



Power, Knowledge, and Politics: Policy Analysis in the States (American Government and Public Policy)

John Hird

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If knowledge is power, then John Hird has opened the doors for anyone interested in public policymaking and policy analysis on the state level. A beginning question might be: does politics put gasoline or sugar in the tank? More specifically, in a highly partisan political environment, is nonpartisan expertise useful to policymaking? Do policy analysts play a meaningful role in decision making? Does policy expertise promote democratic decision making? Does it vest power in an unelected and unaccountable elite, or does it become co-opted by political actors and circumstances? Is it used to make substantive changes or just for window-dressing?

In a unique comparative focus on state policy, *Power, Knowledge, and Politics* dissects the nature of the policy institutions that policymakers establish and analyzes the connection between policy research and how it is actually used in decision making. Hird probes the effects of politics and political institutions?parties, state political culture and dynamics, legislative and gubernatorial staffing, partisan think tanks, interest groups?on the nature and conduct of nonpartisan policy analysis. Through a comparative examination of institutions and testing theories of the use of policy analysis, Hird draws conclusions that are more useful than those derived from single cases.

Hird examines nonpartisan policy research organizations established by and operating in U.S. state legislatures?one of the most intense of political environments?to determine whether and how nonpartisan policy research can survive in that harsh climate. By first detailing how nonpartisan policy analysis organizations came to be and what they do, and then determining what state legislators want from them, he presents a rigorous statistical analysis of those agencies in all 50 states and from a survey of 800 state legislators. This thoroughly comprehensive look at policymaking at the state level concludes that nonpartisan policy analysis institutions can play an important role?as long as they remain scrupulously nonpartisan.

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