizens from rural areas—undertaking administrative tasks in capital cities related to transitional justice

processes may also reduce the marginal costs of engaging in such political activities, which typically require physical presence in capital cities. Requesting documents from the state to legitimate claims before reparations institutions also frequently involves visiting buildings close to other offices in capital cities that can help reduce the costs associated with formal political participation.

Finally, engagement with reparations authorities may empower victims as political subjects.[39] State authorities often claim the capacity to confer agency and citizenship to individuals.[40] Public policies "endow some kinds of demands with political legitimacy and therefore promote greater political involvement."[41] Social welfare policies that clearly define a target population help mobilize political action by constructing "advantaged" positions that signal beneficiaries' value as citizens and activate political identities along the cleavages signaled by eligibility criteria.[42] Reparations programs that define the population of victims may therefore both dignify victims and grant them political recognition, activating the "victim" part of their identity and motivating them to become politically engaged. Such programs may also create "hierarchies of victimhood," as documented in post-war Bosnia and Rwanda, which can either mobilize or demobilize victims, depending on one's place in the hierarchy.[43]

Given these possible pathways to engagement, our core hypothesis is that contact with transitional justice institutions that provide reparations—the state "bureaucracy of victimhood"[44]—should increase victims' political engagement. While we are unable to adjudicate which of the mechanisms might produce these effects, we assess the observable implications of each to begin that process.

Some of our theoretical mechanisms may be unique to victims' engagement with reparations programs, as opposed to other transitional justice institutions. For example, transitional justice courts may not require that victims gather relevant documentation used for voter registration purposes, in line with the transaction cost mechanism. We do not expect that victims' participation in truth commissions would necessarily produce information on how to navigate state bureaucracies in ways that would increase future participation in political activities. At the same time, frustration and anger with both the process and outcome of engagement with these other transitional justice institutions could produce frustration and motivate redress. Future work could study the conditions under which these mechanisms apply to additional transitional justice mechanisms beyond reparations.

Setting

Before describing the survey and our empirical approach, we provide a brief overview of the Colombian context. The Colombian civil war is among the longest in the post-World War II period. While it dates to the formation of the FARC-EP in the early 1960s, the FARC was relegated to remote areas until the 1980s, rarely confronting state forces.[45] In the 1980s, the FARC expanded its role in the cocaine trade, eventually confronting a member of the Medellín cartel over taxing coca crops that helped revive counterinsurgent

militias.[46] Though the FARC participated in peace talks in the early 1980s, and formed a legal political party as a result, its insurgent army increased in strength. The 1990s saw the group expand its territorial presence, sometimes directly challenging the Colombian Armed Forces.

Eventually, counterinsurgent militias unified under the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) umbrella in 1997 and ousted the FARC from many regions via massacres and mass civilian displacements.[47] Over time, the Armed Forces became more effective at fighting the FARC, sometimes in tandem with the AUC. In the early 2000s, the military began targeting high-ranking FARC members for assassination: after losing several leaders, the group entered into secret talks with the Juan Manuel Santos administration in 2011.

Between 2011 and 2016, government and FARC representatives and international guarantors negotiated a peace agreement comprised of five pillars (plus details regarding the implementation of the agreement): agrarian/land reform, political participation, illicit crops, transitional justice and reparations for victims, and demobilization and reincorporation of ex-combatants. Signed by the parties on September 26, 2016, the agreement narrowly failed to win popular support in a plebiscite on October 2, 2016. The parties returned to the negotiating table to discuss requests from opposition politicians and then signed a modified agreement in November 2016. The war is estimated to have caused 250,000 deaths since the 1960s.[48] Armed groups and the Armed Forces of Colombia also displaced at least seven million civilians, engaged in sexual violence, extorted households, kidnapped, and forcibly disappeared and tortured civilians.

Transitional Justice in Colombia The peace agreement with the FARC created new institutions to empower victims of the conflict, including a truth commission and transitional justice court to prosecute human rights violations during the conflict. These new bureaucracies added to and replaced those created in 1994 to register internally displaced people (IDPs).[49] The creation of the IDP registry was slow and adjusted every few years, but was codified in 1997 by Law 387, which also guaranteed the right to humanitarian assistance and reparations.[50] In 2005, the "Justice and Peace Law" was adopted, which, in addition to providing a framework for paramilitary organizations to demobilize, with confessions provided by their leaders, also guaranteed reparations for victims.[51] These processes were then supplanted by the 2011 Victims' Law.

The 2011 Victims' Law created a new bureaucracy—la Unidad para las Víctimas, or Victims' Unit—to centralize the state's policies to recognize victims and offer them reparations.[52] The law defines victims as "those people who individually or collectively suffered harm due to acts that occurred after January 1, 1985, as a consequence of infractions of International Humanitarian Law or grave violations of international human rights norms that occurred within the context of the internal armed conflict."[53] Anyone victimized by any armed actor in the war (including the state), and regardless of need, may register as a victim and receive associated benefits. Victims initially receive three months of food and housing assistance as "humanitarian assistance," and

then become eligible for reparations. As of October 2019—when our survey's first wave was fielded—8.9 million individuals were recognized by the state as victims, roughly 20 percent of Colombia's total population.[54] 90 percent of registrants experienced forced displacement, with the vast majority also experiencing other forms of violence.[55]

Victims must be engaged with the state bureaucracy to claim recognition, reparations, and restitution from the state: as Cronin-Furman and Krystalli attest, "[i]n practice, accessing benefits requires continued navigation across dispersed national and local entities."[56] In Bogotá alone, eighteen different entities manage some aspect of victims' claims.[57] The national system of attention and reparation to victims comprises thirty-seven public entities at various levels of the state, characterized by "extreme institutional dispersion" within which "[t]he profusion of a diverse and complex combination of rules of the game, norms, law and agencies […]" govern victim recognition and reparation.[58]

To register, victims must approach a state agency and declare the circumstances leading to their victimization. The Victims' Unit checks the plausibility of the claims and either rejects or accepts them. From 2010, the benefit of the doubt is given to the claimant.[59] Ibáñez and Velásquez found that 70 percent of displaced victims were able to register,[60] while the remaining proportion chiefly faced information deficits.[61] The government created the Mobile Victims Unit (MVU) in 2012 to improve registration in remote regions like those studied here.[62] The MVU increased registration likelihood by approximately 8 percent.[63]

The 2011 Victims Law and the 2016 peace agreement include measures to encourage political participation by victims. Article 193 of the Victims Law aims to "promote and guarantee the conditions and spaces for the effective participation of victims at the national, departmental municipal levels with a differential focus to guarantee the election of their representatives in decision-making bodies, create rules of the game in a protocol of participation."[64] Claiming victim status may therefore lead victims to have more contact with an agency explicitly charged with their political participation.

Given budget constraints, personnel restrictions, and lack of political will, the delivery of reparations has been slow. According to Guarín, Londoño-Vélez and Posso, about one million victims had received reparations by the end of 2021, even though administrative reparations—cash transfers—are arguably the easiest form of reparations to provide.[65] This means that roughly seven million continue to await receipt of reparations.[66] Land restitution is also progressing slowly: as of September 2021, Colombian courts had issued rulings on only 12,300 of 133,000 land restitution claims under the 2011 law.[67]

Political Engagement in Colombia In spite of the conflict, Colombia is one of the most durable democracies in Latin America, although opportunities for political participation have shifted over time. Between 1958 and 1974, the democracy was consociational, dominated by the Liberal and Conservative political parties alternating power mechanically in the national cabinet every four years. Some argued that the exclusionary and top-down political system fueled insurgency, because it could not accommodate a

broad range of political preferences.[68] During the 1982 peace talks with the FARC, this interpretation was embraced, and political reforms were adopted to address it. The FARC founded a legal political party in 1985, the Patriotic Union (UP), whose candidate for president in the 1986 elections won 4 percent of the national vote. In 1988, municipalities held the first direct elections for mayors—another reform stemming from the peace talks. Though the FARC initially embraced electoral participation, following assassinations and mass displacement by counterinsurgent militias, in the 1990s the FARC forbid electoral participation in areas it controlled, and the UP stopped contesting elections in 2002.[69] Despite the UP's exit from formal politics, new parties proliferated following a new constitution in 1991. Turnout in Colombia during this period was marginally lower than in other Latin American democracies.[70]

Civil society organizations and unions expanded in the 1960s. Government repression of student activists and unions under the Turbay administration (1978–1982) appears to have led many to join armed groups. In the late 1980s, the Catholic Church and human rights activists began agitating for greater attention to violence against social leaders and union members.[71] Social leaders, many seeking reparations and land restitution for victims, have frequently been targeted with lethal violence, which has accelerated since the 2016 peace agreement.[72] In spite of the history of violence against activists, Colombia has a vibrant civil society that has oftentimes held the state accountable for human rights violations. One measure of this vibrancy is the 18,397 protest events on these issues that occurred between 1975 and 2010, according to the Social Struggle dataset by the Center for Research and Popular Education (CINEP).[73] Protesting is not exclusively limited to those living in urban areas. The same dataset registered 8,571 protests between 2010 and 2020, which occurred across 71 percent of the country's municipalities. A third of these municipalities had fewer than 50,000 inhabitants, and on average 60 percent of their population lived in rural areas.

At the local level, residents engage with communal action boards (Juntas de Acción Comunal or JACs), civil society organizations, and local politicians. JACs are elected bodies formed by the state in the early 1960s to organize communities and to secure land reforms.[74] They receive petitions, lobby municipal governments on behalf of community members, mobilize protests, and occasionally organize the local provision of public goods.[75] Beyond JACs, citizens also contact local NGOs—including human rights and environmental organizations—to request attention to their concerns. Finally, residents can reach out to local politicians such as mayors and municipal council members (elected to represent opposition leaders) to lodge requests and complaints. We know from existing research in other Latin American countries that local politicians' responsiveness to citizen concerns depends on the latter's mobilization capacity, rather than how competitive the electoral context is.[76]

Political engagement in Colombia differs between cities and peripheral regions, where armed groups are more prevalent. Some groups, in alliance with local political elites, have suppressed the vote by intimidating and killing local leaders.[77] Insurgent groups have also used JACs to help govern, or collaborated with them to do so.[78] In addition, local elites still mobilize voters through clientelism and machine politics.[79] This helps explain why

abstention in recent elections is lower in municipalities with more rural voters and fewer polling stations, when compared to larger cities that face fewer obstacles to voting.[80]

Empirics

Survey Methodology In late 2019, we fielded the survey's first wave in all sixteen regions targeted for implementation of the 2016 peace agreement. These "Programs for Development with a Territorial Focus" (PDETs, in Spanish) cover 170 municipalities and an impressive stretch of territory: at 411,029 square kilometers, they represent 36 percent of Colombia's territory. The survey was conducted in seventy-two municipalities and is representative of each of the sixteen PDETs.[81] The total number of respondents in 2019 was 12,052. The second wave occurred in summer 2021 and included 11,777 respondents, of whom nearly two-thirds participated in wave 1. (More details about sampling appear in the Appendix A.)

The sample includes all PDETs, stratified by municipality, and includes the *cabecera municipal* (municipal seats) and the *centros poblados* (villages consisting of at least twenty homes). Within the *cabeceras municipales* and *centros poblados*, *manzanas* (blocks) were randomly selected. Within the blocks, the enumerator identified all structures on the block, residential, abandoned, empty lot, or business, and then entered this information into a handheld device. Given the distribution of types of properties identified and the sample size required, the software then randomly selected among inhabited residences. Within selected households, the aim was to speak with an adult household member at home. Enumerators aimed for gender parity, but this depended on respondent availability. More details about data collection can be found in Appendix A, and Table B1 displays descriptive statistics.

Measuring Political Engagement We build four measures of respondents' political engagement. First, we use an additive index of dummy variables coding organizational participation, which captures whether respondents have been a member of a nongovernmental organization in the prior six months and/or a JAC. The second variable is an additive index of dummy variables to code contact with local leaders and politicians, measuring whether respondents reported that they contacted local leaders and/or politicians in the prior six months. The third variable is a dummy variable measuring electoral behavior, which captures whether respondents planned to vote in the 2022 presidential election. This includes those respondents that affirmed they will surely vote and those that will do so depending on the list of candidates, published two months before the election occurs (May 2022).[82] We also build an alternative measure of electoral behavior with a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 only for those respondents who said that they will surely vote. The results of estimations using this latter variable are presented in Appendix B (Table B12 and B13). The fourth measure of political engagement is a dummy variable capturing whether a respondent participated in a protest in the prior six months.

Appendix Table B1 reports descriptive statistics for the four indices of political engagement across both waves, and Table B2 provides descriptive statistics for the first-differenced indices. Between the two waves, we see decreases in political engagement through organizational participation, contacting leaders, and electoral turnout. Organizational participation was only reported by 7 percent of the sample in the first wave and 6 percent in the second. This slight reduction is explained chiefly by decreases in NGO membership (from 6 percent to 3 percent). The reduction in the contacting leaders index (from 18 percent to 9 percent) was mostly driven by decreases in contact with politicians (from 21 percent to 8 percent), rather than with local leaders. This may be related with local election cycles, because the first wave was conducted during the weeks leading up to and following the 2019 local elections, and the second wave was collected outside of electoral periods. Planned electoral participation also decreased slightly (from 86 percent to 84 percent). However, if we consider only those respondents who had a definite intent to vote, we find a slight increase in planned electoral turnout (from 75 percent to 76 percent). Protest participation was reported by only one in ten respondents and is consistent across waves.

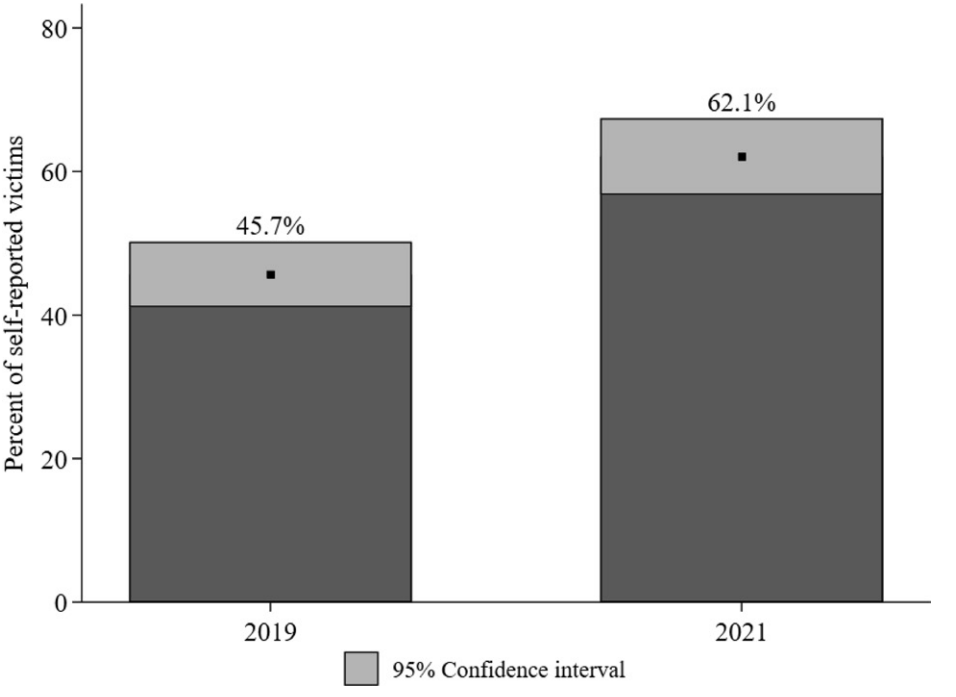
Measuring Victimization and Interactions with Transitional Justice Institutions

To establish the population of victims within our sample—those eligible for inclusion in the RUV— respondents were asked, "[h]ave you or anyone in your family been the victim of extortion, kidnapping, homicide, sexual violence, etc. during the armed conflict?" Those who responded "yes" to this question in the first wave—almost 30 percent—are coded as victims. In fourteen of sixteen regions in the first wave (excluding Arauca and Tolima, where we piloted the survey), we asked whether the respondent or a family member was forced to move due to violence. This variable— "forced displacement"—takes a value of 1 for those who responded affirmatively to the question, and 0 otherwise. In our sample, 52.6 percent (3,941 individuals) responded affirmatively. While some forcibly displaced respondents were also victimized in other ways, 53.5 percent of the displaced did not report other forms of victimization.

In the second wave, "forced displacement" was also included explicitly in the victimization question described above. For this reason, 57.0 percent of respondents of the total respondents in the second wave answered affirmatively. However, we also include the forced displacement question separately to maintain apples-to-apples comparisons with wave 1.[83] Figure 1 shows the percentage of respondents who answered affirmatively to either the victimization or displacement question in each wave. Figure 2 shows the spatial distribution of victims across our sample.

To measure our key independent variable—interactions with the transitional justice bureaucracy—we asked those who responded affirmatively to the victimization question if they were registered with the RUV. This variable, "registered victim," takes a value of 1 for those who report registration with the RUV, and 0 otherwise. In the first wave, 1,659 respondents (19.6 percent of the population) reported registration with the RUV. In the second wave, that number was 3,333 (43.2 percent of the population).[84]

Figure 1 Reported Victimization across Survey Waves

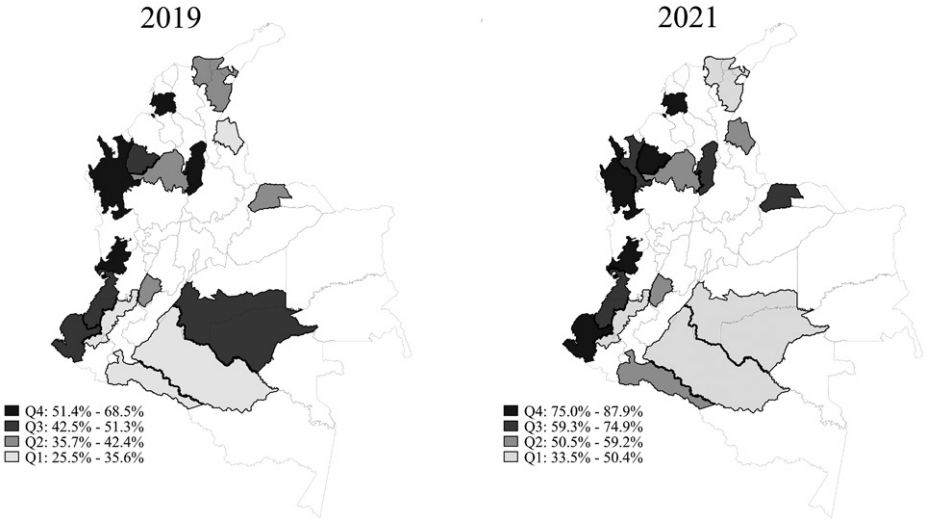


Notes: Observations = 7,696 respondents.

In alternative models (Tables B6, B7, and B8 in Appendix B), we also impute answers to the registration variable for those who were forcibly displaced but did not report another form of victimization, and therefore were not asked if they were registered.[85] We also estimate models that exclude respondents who were victimized during the prior twelve months, because they were probably registered after contacting state institutions (Table B16 in Appendix B). Results from these alternative models to assess robustness are consistent with our main findings (Table 1).

It is important to note that our measure of contact with the bureaucracy of reparations is—by construction—separate from our measure for contacting politicians, one of our dependent variables. The wording of the question for the contacting local leaders is, indeed, quite specific: "Have you contacted a politician, the mayor, or a local government authority?" Those responsible for administering the RUV are national-level state agents in the office *Unidad para las Víctimas*, clearly differentiated visually from their political and local-level counterparts in ways that even the most uninformed constituents can recognize. Those who work for the RUV and the *Unidad para las Víctimas* more broadly, wear bright vests that clearly indicate their institutional affiliation. The JACs do not register people into the RUV, nor do they have any responsibility for administering reparations.

Figure 2 Map of Self-Reported Victimization across Fourteen of Sixteen PDET Regions



Notes: Darker colors indicate more self-reported victims within a given PDET region.

Identification Strategy and Limitations Causally identifying the effect of transitional justice institutions on political participation presents challenges. If politically active individuals are more likely to interact with transitional justice bureaucracies compared with other victims in the first place, there may be systematic differences between those who register as victims and those who do not. Any positive relationship between interactions and political participation would therefore be spurious. More politically engaged individuals may also be more likely to be targeted for violence.

We overcome these challenges using panel data—representative at the level of each subregion prioritized for peace agreement implementation in Colombia—to control for unmeasured heterogeneity among respondents and to attempt to isolate the causal effect of interactions with transitional justice institutions. Our first-differences approach, comparing the same individuals over time, some of whom registered as victims between the two survey waves (1,671 respondents, or 22.6 percent of the recontacted sample), helps address potential non-random assignment. We acknowledge that this is an imperfect strategy, given that registration takes time: some of those victimized between the survey's two waves may not have had a meaningful opportunity to register with the RUV.

Another limitation is how we measure contact with the institutions associated with reparations. We only measure whether people engage with these institutions, rather than intensity and quality of contact with them. Future work could measure these undoubtedly important dimensions.

Estimation We fit Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions using panel survey data with first-differenced regressions, harnessing within-respondent variation in responses between 2019 and 2021. In all regressions, we include time-varying controls for age, employment, level of education, religion, whether the respondents owned their homes, received aid from the central state, and perceived an improvement in their economic situation in the last twelve months.[86] Standard errors are clustered at the municipal level and all models include survey weights. We also report cross-sectional models using first and second wave data separately (Table B4 and Table B5) and models with clustered standard errors by individuals (Tables B9, B10, and B11).

Results

Are Registered Victims More Engaged? Table 1 assesses whether interactions with institutions responsible for providing reparations—proxied by a victim's registration with the RUV—increases political participation. We harness the panel structure of our data and first-differences to study changes in political engagement as a function of changing patterns of victim registration. In line with our hypotheses, we find that those who registered between the two survey waves are more likely to contact local leaders and politicians (column 2) and to state that they will vote in the next presidential election (column 3). We observe a statistically significant but modest increase of 0.029 units in the contacting leaders index, equivalent to 2.9 percentage points. In terms of electoral participation, we estimate an increase of 5.5 percentage points in the probability of stating that s/he will vote in the 2022 presidential election.[87] We do not see statistically significant effects for the other dependent variables (columns 1 and 4): victims' interactions with the institutions dedicated to reparations do not increase organizational participation nor self-reported protest behavior. Results are nearly identical when using the imputed registration variable and when clustering standard errors at the individual level (Tables B8 and B.11, respectively).

When using first and second wave data (Tables B4 and B5, respectively), we also find positive effects of registration on contacting leaders, while the effect of registration on electoral behavior is only significant in the second wave. This difference could be due to the fact that the effect of victims' registration on electoral turnout is only important as election day approaches. These results are also nearly identical when using the imputed registration variable (Tables B6 and B7) and when clustering standard errors at the individual level (Tables B9 and B10).

In addition, when using the first wave data (Table B4), we find that victims who have interacted with reparations institutions in the first wave are more likely to participate in non- governmental organizations or JACs (1.3 percentage points, $p < .1$). When using second wave data (Table B5), we also find a positive and statistically significant effect of registration on organizational participation (1.9 percentage points, $p < .05$) and, surprisingly, a negative and significant effect on protest participation (-2.0 percentage points, $p < .1$). However, some of these results are not robust to using the imputed registration

Table 1 Effect of Interactions with Reparations Institutions on Engagement, First Differences

	Organizational participation (1)	Contact leaders (2)	Electoral behavior (3)	Protest participation (4)
Registered victim	-0.002	0.029**	0.055***	0.004
	(0.008)	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Individual-level controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	7064	7669	7667	7620
R-squared	0.005	0.009	0.006	0.012

Notes: Linearized standard errors in parentheses.
* p < 0.10; ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01.

variable and clustered errors by individuals: the positive effect of registration on organizational participation in the first wave and the negative effect on self-reported protest participation in the second wave are no longer significant (Tables B6 and B7). Moreover, the effect on protests is positive and statistically significant when using the first wave data and clustered errors by individuals (Table B9).

Mechanisms These results lend support to several mechanisms, while casting doubt on others. For example, the positive and consistent effects on the contacting leaders index may indicate the existence of positive feedback loops that weaken, rather than reverse, pessimism about the effectiveness of contacting local leaders and politicians. More specifically, the results from the second model in Table 1 mean that among non-registered respondents, the contacting leaders index decreased by 0.097 units (on the index's 0–1 scale) between waves, and only 0.067 units among respondents registered with the RUV. This suggests that registration helped smooth the negative trend of political engagement through contacting local leaders and politicians we observe in our sample (Table B2).

Furthermore, the positive and consistent effects on prospective turnout indicate support for the reduced transaction costs mechanism. Concretely, our first-differences regression on electoral behavior shows that the proportion of non-registered victims who planned to vote decreased around 3.3 percentage points between survey waves, while the proportion of registered victims who considered voting increased by 2.2 percentage points. While we are unable to pin down precise mechanisms, one possibility is that registered victims are required to gather documents to process their reparations requests—including an updated national identity card (*cédula de ciudadanía*)— which are also mandatory for voting. This is also supported by responses in the second wave about reasons for not voting in the 2022 presidential elections: 4.1 percent of those who were not registered said that their main reason for not voting was related to problems with their national identity cards or because they have not registered to vote. For

registered respondents who said they will not vote, this percentage is only 2.1 percent. In contrast, if the frustration mechanism held, we might expect to see positive effects on self-reported protest participation, as protests are "a primary way that citizens seek to influence politics and redress their urgent grievances."[88] But we do not.

How large are our treatment effects? To benchmark our effect sizes, we look to different samples, measures of our core variables, and across multiple civil war contexts. In Table B17, we replicated the cross-sectional model specification of Table B4 and Table B5 using a representative sample of all Colombian adults in 2018 from the Americas Barometer survey. The estimation results from this sample indicate that the effects of registration on political engagement are comparable to our results. On average, registered victims in the national sample report higher organizational participation, contact with leaders, and voting than non-registered respondents, by 8.8, 7.9, and 13.0 percentage points, respectively.

We also look to other samples. At the municipal level in Colombia, turnout in 2022 presidential elections was 5.3 percentage points higher in PDETs than in the rest of Colombian municipalities.[89] In the Sierra Leone civil war, war exposure increased the probability of attending a community meeting by 6.9 percentage points and membership in social and political groups by 9.9 and 3.4 percentage points, respectively.[90] Abduction in northern Uganda led to an 11.0 percentage point increase in the probability that an adult voted in a 2005 referendum and a 3.4 percentage point increase in the probability that an adult became responsible for community organizing in daily or weekly meetings.[91]

In the next two subsections, we consider two possible threats to inference. First, might selection into registration explain our core findings? Second, might victimization—rather than interactions with state institutions responsible for reparations—explain the identified effects?

Selection Effects While we have sought to isolate the causal effects of registration on engagement—controlling for individual-level factors and using a first-differences approach to capture within-respondent variation over time—this approach is imperfect. If individuals were victimized for their predispositions towards political engagement, then any relationship uncovered might not be causal. If unmeasured individual characteristics drive some victims to register with the state, then isolating the effect of contact with reparations institutions on political behavior would be difficult. While selection represents a threat to inference, it also provides an opportunity to address a policy-relevant puzzle: why do some citizens seek out state benefits to which they are entitled, while others do not? In answering this question, we contribute to scholarship on puzzlingly low take-up rates for social benefits.[92]

We first consider the possible role of identity-based characteristics of victims or characteristics of their victimizers in registering as a victim or not. Figure C1 shows no significant differences between victims registered between 2019 and 2021 and those registered before 2019 in terms of demographic characteristics, year of victimization, and identity of the perpetrator from their last victimization event. In addition, some victims

who experienced violence between 2019 and 2021 and were eligible to register with the RUV had not yet done so before the 2021 survey, given the relatively short window between waves. These individuals may have been in contact with the *Unidad para las Víctimas* in the interim yet fell short of registration. In other words, the results reported above are likely biased towards zero: some individuals within the control group—those not registered—likely have been partially treated.

Next, we use a double-Lasso selector to determine which variables are significant predictors of registration.[93] This method limits researcher discretion in choosing what factors might be significant predictors of a given dependent variable. We included socio-demographic characteristics, dummy variables that identify the presumed perpetrators, the year of respondents' victimization, and whether their territories are ruled by armed groups. Table 2 shows that, after using the double-Lasso selector, seven of twenty variables are significant predictors of registration, which include surprisingly few socio-demographic and victimization characteristics. Women and Afro-Colombians are more likely to be registered. Perhaps less surprisingly, respondents who were victimized by insurgents, paramilitaries, or do not know who the perpetrator was are more likely to be registered than victims of state forces, in line with findings by Voytas and Crisman.[94] Respondents victimized from 2000 onwards are also more likely to be registered than those victimized prior to that year. Yet living in rural areas, level of education, age, household composition, and different measures of socioeconomic status are all poor

Table 2 Factors Predicting Victims' Registration, Second Wave

	Registration as a victim (1)
Afrocolombian	0.490***
	(0.137)
Female	0.171***
	(0.076)
Last event perpetrator: Guerrillas	2.037***
	(0.196)
Last event perpetrator: Paramilitaries	1.921***
	(0.228)
Last event perpetrator: Do not know	1.957***
	(0.212)
Victimized from 2000 to 2010	0.641***
	(0.158)
Victimized after 2010	0.439**
	(0.203)
Constant	-1.607***
	(0.178)
Lasso controls	✓
Observations	4907

Notes: Linearized standard errors in parentheses.
* p < 0.10; ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01.

predictors of registration. Moreover, indigenous victims are no more (or less) likely to be registered than other victims. This empirical exercise should reassure us that, while registration may not be randomly distributed, few observable characteristics predict who interacts with reparations institutions.

Are Effects Driven by Victimization, Rather than Registration? Given the well-established finding that victimization increases political behavior,[95] our results may capture the effects of becoming a victim, rather than interactions with reparations institutions. We perform two empirical exercises to determine whether registration exerts an independent effect on political engagement. First, Table 3 restricts the sample to victims, assessing whether victims newly registered between survey waves are more likely to engage politically than their non-registered victim counterparts and victims already registered in the first wave. Second, Table 4 uses mediation analysis to estimate the total causal effect of victimization on political engagement, along with its decomposition into a direct effect and an indirect effect that runs through registration. More specifically, victimization causes an intermediate outcome, registration, which is also a mediator in victimization's effect on the final outcome, political engagement. To improve the precision of our estimates, we include as controls the significant predictors selected by the double Lasso selector method. The results show that some of the effects identified in the core empirical tests are driven by victimization, while others are mediated by victims' interactions with reparations institutions.

Another possibility is that endogenous dynamics—for instance, that more politically active individuals are victimized, or that more politically active victims are registering with the RUV—could explain the positive results we identify. When limiting only to victims, for example, there are no significant differences in engagement between registered and non-registered victims when using first-differences (Table 3). Mediation analysis demonstrates that the total causal effects of victimization are positive and

Table 3 Effect of Interactions with Reparations Institutions on Engagement. First Differences and Self-Recognized Victims Only

	Organizational participation (1)	**Contact leaders (2)**	**Electoral behavior (3)**	**Protest participation (4)**
Registered victim	-0.008	0.018	0.021	-0.007
	(0.008)	(0.017)	(0.021)	(0.020)
Individual-level controls (after double-Lasso selector)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	4538	4897	4896	4866
R-squared	0.004	0.004	0.002	0.005

Notes: Linearized standard errors in parentheses.
* p < 0.10; ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01.

Table 4 Effect of Victimization on Engagement, Mediated by Registration, First Differences

	Organizational participation (1)	Contact leaders (2)	Electoral behavior (3)	Protest participation (4)
Direct effect	0.027***	0.037**	-0.006	-0.006
	(0.010)	(0.018)	(0.021)	(0.024)
Indirect effect	-0.001	0.002	0.006*	-0.001
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Total effect	0.025***	0.039**	-0.001	-0.008
	(0.010)	(0.018)	(0.021)	(0.024)
Individual-level controls (after double-Lasso selector)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	7062	7666	7664	7617

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses.
* p < 0.10; ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01.

significant for organizational participation and contacting leaders, yet only the effect on electoral behavior is affected indirectly by victims' registration with the RUV. The total effect of victimization on electoral behavior can be decomposed into a non-significant direct effect (-0.006) and a significant indirect effect that runs through registration (0.006, p <.10). Nevertheless, when using the measure of electoral behavior that breaks the sample between those who had a clear intent to vote and those whose desire to vote was conditional on candidates, the indirect effect of registration is not significant (Table B13).

Conclusion

Transitional justice institutions are important tools of peacebuilding as societies reckon with past episodes of violence and repression. These institutions depend on victims' participation to achieve their goals, including prosecuting perpetrators of human rights abuses, revealing the truth about state repression, and providing reparations to victims. We focus on reparations for human rights abuses and argue that victims' interactions with institutions that provide these benefits increase political engagement through positive feedback loops, anger, lower transaction costs, and empowerment.

To study these questions, we use an original panel survey from Colombia fielded in areas prioritized for implementation of the 2016 peace agreement. We find evidence that respondents who interacted with reparations institutions were more likely to have contacted local leaders or politicians and intended to vote. We find no consistent evidence of increased participation in communal organizations or protests. While our mediation analysis shows that some of these effects are driven by victimization itself, we still find some independent effects of registration.

Our findings have implications for understanding political engagement. They support the idea that victims are already political subjects, independent of the status conferred upon them by the state, consistent with qualitative evidence from the Colombian case.[96] In fact, victims' advocacy efforts have shaped the content of transitional justice measures over time in Colombia.[97] At the same time, interactions with state institutions may mobilize some but not others;[98] a task for future work is to explore such dynamics.

We contribute to scholarship on the effects of different kinds of transitional justice institutions. These measures are associated with greater democratic participation,[99] but studies examining individual-level effects, and consequences for victims themselves, remain scarce. Understanding how contact with reparations institutions and transitional justice institutions broadly affects political engagement can help us understand whether and how democratic quality can be shaped by transitional justice tools.

Finally, we contribute to ongoing debates about the effects of victimization on a range of political outcomes and attitudes. The literature principally focuses on how victimization has legacies for electoral outcomes,[100] rather than other forms of grassroots political participation, which are crucial to the health of democratic politics.[101] Relatively little is known about the effects of violence on local political engagement, for example. Here we show that while victimization has effects on political engagement, reparations programs influence how victims engage politically. Additionally, beyond individual-level effects on engagement, these and similar programs may also reinforce or even create new cleavages along the lines of victimization.[102] Given the redistributive implications of reparations programs, such cleavages could define political debates and shape democratic politics following war and democratic transitions.

Our findings are also relevant for policy debates about institutional design of transitional justice measures. Future work could isolate what types of contact with reparations programs and other transitional justice institutions are most likely to produce mobilization, and among which sub-populations of victims, and begin to understand under what conditions, if any, frustration with the system decreases participation via political deactivation.

How generalizable are our results to other countries beyond Colombia? South Africa, Peru, Guatemala, and Rwanda all experienced armed conflicts and systematic human rights violations and implemented transitional justice measures such as truth commissions, special tribunals, and reparations programs. Our results may be less generalizable to countries transitioning from authoritarian regimes or those lacking robust state bureaucracies that require and facilitate victim participation. Because reparations for victims in Colombia are the most comprehensive in the world,[103] and given our modest findings, we may be less likely to find effects elsewhere. Yet Colombia's victim population is already highly politically mobilized, so we may run up against ceiling effects in our case. If other contexts feature less politically activated victims, we might see larger effects of registration on engagement. A promising path for countries transitioning from violent pasts is to acknowledge victims' political agency and support their effective political engagement, including by inviting their participation in the design and implementation of transitional justice institutions such as those that offer reparations.

NOTES

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83. We identified 892 respondents who reported victimization in the first wave, but not in the second wave. We coded them as not victimized and changed the codification of these respondents in wave 1 data. We followed the same logic for 577 respondents who reported that they were registered in the RUV in the first wave, but that they were not in the second wave.

84. Official reports of the RUV estimate that the share of registered victims in the sixteen PDETs was 37.8 percent at the end of 2019 and 38.3 percent at the end of 2021. This suggests that our survey data may underestimate victims' registration with the RUV in the first wave and overestimate it in the second wave. The RUV official reports were retrieved on January 8, 2025 from "Ficha estratégica Unidad para las Víctimas," Unidad para las Víctimas, https://fichaestrategica.unidadvictimas.gov.co/boletinPDET/IndexPDET.

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86. Cross-sectional models also included time-constant controls for gender, ethnicity, and whether the respondent resides in the municipal capital or a rural community (*centro poblado*). The descriptive statistics of all control variables are presented in Table B1 and Table B2.

87. When using our alternative measure of intent to vote—coding only those who say they will "surely" vote—we find similarly positive effects, but with greater statistical uncertainty (Table B12).

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102. Berry.

103. Sikkink et al.