Featuring the first in-depth comparison of the judicial politics of five under-studied Central American countries, *The Achilles Heel of Democracy* offers a novel typology of “judicial regime types” based on the political independence and societal autonomy of the judiciary. This book highlights the under-theorized influences on the justice system – criminals, activists, and other societal actors, and the ways that they intersect with more overtly political influences. Grounded in interviews with judges, lawyers, and activists, it presents the “high politics” of constitutional conflicts in the context of national political conflicts as well as the “low politics” of crime control and the operations of trial-level courts. The book begins in the violent and often authoritarian 1980s in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua and spans through the tumultuous 2015 “Guatemalan Spring”; the evolution of Costa Rica’s robust liberal judicial regime is traced from the 1950s.

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The Achilles Heel of Democracy

JUDICIAL AUTONOMY AND THE RULE OF LAW IN CENTRAL AMERICA

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Acknowledgments

In the decade and a half I have lived with this project, I and it have enjoyed the support of more people than I could ever list. I regret that I cannot personally thank the individuals who participated in this research because of promises of anonymity. The judges, lawyers, and activists with whom I spoke gave generously of their time, pointed me down fruitful avenues, and offered invaluable perspective. This book would not exist without them. Their thoughtful and passionate dedication to their countries was inspiring. I can thank Jorge Vargas Cullell of Estado de la Nación in Costa Rica for his enthusiasm for my research.

At Georgetown, my adviser, John Bailey, was endlessly patient with me throughout my graduate years. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Douglas Reed for his support. One could have no better cheering section. At Georgetown, I also had the good fortune to be a part of a supportive group of friends interested in questions of constitutionalism, notable among them Matthew Taylor and Susan Alberts. I also owe a debt of gratitude to the late C. Neal Tate. Since coming to Ohio State, my Mansfield Campus colleagues have provided endless support, the most significant manifestation of which has been Write Club and its sometimes-shifting membership. Previous drafts of all or part of this work were generously read by Alexei Trochev, Raul Sanchez Urribarri, Sarah Brooks, Marcus Kurtz, Susan Delagrange, Cynthia Callahan, and Joseph Fahey. Research assistance was provided by Vittorio Merola, who was instrumental in coding the 2010 questionnaires, and Hannah Chelinsky. At Cambridge University Press, I thank four anonymous reviewers and my editor, John Berger. Any and all errors or omissions in this book, however, are entirely my own.

My earliest travels to Central America came as a part of my dissertation research. At that stage, I was fortunate to receive a field research fellowship from Georgetown University’s Center for Latin American Studies in 2003 and
Acknowledgments

a Beinecke Scholarship from the Harry S. Truman Good Neighbor Foundation in 2004. The 2003–2004 Jill Hopper Memorial Fellowship from the Department of Government at Georgetown University provided the invaluable opportunity to retain a stipend while conducting research in Guatemala and Nicaragua. Later rounds of field research in 2009–2010 were made possible by a Seed Grant from the Mansfield Campus of The Ohio State University, which also allowed me to arrange my classes to accommodate another extensive field work year in Guatemala and Costa Rica in 2009 and subsequently awarded me a Special Research Appointment in 2011 to facilitate early drafting of this project. Research assistance for this project was supported by two Faculty Grants from the Mershon Center for International Security Studies of The Ohio State University.

I thank the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) and its major supporters (the United States Agency for International Development, the Inter-American Development Bank, and Vanderbilt University) for making available the data used to construct several of the charts in chapters one and three.

Parts of chapters one and two have previously been published in Political Research Quarterly in December 2013 under the title “Judicial Autonomy in Central America: A Typological Argument” (Vol. 66. No. 4, pp 830–841). I am indebted to three anonymous reviewers at Political Research Quarterly for pushing me to take my thinking about the typological argument and its implications deeper.

I also wish to thank my family. My wife, Jen, has learned more about Central American judicial politics than perhaps any architect before her. My parents, John and Laveta Bowen, provided repeated logistical support for my travels and a great deal of child care for my writing. Until our divorce, Delano Lopez was also an enthusiastic cheerleader for me and this project, including accompanying me on most of my research travels. This book is dedicated to my son, Peregrin.