

By continuing to browse this site you agree to us using cookies as described in [About Cookies](#)

**Wiley Online Library**

Log in / Register

[Go to old article view](#)

Go To

**Political Science Quarterly** [Explore this journal >](#)

[View issue TOC](#)

Volume 132, Issue 2

Summer 2017

Pages 356–358

**Book Review**

**Politics against Domination by Ian Shapiro . Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2016, 288 pp. \$35.00.**

[Kathleen Tipler](#)

**First published:**

27 June 2017 [Full publication history](#)

**DOI:**

10.1002/polq.12628 [View/save citation](#)

**Cited by (CrossRef):**

0 articles [Check for updates](#) [Citation tools](#)

A number of political theorists have turned to nondomination, with the concept playing a key role in the work of Michael Walzer, Iris Marion Young, and Philip Pettit. Ian Shapiro's thinking has undoubtedly been shaped by their insights, yet his work on nondomination is uniquely his own. One of its most distinctive features is his pragmatism. Shapiro argues that ideal theories have little to say about the messy practice of politics, and he emphasizes that normative obligations are constrained by what is politically possible. Normative theorizing should begin with what is happening on the ground, according to Shapiro, not with an ideal world constructed by abstract principles of justice. His approach is explicitly Burkean, aiming for the incremental redesign of institutions, based on the results of experimentation (purposeful or not), taking into account the findings of empirical political science, all driven by the goal of combatting domination.

Domination is, he argues, “rooted in the particular” (p. 24)—the particulars of who is being dominated by whom, how domination is occurring, and the consequences of such domination. Shapiro argues that our “oughts”—our normative obligations—derive from examining these dimensions of domination in the specific, concrete contexts in which we find ourselves entangled. Shapiro considers a large number of such entanglements, including debates over the role of constitutional courts, supermajoritarian decision-making procedures, world government, a global minimum wage, the containment of cross-border threats, and humanitarian interventions. *Politics against Domination* was intended as a long-awaited, complementary volume to Shapiro's 1994 *Democratic Justice*. While *Democratic Justice* provided the foundational articulation of his normative approach and applied it to civil institutions—such as child rearing, marriage, and work—*Politics against Domination* focuses on public institutions and international politics.

As Shapiro notes throughout, his approach leads to different institutional solutions than those proposed by others who invoke nondomination, such as Pettit. For example, Shapiro embraces majoritarian decision-making procedures and competitive elections, rather than deliberation and separation of powers. In contrast to the argument on civic institutions made in *Democratic Justice*, here he argues there should be little deference to “insider knowledge” or expertise, as the logic of public institutions is power, and that power should be under democratic control. Complex institutions, he claims, tend to entrench powerful interests, so we should revive Schumpeter and institutionalize competition. One of his many concrete, intriguing suggestions is that of a “competitiveness threshold,” such that districts are redrawn after multiple uncontested elections and redrawn in ways that would retain the power of voting minorities (p. 88).

Given that Shapiro developed his thinking on domination in *Democratic Justice* and added extensions and responses to critics in multiple later works, his longtime readers and interlocutors will find few significant innovations to his broad theoretical framework in this latest volume. What they will find, however, is an elegant restatement of his approach, one that has clearly developed over decades, and many new applications. In light of Shapiro's pragmatism, this volume's emphasis on the application of nondomination theory, rather than abstract theorizing motivating a nondomination approach, makes sense. The book's first chapter, which provides a concise and developed overview of Shapiro's thinking on domination, will serve newcomers to Shapiro's work particularly well. The following chapters will be of use to those with interests in democratic institutions and in justice and democracy in the international context.

Shapiro has a brief and compelling section on the importance of hope in his first chapter. This book enacts and encourages hope, with its analytical clarity, deep engagement of complicated political issues that resist easy theorizing, and emphasis on the politically possible.

---

KATHLEEN TIPLER  
*University of Oklahoma*

## Related content

# WILEY

**Browse Publications**

**Browse by Subject**

**Resources**

[Help & Support](#)

[Cookies & Privacy](#)

[Terms of Service](#)

[About Us](#)

[Wiley Job Network](#)

[Advertisers & Agents](#)

---

Powered by [Wiley Online Library](#) Copyright © 1999 - 2017 John Wiley & Sons, Inc. All Rights Reserved