

**PROSECUTORIAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND VICTIMS'
RIGHTS IN LATIN AMERICA**

The responsibility of any state is to protect its citizens. But if a state, either through omission or through commission, fails to investigate and prosecute crime then what remedies do citizens have? Verónica Michel investigates procedural rights in Chile, Guatemala, and Mexico that allow citizens to call for the appointment of a private prosecutor to initiate criminal investigations. This right diminishes the monopoly of the state over criminal prosecutions and thus offers citizens a way of insisting on state accountability. This book provides the first full-length empirical study of how the victims' right to private prosecution can impact access to justice in Latin America, and shows how institutional and legal arrangements interact to shape the politics of criminal justice. By examining homicide cases in detail, Michel highlights how everyday legal struggles can help build the rule of law from below.

Verónica Michel is Assistant Professor of Political Science at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, The City University of New York. Her article "Human Rights Prosecutions and the Participation Rights of Victims in Latin America" (coauthored with Kathryn Sikkink, *Law and Society Review*) received the 2014 Best Journal Article Award from the Law and Courts Section of the American Political Science Association.

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Verónica Michel

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A mi padre, Guillermo.

In memoriam.

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I grew up in Mexico City believing that in Latin America the legal system worked only to support the elite, to incarcerate the poor, or to repress opponents. If social change was possible, I then thought, it was through demands pressed on the streets, not the courts. Then, in the 1990s, human rights trials started to make headlines across Latin America, and to the surprise of many the judiciary began to adopt a new role in Latin American politics. As a graduate student, I became curious about the changes introduced by judicial reforms in Latin America and the new emphasis these reforms placed on victims' rights. Along the way, many people helped me convert this curiosity into a research question, then into a thesis, later into an argument, and finally into a book about how the law and courts matter for victims and can produce meaningful social change. In this journey a vast network of friends, relatives, colleagues, and institutions helped me in many more ways than I can account for in just a few pages.

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