



The Shadowlands of Conduct: Ethics and State Politics (American Government and Public Policy)

Beth Rosenson

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Although the linking of "ethics" and "politics" may seem more like the ingredients for a comedian's monologue, it is a sober issue and one that affects every American?especially when it comes to state politics, where the cynical might say ethics can never survive. To find examples of the latest corruption *du jour*, all one has to do is turn to the newspaper, or switch on the local newscast (think Illinois and New Jersey).

Scandals have been ubiquitous since the beginning of the Republic, but it wasn't until 1954 that ethical self-regulation began to move legislatively beyond bribery statutes to address deeper issues?those which, in New York Governor Thomas Dewey's words, skulked in the "shadowlands of conduct." Rosenson begins her exploration with that moment when New York became the first state to enact a general ethics law, setting standards and guidelines for behavior. Unforgiving and illuminating, she examines the many laws that have been enacted since and the reasons that many of these law came into being.

It is crucial to the functioning of a democratic government to understand how and why ethics laws vary across legislatures, and it is surprising to discover that many states have become far more stringent than the U.S. Congress in laws and regulations. Using both qualitative historical sources and rigorous statistical analysis, Rosenson examines when and why, from 1954 to the present, legislators have enacted ethics laws that seem to threaten their own well-being. Among the economic, political, and institutional factors considered that have helped or hindered the passage of these laws, the most consistent was pure scandal, abetted by the media. To have good government, one must be able to trust it, and this book can help all citizens understand and find their way out of the shadowlands into the light.

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