

Donald P. Green and Ian Shapiro,
Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory:
A Critique of Applications in Political
Science (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994), back cover

Political Science

This is the first comprehensive evaluation of rational choice explanations in political science. Green and Shapiro assess rational choice theory where it is reputed to do best: the study of collective action, political parties and politicians, voting cycles, and prisoner's dilemmas. They reveal the much-heralded achievements of rational choice theory to be deeply suspect, and explain the fundamental rethinking that is needed if rational choice models are to contribute to the study of politics. This widely discussed book is essential reading for anyone interested in the place of rationality in the study of politics and in social science methodology.

"Green and Shapiro demonstrate that, half a century after its founding and despite its promise of creating a parsimonious, rigorous, and universally applicable political science, the rational choice school has little to show by way of empirical confirmation of its grand hypotheses. In coping with these disappointments, its proponents have engaged in a shell game of efforts to defend their claims of rigorous science, universal applicability, and superiority to all other explanatory theories. Green and Shapiro puncture these pretenses in their masterful treatments of the rational choice literatures."

—GABRIEL ALMOND

"Green and Shapiro write with lucidity, grace, and even, on occasion, wit. Unlike many critics of rational choice theorizing, they are sympathetic to its explanatory aspirations. Their critique focuses on the adequacy of the explanations offered in the rational choice literature. Drawing on a wealth of examples, they show that all too often writers are content to have offered an explanation in rational choice terms of some phenomenon without going on to ask if this explanation is sounder than the alternatives that might be offered."

—BRIAN BARRY

"This is a most thought-provoking book."

—THEBA SKOCPOL

"*Pathologies* will no doubt give comfort to the many who already prejudicially loathe RCT and encourage others to dismiss the approach entirely without having to do their own homework. But it should be welcomed by rational choice theorists anyway. Taking its lessons to heart, they might do better."

—MICHAEL TAYLOR, *CRITICAL REVIEW*

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