

THE ROLE AND IMPLICATIONS OF CITIZEN ENVIRONMENTAL BOARDS IN STATE-LEVEL POLICY-MAKING: DOES AGENCY STRUCTURE MATTER?

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ABSTRACT

Environmental regulation is widely considered among the most impactful regulatory fields, as it is both scientifically and technically complex and carries diverse and far-ranging implications for society. Because of this, environmental policy has developed as a highly controversial and contentious policy area, which has led to significant challenges to policy formulation and implementation, as stakeholders fight for their perspective, often at great expense of time, resources, and perceived policy legitimacy.

The environmental policy board emerged early in the development of regulatory governance in this area as a tool to ensure that regulatory processes and decisions are fair and representative of the public interest. These part-time citizen boards have been delegated significant decision-making and/or oversight authority in several states, with the promise that deliberative decision-making structures are better equipped to integrate multiple, varied perspectives and therefore enhances the probability of legitimate and successful policy outcomes. Critics of this governance model argue that it impedes effective and decisive decision-making by weakening accountability, dividing authority, and making the policy process more vulnerable to interest group influence.

Given their prominence and the current salience of collaborative strategies and institutions, it is surprising that very little scholarly attention has been paid to the contribution state-level environmental boards make to environmental regulation. This study seeks to fill this

gap by studying boards' origins, experiences, and impacts on environmental processes and outcomes. It is proposed here that state policymakers and their constituencies use boards to gain leverage over environmental policy. It is further anticipated that variation in institutional features can be linked to variation in the outcome preferences of these actors.