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REGINA BATESON

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Crime Victimization and Political Participation

REGINA BATESON *Yale University*

Crime victimization is an important cause of political participation. Analysis of survey data from five continents shows that individuals who report recent crime victimization participate in politics more than comparable nonvictims. Rather than becoming withdrawn or disempowered, crime victims tend to become more engaged in civic and political life. The effect of crime victimization is roughly equivalent to an additional five to ten years of education, meaning that crime victimization ranks among the most influential predictors of political participation. Prior research has shown that exposure to violence during some civil wars can result in increased political participation, but this article demonstrates that the effect of victimization extends to peacetime, to nonviolent as well as violent crimes, and across most of the world. At the same time, however, crime victimization is sometimes associated with dissatisfaction with democracy and support for authoritarianism, vigilantism, and harsh policing tactics, especially in Latin America.