In *Attention Deficit Democracy*, Ben Berger challenges the very meaning and definition of “civic engagement” and presents a systematic analysis of how the term’s misuse in social science can endanger not only the durability of future civic engagement literature but also the many accolades for scholarly contributions already produced. The timing of this book’s publication is pivotal because the celebrity status of the civic engagement literature has gone out of control without conceptual clarification of what civic engagement is or entails.

The first half of the book focuses on dissecting the elements—political, social, and moral—that form the body of civic engagement. Berger posits that without an understanding of these multiple aspects of engagement, the notion of civic engagement as simply a noble gesture lacks merit and will harm its current value. These categories can be viewed, depending on scale, at the local, national, or international level. Using the concept of attention and energy, Berger provides potential sources of operationalization whereby engagement can be practical rather than vague. Understanding the limits of making democracy work, Berger proposes ideas that he believes can help achieve democracy in a more efficient manner.

The central theme, perhaps misision, of this book is to educate scholars about the danger of misinterpreting the concept or definition of civic engagement. Berger’s goal, then, is not only to expose the confusion but also to turn it to advantage. He posits that the meaning of civic engagement is only confused by making it an all-inclusive umbrella that takes in everything from bowling in leagues to watching political programs on television, to writing checks to political advocacy groups and participating in political rallies and marches. His efforts to illustrate the three distinct engagement categories are important for both conceptual and empirical scholarship. He notes that engagement is a uniquely appropriate term for discussing ways to make democracy work, but only if we understand its full significance.

What explains the decline of civil engagement and of trust in government? What explains the different degrees of relationship in civic engagement and citizen trust? Why are there discrepancies in the empirical analysis of these questions? For example, while the civic engagement and citizen trust literatures
note the ongoing decline in trust, the explanations for the trend seem to depend on the types of activities citizens engage in (which can vary from attending church services to making campaign donations). Are all of these uninformed aspects of civic engagement? Berger’s analysis penetrates this notion, arguing that different types of engagement can produce different results.

Berger goes to great lengths to distinguish political, social, and moral engagement. He defines political engagement as activity and attention relating to the political processes and institutions of local, regional, or national government. This can include voting, seeking or holding office, attending town meetings, circulating a petition—any engagement whose purpose is to influence government actors and political outcomes. Even this subcategory, however, needs further clarification in terms of the type of attention and the source of the energy that directs the motivation behind each event. For example, if one were to operationalize these events as factors related to trust in government (often viewed as the criterion of good governance), how citizens initiate their engagement for campaigning for office or for attending town meetings can be very different.

While those running for office are more likely to be highly educated and have positive faith in important public institutions, those attending town meetings are motivated by the potential impact, both positive and negative, that they may receive. Berger makes a fundamental contribution by alerting students of the civic engagement genre to be serious about the merits of these different types of engagement, but there is still a lack of conceptual clarity and vagueness.

In defining social engagement as activity and attention related to the social groups, dynamics, and norms that categorize civic engagement (involvements ranging from Putnam’s bowling leagues to parenting groups to friendship circles), Berger observes that it has no obvious connection to citizenship or the polis (p. 5). Again, there is a significant overlap in meaning with political engagement. For example, would one argue that parent groups should be labeled as social rather than political engagement unless or until they voice their opinions collectively on the education of their children or abortion rights? In a market that is data-driven, scholars often ignore the possible implications of not knowing the discussions that take place in such organizations. Berger’s efforts to delineate the characteristics of moral engagement are important conceptually, but ultimately fail to help in understanding its distinctness and its place more significantly in the literature. He defines moral engagement as attention and activity related to moral reasoning and agency. Because he emphasizes the role of practicality over idealism for measuring the constructs he uses to advance the study of civic engagement, the shortcomings of his characterization of moral engagement are made even more transparent by his failure to explain how the concept can be operationalized.

In dealing with the difficulty of assessing the merits and advancing the conceptual clarity of civic engagement, Berger also stresses the important role of institutions in channeling citizens’ collective energy into useful political outlets that connect local energy with regional and national politics. Motivated by Tocqueville’s notion, he argues that voluntary associations and political participation can be best exercised with the appropriate institutional design. One wonders whether this is related to government’s political responsiveness as a key determinant in advancing the democratic system. As Berger observes, many scholars ignore political participation at the local level because of the
seeming lack of decision-making ability, which is taken up at the state and national government levels. Berger argues that promoting political engagement at the local rather than the national level speaks to a broad range of democratic values and goals and can pave the way for national-level engagement. This notion is directly tied to his focus on engaging with marginalized citizens.

The highlight of this volume is its emphasis on targeting not only all citizens but, importantly, those who may be more sensitive to the effects of democracy’s political attention deficit. Berger states that scholars and institutions often promote engagement among people who already tend to participate at much higher rates than the rest of the population, such as members of the upper middle class or college students at elite institutions, and this is unlikely to improve democratic representation, fairness, or legitimacy. He goes on to say that the poorest and least-educated citizens are most likely to be disengaged both politically and socially, and least likely to be accurately represented by politicians or activists (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Engaging these marginalized citizens, he stresses, would improve their prospects and serve the broader polity well by promoting the widely shared goals of fairness and democratic legitimacy (Lijphart 1997). Although scholars agree that the more educated and affluent are more likely to participate in democratic citizenship, research that targets marginalized citizens who often fall victim to disengagement is rare. As Berger notes, citizens are the core element of democratic politics, and therefore political theorists should take citizens seriously. As the title of his book implies, engaging citizens in the political process depends on getting this attention, which is difficult when they are not attracted to political issues so that politics must then compete against equally, if not more important, problems.

As a remedy to improve democracy, Berger uses Tocqueville’s premises and insights to call for (1) changing the approach to politics and political mobilization, (2) changing ourselves, and (3) changing institutions (p. 147). He notes that more attention and energy can be attracted to political affairs, processes, and institutions by making politics more attractive and appealing to citizens’ existing tastes. He notes that this cannot be done without making institutions more responsive. Most important of all, he states, those who care about political equality and fair representation can shift resources from promoting political engagement among college students, who are already among the most likely to be politically engaged as adults, and instead target the attention and energy of specific demographic groups like the poor and the poorly educated, who are most prone to political disengagement and most likely to be misrepresented.

Berger’s work is a dire reminder to all who want to take advantage of the important concept of civic engagement, not just ideally but also practically, that civic engagement cannot become a tool for better governance unless its inherent political, social, and moral characteristics are first identified.

Beyond the differences between the elements delineated in this book, one thing stands tall as that which binds all the others: government responsiveness. Because of the diverse set of competing interests, attention to political process is often temporal. Just as economists calculate the circumstances, such as market failure, under which government must intervene, so too the government must intervene when the governing process leaves out, whether knowingly or unknowingly, the segment of the population that is most vulnerable and has the most potential to be disengaged from the political process.
The civic engagement literature will not be complete unless it can justify and specify the role of the marginalized in the political process. In order to achieve promote fairness and equality in political as well as democratic society, practitioners must ensure fair opportunity for all, especially those with higher chances of being disenfranchised.

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American Public Service: Constitutional and Ethical Foundations
EDITED BY SHEILA KENNEDY AND DAVID SCHULTZ
Sudbury, Mass.: Jones & Bartlett, 2010

Sheila Kennedy and David Schultz present a framework based upon the public service ethics ideology refined by David Rosenbloom, who argues that the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights embody the foundational values of public service ethics for managers. As Kennedy and Schultz point out, John Rohr provides the seminal context with his contention that public administration starts with the Constitution and ends with public officials running that Constitution (p. ix). The work of Kennedy and Schultz “examines public administration ethics as contextualized by constitutional, legal, and political values within the United States. Through case studies and hypothetical examples, the authors explore what these values mean for specific duties of managers and for the resolution of many contemporary issues confronting public sector officials” (back cover). In essence, this book filters public service ethics through U.S. constitutional, legal, and political lenses, providing readers with ethical context.

Part I, chapters 1 through 3, defines constitutional ethic. Chapter 1 covers the constitutional culture, including the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, civil liberties, original intent, “rule of law,” and checks and balances. The chapter also provides overall historical context: past, present, and future. Chapter 2 examines the concept and definition of political culture relative to the traditions of religion, liberalism, republicanism, and legalism, and the overall effect of the United States as a melting pot of values. Chapter 3 explores foundational American constitutionalism and ethics, especially the interaction with politics, public opinion, and the political process.

Part II, chapters 4 through 6, applies the constitutional ethic. Chapter 4 begins by examining representation and then describes liberal theory and partisan neutrality, political neutrality relative to the politics/administration dichotomy, neutral competence and the Constitution, and neutrality and representation within

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public service. It also attempts to define the concept of public interest. Chapter 5 starts by exploring the historical context both past and present, including defining and applying the concept of a level playing field in relation to the Fourteenth Amendment. Specific court cases highlight this constitutional and ethical struggle. Chapter 6 probes the dynamic between the New Deal and constitutionalizing the administrative state, especially in relation to conflicts of interest, gifts, whistle-blowing, and the overall interaction and effect of personal ethics on professional service.

Part III, “The Constitutional Ethic in the Twenty-first Century,” encompasses the final chapters. Chapter 7 includes all three sectors (public, nonprofit, and private), public/private mixing, the “invisible state,” state action doctrine, faith-based contracting and the constitutional ethic, and the need for accountability. Chapter 8 examines U.S. media beginnings, defining fact, fiction, and objectivity, news protections, and the interface between policy and the press. Last, chapter 9 considers private versus public ethics in terms of Machiavelli, ethical diversity, ethics across sectors (private, nonprofit, and public), and multinationalism.

Increasingly, public administration and related fields are calling for and demanding greater ethical consideration and debate, emphasizing policy decisions. This movement, especially relative to public service values, includes the leading public administration professional organizations. As a result, Kennedy and Schultz’s book can help academic programs, both undergraduate and graduate, ensure that faculty and students engage in foundational ethical debate and analysis pertaining to the underpinnings of public service, which the text further spurs through case studies, discussion questions, and PowerPoint presentations. In respect to master of public affairs (MPA) programs being values-based, Stuteville and Dipadova-Stocks (2011) contend,

A values-based curriculum grounds students in public service values and provides key preparation as they assume their professional roles in changing times. While during the 20th century many public administration scholars eschewed values in favor of positivism . . . history has demonstrated that values (expressed and unexpressed) in public organizations have real social and political consequences of profound significance. (p. 585)

For example, at the author’s school, the vision statement embodies a focus stating that “Public Affairs will serve the common good by graduating leaders who exercise authority responsibly, make ethical decisions, act with moral courage, and advance human dignity worldwide” (www.park.edu/grad/masters-mpa-vision.aspx). American Public Service: Constitutional and Ethical Foundations gives readers, both students and practitioners, the contextual understanding and tools to consider the ethical societal impact of their decisions. Kennedy and Schultz articulate this vital and urgent need, stating emphatically:

We take Rohr’s and Rosenbloom’s arguments seriously. This book examines public administration ethics within the context of the constitutional, legal, and political values of the United States, and uses the American system’s constitutional values as the lens through which we might examine both the specific duties of the government managers and the appropriate resolution of many contemporary issues confronting (and confounding) public sector officials. (p. ix)

American Public Service is an important contribution because it takes the reader from the constitutional, to the ethi-
cal, to the practical by highlighting the struggles of the administrator. In so doing, it fills a void in the literature for both academics and practitioners. Moreover, this work offers insights into public affairs by linking foundational constitutional and ethical considerations as a basis for action, and more significantly as a guide to twenty-first-century public service.

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