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## **Book Review: Corruption in the Americas**

José de Arimatéia da Cruz

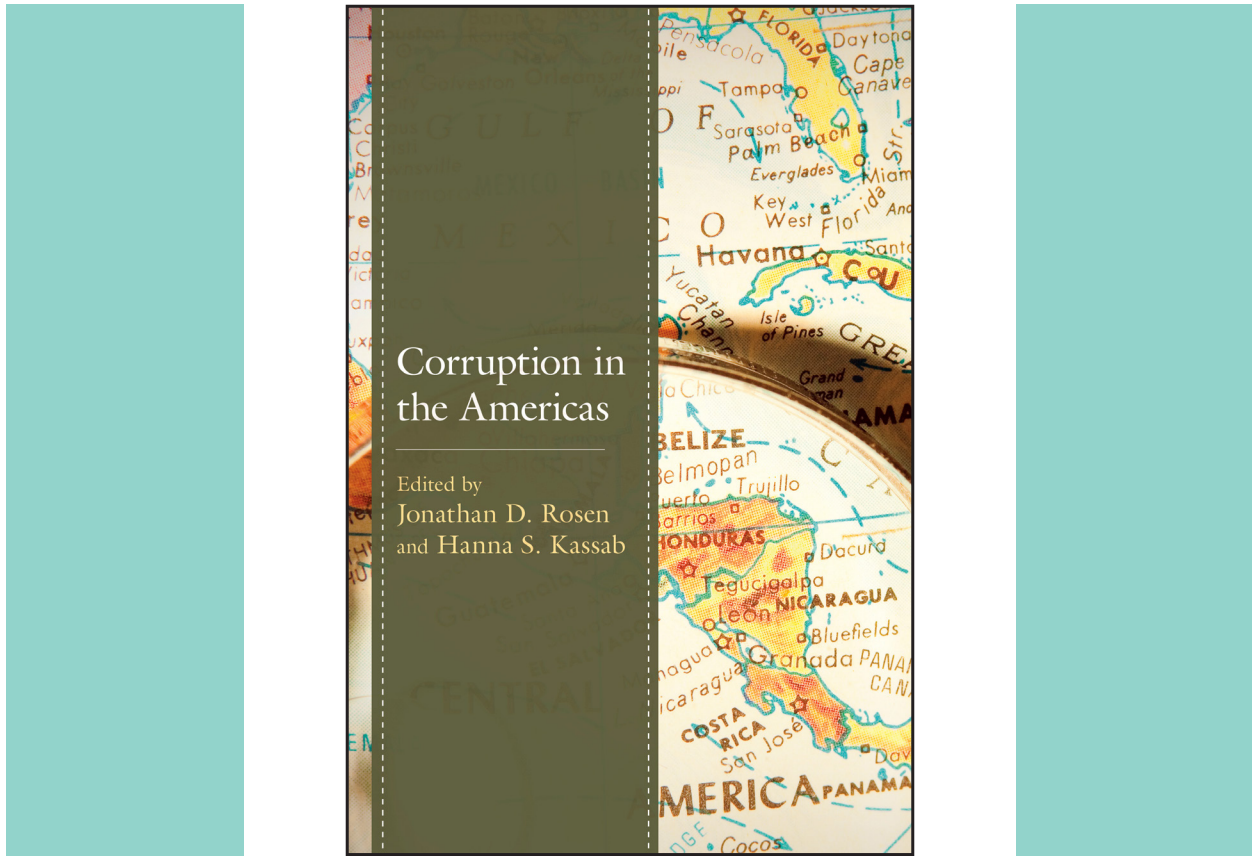
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## — PARAMETERS BOOKSHELF —



Reviewed by José de Arimatéia da Cruz, professor of international relations and comparative politics, Georgia Southern University, and visiting professor, Center for Strategic Leadership, US Army War College

Jonathan D. Rosen and Hanna S. Kassab argue in *Corruption in the Americas* that corruption is an industry that has also become an integral part of Latin American societies. Corruption destroys the social fabric of society; it has made its way into governmental institutions and the political process in Latin America.

Rosen is an assistant professor of criminal justice at Holy Family University, Pennsylvania, and Kassab is a teaching assistant professor at East Carolina University in North Carolina. *Corruption in the Americas* is composed of an introduction and seven chapters examining the relationship between corruption and organized crime, the main actors involved in corruption, governmental responses to corruption, and the impact corruption has on governmental

institutions and people's trust in their governments. Trust is paramount in any system of government. Without it, the ability of the government to function properly is nonexistent.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how important trust in governmental institutions is. Countries where the government had the support and trust of the people handled the pandemic and its aftermath much better than those that did not have support. On the other hand, societies in countries in which there was distrust between the people and the governmental institutions addressing the pandemic took a hard hit. Distrust and corruption have debilitating factors for many states and inhibit the implementation of the rule of law and the strengthening of institutions (3).

Corruption is a critical component that corrodes the status apparatus and helps weaken countries (4).

Given how ingrained corruption is within the social fabric in Latin America, Rosen and Kassab refer to those countries as “fragile states” (6). The authors define “fragile states” as weak states that are fertile ground for organized crime groups and illegal actors, as such groups can infiltrate the state apparatus through corruption and other mechanisms, including extortion (6). As Francis Fukuyama pointed out, in a 2008 *Journal of Democracy* article, “populism’s weakness is not that it caters to the people; rather, its failing lies in offering only short-term solutions that worsen the long-term prospects of the poor.”

Rosen and Kassab also highlight that despite years of authoritarianism in many Latin American countries, support for democracy is at an all-time low. For example, according to Latinobarómetro, a public opinion organization in Latin America, support for democracy as a system of government was 43 percent among Peruvians in 2018, the lowest percentage in Peru since the survey began in 1995—except for 2005 (117). It should come as no surprise that Peru had mass protests after its leftist president was ousted in 2022. A similar situation took place in Brazil when sympathizers of former President Jair Bolsonaro invaded the Brazilian supreme court, the presidential palace, and the congress to reverse the election outcome, which led to the victory of democratically elected Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva.

Although not a new issue, the rise of violent nonstate actors is now given greater visibility due to the dysfunctionality of governments and institutions in Latin America. In many parts of Latin America, the government’s ability to provide for its citizens’ necessities is nonexistent, and violent nonstate actors have capitalized on the vacuum

provided by the government. In the case of Brazil, the intersection between the legitimate government and violent nonstate actors can be characterized as symbiotic (139). Government and violent nonstate actors “often operate in conjunction with one another for mutual benefit, whether directly or indirectly” (139). Those violent nonstate actors have financed the election of political leaders who, once in office, pass legislation, making it more complicated to prosecute criminal elements. In Rio de Janeiro, militias currently control 25.5 percent of the city’s neighborhoods, covering 57.5 percent of the city’s territory. Criminal organizations such as Primeiro Comando da Capital (First Command of the Capital), Amigos dos Amigos (Friends of Friends), and Comando Vermelho (Red Command) maintain control of a large swath of land in Rio’s favelas or shantytowns. These favelas are no-go zones where police do not patrol and violent nonstate actors impose their social order. They also provide public services, including building daycare centers, paying for medical bills, providing food and entertainment—such as baile funk (dance parties), and imposing order in their controlled communities, as the state does.

I recommend this book to US Army War College students, especially those taking the Regional Studies Program Americas. The book highlights the symbiotic relationship and strategic partnership between corrupt organized criminal organizations and those in power.

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**Keywords: corruption, Latin America, Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva, President Jair Bolsonaro, Brazil**

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