

Our Own Worst Enemy: The Assault from within on Modern Democracy

Tom Nichols

Oxford University Press (Aug 19, 2021)

Hardcover \$24.95 (272pp)

978-0-19-751887-8

Tom Nichols examines the current state and possible future of liberal democracy in *Our Own Worst Enemy*.

In decades past, Nichols says, democratic nations had to protect themselves from external, physical threats. But countries around the world now face ideological threats from within. Right-wing authoritarianism is on the rise, and many people seem happy to sacrifice their rights if it means depriving someone they dislike of theirs. How these countries—and the United States in particular—got to this point is a thorny topic, on which Nichols provides bleak but thought-provoking analysis.

After a frank prologue detailing his own prideful miscalculations about American democracy, Nichols argues that the real problem is not America's "broken" systems, but its uninformed citizenry. For some voters, labels mean more than policy. They vote for incendiary candidates not because they have considered the facts or believe their vote will benefit the nation, but because they are jealous, angry, selfish, and insecure. Nichols notes that the internet, though not the originator of such problems, has worsened them, discouraging critical thinking and affecting users' mental health.

While Nichols knows that there are no easy answers, and perhaps are no answers at all, he warns against uncontrolled cynicism, which may drive voters not to participate in democracy at all, or even to try to destroy it. He recommends greater voter engagement, and perhaps even restructuring the United States as we know it. These and other proposed solutions, Nichols admits, may not appeal to a society now accustomed to instant gratification and 280-character jousting matches, but, in the end, America's salvation can only come from the same place as the forces now ripping it apart: from within.

Our Own Worst Enemy is a blistering critique of twenty-first-century American politics.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (July / August 2021)

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