In his book *Corruption, Inequality, and the Rule of Law: The Bulging Pocket Makes the Easy Life*, Eric Uslaner takes on the task of researching the interception of such fundamental determinants as corruption, inequality, and the rule of law. While inequality and the rule of law are by now well-researched both quantitatively and qualitatively, the issue of corruption remains in many ways *terra incognita* even for the scholarly community, and more so for professionals and ordinary people. Corruption itself is often a taboo topic in state and international organizations. For reasons based on political correctness and diplomacy, many public figures avoid talking about this inconvenient topic, as do many scholars. Uslaner is obviously not one of those politically correct scholars. He pinpoints the roots of corruption, saying that it rests “upon economic inequality and low trust in people who are different from yourself. Corruption, in its turn, leads to less trust in other people and more inequality” (4).

Built around the concept of the inequality trap, the book takes us through the definitions and conceptualizations of corruption, theoretical frameworks, aggregate cross-national tests of the inequality trap thesis, and corruption in former Communist countries, as well as suggestions on how to eliminate corruption. Cases of countries successful in curbing corruption, such as Singapore and Hong Kong, are also addressed in this study. To the author’s credit, he uses examples of malfeasance in the United States as well. Measurements of corruption that remain a constant challenge for any researcher are taken into account.

Traditionally—to the extent that the field of corruption may fit the definition of traditional—political science writings on corruption remain largely built around specific cases. Uslaner clearly breaks this tradition, and does it exceptionally well. One cannot help but be impressed by the scope of quantitative econometric analysis presented, both within the text and in the appendices. This is rather unusual for a political science book, especially one focused on such a “data scarce” problem as corruption. Even though some proxies used in the regression analysis may be interpreted as quite liberal approximations, the presence of such analysis is a clear and bold merit of the book. Indeed, it makes it an unparalleled source of information to which a graduate student or a scholar may turn not just for excellent analytical points, but for the results of data analysis as well.

Uslaner points continuously to the merits and virtues of universal education, including in the task of reducing corruption. It may be equally hard to find a single politician or an economist in both developed and developing nations who would disagree with such a claim, yet, as the author rightly points out, some specialists and public officials simply consider this type of access unaffordable, missing out on the paramount benefits that it can bring in the long run. Regrettfully, many developing nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America still preach the concept of giving higher education to the elite in lieu of
universalizing access to elementary and secondary education. The level of corruption in these nations is known to be very high as well.

One statement with which I would disagree, though, refers to the level of corruption in the services sector in the USSR. Uslaner notes that “many ‘universal’ services were not ‘free’ under Communism since many, perhaps most, people had to make ‘gift’ payments to receive these services, including good grades at school and admission to universities” (248). Indeed, while this may be faced in the republics of Kazakhstan, Central Asia, and the Caucasus—by some, yet certainly not most, people—the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic states have seen these kind of “gift payments” far less frequently. These republics constituted the bulk of the Soviet Union in every sense, including by population; territory; production capacities; and in the science, education and healthcare sectors.

The luxury of selecting the best and brightest, disregarding their ability to pay, that Soviet professors and universities enjoyed during the Communist era remains unaffordable even for their colleagues in Western Europe, not to mention in parochial American universities. The scale and scope of achievements in science and education during the Soviet era point exactly to the low level of corruption in these sectors of the economy. In present times, of course, the situation has changed dramatically, and corruption in the social sector of former Communist states flourishes.

Uslaner concludes that “the key to reducing corruption seems to involve making people less dependent upon it” (246). Indeed, has been noted by the media in post-Communist states that people consider corruption to be an easy and affordable means of getting around the rules set by the state. On the other hand, educated people, professionals, and those with higher levels of income find corruption irritating and rather damaging to their daily lives. One concern is that the state is unlikely to give up its informal tools of control; education alone will not free people from state corruption.