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Book Review: Corruption, Grabbing and Development: Real World Challenges by Tina Søreide and Aled Williams, eds.

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Søreide, Tina, and Aled Williams, eds. *Corruption, Grabbing and Development: Real World Challenges*. Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2014. xvi + 216 pages. Paperback, \$39.95.

Tina Søreide and Aled Williams bring both academic depth and real world experience to this volume. Law and economics are Søreide's specialties. Political science, with policy research and resource management experience, is Williams' strength. Issues of corruption and development tie together their work with that of the contributors to the volume. Geography and cultural perspectives come into play. The editors perform outstandingly in introducing the collection, organizing the articles usefully, and orienting the reader to the cohesive whole. In fact, the quality of the Introduction is exceptional, a must-read, for content and style.

The editors begin their Introduction with a definition of *grabbing*: "Grabbing is when someone seizes something that he or she is not entitled to, or takes *more* than what is his or hers formally, informally or tacitly allocated share" (p. 1). These may be legal acts "selfishly securing benefits at the expense of others" (p. 3), and perceived as a violation of social norms. Corruption, however, is legally defined and can be prosecuted judicially. What is meant in this volume by "development" can be inferred from the over-all contents: equitable extraction, distribution involving opportunity and a good life for all, educational outcomes, health care, fair regulation (rule of law, policing, qualified and independent judiciary), and infrastructural works providing meaningful public services.

In the Introduction, Søreide and Williams note that the grabbing described in the *National Geographic* (January 2007) cover story "Amazon—Battle to Stop the Land Grab" was, in a sense, accepted. However, they go on to demonstrate that grabbing reduces trust and perverts allocation mechanisms. Hence, tolerance or pervasiveness of grabbing, although it might enrich developers, in fact obstructs development. To demonstrate this fact, the book contains diverse articles that embrace data, statistical analyses, and econometrics. Organization of the articles divides the material into four sections: (1) Structure and characteristics of a system that are conducive to grabbing, (2) Grabbing behaviors within a system, (3) Interference or prevention of internal system function due to grabbing, and (4) Interactions with other systems conducive to grabbing. These translate as facilities, mobilization, immobilization, and contagion. In addition, the case studies in the chapters are "real world," as the subtitle promises. They are meticulously done, and lend themselves to extracting lessons.

Two articles in *Corruption, Grabbing and Development: Real World Challenges* deserve pride-of-place on reading lists for first-world countries and for transitional states: "Transport infrastructure failures in Spain: mismanagement and incompetence, or political capture?" by Germà Bel, Antonio Eustache and Renaud Foucart (chapter 10), and "Elite Capture of Kabul Bank" by Arne Strand (chapter 14). The lessons are cross-cutting and interactive. In the Spain article, the authors note that "bad politics continue because politicians can afford it...risks associated with bad policies and even corruption are low in terms of voter sanctions" (p. 136). They also explain that "collusion and capture do not come cheaply. And taxpayers will continue to pay, *for long*, and a few will continue to benefit, *a lot*...getting governance and institutions right may be the most cost-effective way of getting politics right and minimizing the odds of capture and other corrupt practices. It takes time...political will and committed voters" (p. 137). In the Afghanistan article, the authors state that "when military strategies overrule principles of state-building and good governance, this opens up endless opportunities for elite capture and

corruption ... Efforts to ‘buy’ short-term peace with political and military elites will not benefit longer-term peace-building” (p. 184).

Other articles in the book research grabbing that has become a part of infrastructure in diverse, developed and developing countries such as Ghana, Kenya, Netherlands, Nigeria, Tanzania, and the United Kingdom. Several poor and rich countries — such as Bangladesh, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, Tunisia, and Zambia — illustrate the real-time damage to regulation done by grabbing practiced in policing and justice systems. Short-term, narrow gains from grabbing undermine long-term, broad distribution of education in Burkina Faso, Indonesia, Philippines, and Uganda. Colombia and Tanzania reveal harms of grabbing to public health. The editors, the contributing authors, as well as the readers, can see that remediation is daunting. Solutions involve both making structural-functional changes and shunning legal grabbing, and these are crucially dependent in turn on the mobilization of political will and the activation of committed voters.

Neil J. Smelser’s (1963) *Theory of Collective Behavior*, as well as Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith’s (2011, 2012) *Dictator’s Handbook: Why Bad Behavior Is Almost Always Good Politics* are also valuable resources. In addition, to identify and calibrate performance attributes, such as structural-functional, extractive, distributive, and regulative, a widely used and respected text is G. Bingham Powell, Russel J. Dalton, and Kaare Strøm’s (2012) *Comparative Politics Today: A Theoretical Framework*. In good company, Soreide and Williams’ text, *Corruption, Grabbing and Development: Real World Challenges*, merits follow-up. Future, professional publication might include numbers about thresholds of grabbing or corruption (for example, as shares of GDP or levels that sabotage or enable development). Systematic comparative analysts will find this a rich field for hypotheses that further research can test. Last, but certainly not least, pop culture articles are also warranted — to inform, motivate, and excite persons whose daily practices can actualize the behaviors that Søreide and Williams prescribe.

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