



# Seguridad: Crime, Police Power, and Democracy in Argentina

By Guillermina Seri

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This study of police governance draws on over ninety interviews conducted with Argentine police officers. In Argentina, a rising fear of crime has led to the politics of Seguridad, a concept that amalgamates personal safety with state security. As a new governing rationale, Seguridad is strengthening forms of police intervention that weaken the democracy. As they target crime, the police have the power to deny rights, deciding whether an individual is a citizen or a criminal suspect - the latter often being attributed to members of vulnerable groups.

This study brings together key issues of governance that involve the police, democracy, and the quality of citizenship. It sheds light on how the police act as gatekeepers of citizenship and administrators of rights and law. Here, the rhetoric of Seguridad is seen as an ideological framework that masks inequality and unites "good" citizens.

Seguridad shows how police practices should be part of our understanding of regimes and will appeal to anyone concerned with security forces, as well as researchers in democratic theory and Latin American politics.

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### **Review**

"This is a rich and evocative book that makes a significant contribution to police studies, regime theory, and, more broadly, political theory. The work deepens our understanding of policing as a form of governance, as the manifestation of the state at the ground level; police possess kingly prerogatives, the author argues, including the power of life and death. Seri shows how police act as gatekeepers of citizenship and administrators of rights and law--if they determine one is worthy--and how the rhetoric of seguridad is in essence an ideological framework that masks inequality and unites "decent" citizens. The author challenges mainstream perspectives of "democratic policing," questioning the assumption that police in democracies naturally act in lawful ways, and suggests a deep incompatibility between policing and democratic functioning. -- J. Patrice McSherry, Professor of Political Science, Long Island University "Building from a series of interviews with police agents, Seri's book expands into an analysis of contemporary politics in Argentina and, from there, a fully-fledged critique of seguridad. Insightful and incisive, powerful and provocative, this book is a major contribution to our understanding of police power, the logic of sovereignty and the violence performed in the name of security." -Mark Neocleous Professor of the Critique of Political Economy Brunel University, UK "Demonstrating how crime fears--often forged through a relationship between the media and politics--Guillermina Seri's carefully researched, *Seguridad: Crime, Police Power, and Democracy in Argentina*, demonstrates brilliantly how police, as "the state's capillary arms," assist in making an unequal and fragmented society appear to be 'democratically' governed." Martha K. Huggins, author of *Political Policing* (Duke) and *Violence Workers* (U, of California)

### **About the Author**

**Guillermina Seri** is Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at Union College, NY, USA. She has contributed chapters to several books, including *State Violence and Genocide in Latin America* (2009). She is the co-editor with Eduardo Estévez of the upcoming collected work, *Studying the Police from Contemporary Latin America*.

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