

Expedition and successfully seeking election as a general in charge of the campaign—only to be recalled to Athens while still in route to Sicily with the fleet to stand trial for impiety. He fled to the enemy camp (to Sparta and later to the Persian Court) and was convicted in absentia, his property seized and sold. While he actively assisted the enemies of Athens (using deceit and trickery to gain military advantages over his own fellow citizens), after the oligarchic episode of 411 BCE collapsed he was urged to return to Athens and take up a military command. He did and seems to have been exonerated and to have again commanded troops. New military successes eluded him, however, and it appears that he was assassinated by Spartan sympathizers in 404 BCE. When the Athenians punished an aged Socrates in 399 BCE for having “corrupted the youth” and, by implication, for bearing some measure of responsibility for the disasters suffered by Athens throughout the long war, the example of his well-known relationship with Alcibiades as a youth was surely among the things on their minds.

Helfer assumes the reader’s knowledge of this background. His argument is that Plato intends the three texts as a set to supply an account of Socrates’ efforts to influence the development of Alcibiades’ attitude toward “political ambition.” The book walks the reader through Socrates’ scrutiny of the youthful Alcibiades’ own views of courage, the *demos*, honor, rhetoric, fame, and such in the *Alcibiades I* and *II*. Then Helfer pauses to puzzle over the fate of that “education” in evidence in Alcibiades’ drunken speech about Socrates depicted in the *Symposium* (set around 15 years after the action of the two eponymous dialogues featuring the youthful Alcibiades and close in time to Alcibiades’ greatest moment of apparent personal triumph in politics—the Athenians’ embrace of his advice regarding the merits of the massive Sicilian Expedition and his election as its main commander). Plato’s *Symposium* presents the speeches it recounts as quite memorable since the narrator is recalling them more than a decade later and within weeks of Socrates’ own death.

Helfer stresses that the content and setting of these texts support reading Plato’s picture of Socrates and Alcibiades together as exemplary of the “two-sidedness of the best nature” (*Laws* 908b4-d7). And Helfer shows that it is possible to see the portrait of Socrates’ efforts to engage the

youthful Alcibiades as a model of the Socratic project of trying to “educate” a corrupted philosophic nature (*Republic* 495a1-b6). The book painstakingly reconstructs Socrates’ critical engagement with the youthful Alcibiades’ views of ambition, tracking patterns across texts. The apparent “turbulence of his Socratic education” (p. 205 n. 13), not the events of his life, is the “drama” of Helfer’s title. The looming possibility of tyrannical power is its antagonist.

Somewhat puzzlingly, why the *Alcibiades I* and *II* were for so long considered spurious is passed over very quickly. More sustained critical attention to the history of scholarship might have been revealing. Expectations aroused by the image on the book’s jacket (Edward Armitage, *The Siren*, 1888) are unmet; there is no effort to weave into the discussion any commentary on the reception history of the Platonic portrait of the relationship between Alcibiades and Socrates in the postclassical arts (performing, visual, or literary), even though these traditions have, over centuries, addressed the role of Socrates as Alcibiades’ “teacher,” as well as Alcibiades’ own political ambitions and the pair’s unconventional eroticism. There is also very little discussion of any of the other ancient portraits of the relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades beyond his selected three texts. As a result, how Plato might be trying to intervene in the shaping of a public memory of this relationship or attempting to use the story of Alcibiades to add dimensions to public discourse in his own time (maybe introduce a discussion of politics and celebrity?) is not on Helfer’s agenda. This study is also inattentive to the human costs associated with the martial dimensions of the particular cast of political ambition it takes as given (as well as Plato’s possible interest in such issues).

All in all, *Socrates and Alcibiades* achieves the goal it sets out for itself. It is careful to map the twists and turns of Socrates’ questioning of Alcibiades regarding an ambitious person’s understanding of how to manage his relations with the *demos*. The study’s detachment from critique leaves the reader to wonder if Helfer’s reading of the practice of Socratic education engages contemporary thinking about the allure of tyranny to the would-be tyrant, to his minions, and, frighteningly, sometimes to a mass public today.

## AMERICAN POLITICS

**Fragmented Democracy: Medicaid, Federalism, and Unequal Politics.** By Jamila Michener. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018. 236p. \$84.99 cloth, \$24.99 paper. doi:10.1017/S1537592718002426

— Philip Rocco, *Marquette University*

Studies of American federalism face a fundamental analytical challenge. The federal “system” is neither a fixed institutional arrangement nor a physical object. It is

instead—to borrow a phrase from the late William Anderson—a “concept of the mind.” To make sense of the diversity and complexity of intergovernmental relations, scholars conceptually and empirically bound their studies in ways that affect our understanding of the system’s virtues and vices. In this groundbreaking book, Jamila Michener draws a new and vital map of American federalism that illustrates how geographical inequalities in social provision lead to a weaker democracy.

The book begins as assuredly no study of American federalism ever has: in a burger joint on the outskirts of

Atlanta. There we meet Terrie, a middle-aged black woman who informs Michener of her struggle to gain adequate benefits through Medicaid, the largest source of public health insurance in the United States and the primary means of coverage for low-income Americans. As Terrie informs us, Medicaid benefits vary wildly from state to state. While living in Ohio, California, and Washington, she always had Medicaid, but after moving to Georgia, her benefits were cut off because she had a part-time job, even though she could not afford insurance. Rather than mobilizing her to fight back, Terrie's experiences with Medicaid are disempowering: "You have no say, no say in the process if you don't agree with what is going on in Medicaid" (p. 3).

As this opening scene illustrates, Michener trains her focus on how federalism—a system of government that allocates vital resources on the basis of geography rather than rights or needs—affects the political lives of democratic citizens. This sets *Fragmented Democracy* apart. Numerous studies evaluate how democracy affects federalism—that is, how public officials compete for power in the federal system, and how politics shapes (or distorts) the equilibrium of power between levels of government. Yet as Carol Weissert has noted, U.S. federalism scholarship tends to ignore issues of democratic representation ("What U.S. Federalism Scholars Can Learn from Comparative Work," *Journal of Politics*, 73(4), 2011).

*Fragmented Democracy* helps to address this normatively significant gap in the literature by integrating and expanding on models of participation that emphasize individual characteristics, meso-level institutions, sociopolitical contexts, and policy feedback. In Michener's "contextualized feedback" model, federalism creates variation in citizens' access to important resources and in their sociopolitical contexts (pp. 26–30). These varying experiences with public policy offer citizens divergent lessons about the value of participating in politics (e.g., voting, joining a political group, attending a rally) or engaging in "particularistic resistance" (e.g., appealing an unfavorable decision by a bureaucratic agency).

Wisely, Michener uses Medicaid as the empirical setting for evaluating this broader argument. As with other intergovernmental programs, Medicaid benefits and eligibility rules vary considerably from state to state, affording empirical leverage on the link between program design and political participation. Yet Medicaid is not merely one intergovernmental program among others. Its status as the largest-existing federal-state program make it an ideal index of how American federalism shapes contemporary political life.

The book's empirical backbone is composed of in-person interviews with 45 Medicaid beneficiaries and 16 key stakeholders (e.g., benefits lawyers, nonprofit directors, and front-line workers). By elevating the lived experiences of beneficiaries, Michener provides us vital

evidence that is all too often missing from legislative hearings on Medicaid and the technocratic prose of white papers. Interviews confirm the prevalence of stigma, administrative burdens, and capricious behavior in state Medicaid programs. As one beneficiary puts it, it is only by the "grace of God" that her family receives the health care that she needs (p. 68). Perhaps more importantly, beneficiaries experience geographic variation in benefits as barriers to coverage and administrative burdens of their own. Moving to a new state invariably means confusion and worry regarding which services and treatments will be covered.

These interview data motivate several well-designed quantitative analyses investigating the link between Medicaid program design and political participation. Chapter 4 offers the most pivotal test of Michener's argument. Drawing on a cohort study of the parents of 5,000 children, the author shows that "compared to others in the [sample], respondents who indicated being Medicaid beneficiaries are significantly less likely to vote, register, and participate [in politics] more generally" (p. 77). State policies that narrow the scope of benefits help to account for this effect. Michener finds that state reductions in Medicaid benefits exert a large and statistically significant effect on participatory behavior: "[C]ompared to beneficiaries living in states that did not reduce benefits, beneficiaries living in states that had made the most reductions were between four and nine percentage points less likely to vote, register, or participate" (p. 82).

*Fragmented Democracy* also answers Ann O'M. Bowman's call for more careful attention to state–local relations in the federal system ("The State–Local Government(s) Conundrum: Power and Design," *Journal of Politics*, 79(4), 2017). Chapter 5 examines the role of county government, an often-ignored but critical component of Medicaid administration in many states. Interactions with county-level officials structure beneficiaries' views of their socioeconomic status and race, as well as their perceptions of government responsiveness. When beneficiaries have negative interactions, they are less likely to appeal adverse state actions, including denial and termination of benefits. While Michener's data do not unpack the reasons why county-level patterns vary from state to state, her analysis offers an excellent basis for future scholarship (pp. 110–13). Chapter 6 evaluates how varying neighborhood contexts affect Medicaid beneficiaries' political participation in the city of Chicago. Whereas Medicaid is a person-based policy, the evidence here shows the collateral effects of neglecting *place-based* programs. Beneficiaries have a lower probability of participating in politics when they receive Medicaid services in clinics surrounded by higher levels of perceived social disorder and lower levels of social cohesion.

While many studies of policy feedback might stop here, Michener extends the analysis to consider how the

fragmented federal system affects the efforts of organized policy advocates. As Chapter 7 makes clear, policy advocacy among Medicaid beneficiaries is rare. Nevertheless, her interviews reveal how beneficiaries connect and mobilize through Facebook message boards. In some respects, the evidence here points to a more positive assessment of federalism, illustrating how beneficiaries exploit multiple institutional venues and draw on evidence of effective advocacy in other states to press their claims. Yet the balance sheet has its share of liabilities, too. The federal–state design of Medicaid creates a steep learning curve for advocates, allows political elites to shift blame when under attack, and fragments access to civil legal aid resources that support beneficiaries.

It would be tempting to interpret the evidence in *Fragmented Democracy* as merely suggesting that stingy states, biased bureaucrats, and neglected neighborhoods have weakened American democracy. Michener demonstrates those patterns empirically, with fidelity to the diversity and complexity of intergovernmental relations. But her final analysis cuts deeper, targeting the macro-institution of federalism as a barrier to political participation. As numerous civil and political rights depend on state and local officials for their enforcement, this argument has implications beyond Medicaid itself. If federalism is indeed a “concept of the mind,” this book should inspire policymakers and scholars to think more carefully and critically about how to mitigate its most deleterious effects on democratic citizenship.

**Takeover: Race, Education, and American Democracy.**

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— Desiree S. Pedescleaux, *Spelman College*

Domingo Morel has written a compelling and soundly researched book. It is a must-read for any graduate student who needs an excellent example of a dissertation turned book. It is also a must read for any scholar of urban politics and governance. Using a mixed methodological approach, including an original data set of nearly 1,000 school districts, case studies of several cities, content analysis, and more than 70 interviews with state education officials, state legislators, city council members, school board members, teachers, parents, and community leaders, Morel authors what he calls the “first” systematic study to examine the effects of state takeovers on local school districts. More specifically, he explores the *politics* of state takeovers. He seeks to understand the effects of takeovers on local governance and the implications of takeovers for our understanding of democracy and citizenship. Grounding his analysis squarely in the field of political science (i.e., state and local government and urban politics), the author hypothesizes that state

takeovers disrupt existing governmental regimes. Groups in power would be negatively affected by state takeover, while politically marginalized groups would be aided in their path to political empowerment not previously available to them.

Morel deftly uses data to make the case that in Newark, New Jersey, state takeover was about race and political power. He shows that as African Americans gained political power in Newark and were successful in garnering increased state funding for education via the courts, the city became increasingly vulnerable to state challenge and intervention. He shows how calls for state takeover were anchored in political power and control of resources. Furthermore, using empirical data, he shows that in Newark and other African American—led cities, African American communities are disproportionately negatively affected by state takeovers and more likely to have elected school boards abolished. In Newark, which had a black mayor, black majority city council, and black majority school board, takeover had a detrimental effect on democracy and African American political empowerment: The elected school board was abolished, school funding cut, and jobs lost.

As Morel further unfolds his argument, he notes that takeovers also have the capacity to address politically marginalized groups by creating opportunities for excluded groups to participate in governance decisions. In Newark, state takeover did not represent a loss of political power for Latinos. Before takeover, there was only one Latina on the nine-member elected board. After takeover, there were four Latinos on the 15-member appointed board, raising their level of representation to more closely resemble their share of the city’s population. In 2000, when the Newark school board switched back to an elected board, Latinos participated at a higher rate than in the period before takeover. And by 2003, Latinos had elected five representatives to the nine-member board, a first in the history of Newark school politics.

Morel demonstrates this hypothesis further with a case study of Central Falls, Rhode Island. In 1991 when state takeover of the schools occurred, Latinos had no representation in the mayor’s office, city council, or school board. The dwindling white population dominated city politics. After takeover, the state abolished the all-white elected school board and created a state-appointed board, giving Latinos three of the nine seats. The author goes on to show that takeover seemed to help establish a connection between the Latino community and the schools. In 2012, 21 years after the state takeover, Central Falls elected its first Latino mayor and shortly thereafter elected several Latinos or allies to the city council. State takeover of the schools in Central Falls helped pave the way for Latino political empowerment.

The analysis of Newark, Central Falls, New Orleans, Baltimore, and other cities overwhelmingly supports