

THE FIFTH ESTATE: THINK TANKS, PUBLIC POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

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The book is all-inclusive research on think tanks' role in governance and public policy processes, specifically in the US. The author defines Fifth Estate as attributed to research institutes, scholarly networks, political parties and policy analysts. The comprehensive role of think tanks is due to their lasting impact on governance and the administration of global civil society. Their ever-increasing role and involvement in public policy discourse are unlikely to lessen in coming times.

The book comprises five chapters, including an introduction that defines the term 'Fifth Estate' as a socio-cultural grouping of outlier viewpoints in contemporary societies. This grouping is relatively new to earlier categories of the clergy, nobility, labor and working class and the press in 18th-century European society. Think tanks' culture in the US cherishes a proud history of guiding government branches toward result-oriented decisions and testifying multi-tasking character and contributions to US domestic and foreign policy that grants the Fifth Estate an inescapable role in governance.

The chapter titled "Think Tanks and Governance in the United States" outlines public policy research institutions that facilitate legislative and executive to make pragmatic decisions. While tracing their historical evolution, it takes the readers back to the 19th century by highlighting the immense contributions of business magnates like John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, and J. P. Morgan in developing the culture of policy research institutes. The chapter titled "The Revolving Door" explains that think tanks serve as a revolving door passed through by subject experts who frequently take up executive positions in government besides politicians, benefitting from their research work. The interchangeable role facilitates an unbreakable bonding between the government and think tanks. The chapter on "Think Tanks in Action: Domestic Policy

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Case Studies” highlights several case studies that underscore leading think tanks’ policy input, feedback and suggestions into existing laws besides creating new ones. Reforms in Social Security Funds and Aid to Families with Dependent Children led to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families law – an invaluable service by American Enterprise Institute, New American Foundation and CATO Institute.

Chapter four, “Think Tanks in Action: Foreign Policy Case Studies,” highlights think tanks’ contributions to US foreign policy. For example, President Bush’s famous ‘Axis of Evil’ speech concerning North Korea was a strategic input by Heritage Foundation. It also covers the Iraq war strategy (2006) regarding the combat troops’ surge strategy. Similarly, the Center for American Progress and Center for Strategic and International Studies played a crucial role in President Obama’s strategic reset to end the Iraq war. Moreover, the author coined and describes new terminologies, such as Policy Tsunamis, Global Hacktivist, Anarchist and Populist Movements, Phantom NGOs and Lean, Mean Policy Machines.

In a nutshell, the book establishes think tanks being the Fifth Estate of global civil society involved in everything concerning public policy, governance and administration. Critics may label the work as an apologist’s account that overplays think tanks’ role and input on government’s domestic and foreign policies while downplaying other institutions’ crucial role in decision making. However, such an approach would impair one’s understanding of global civil society rooted in democracy, better integrated and efficient governance institutions and universal human values and rights.