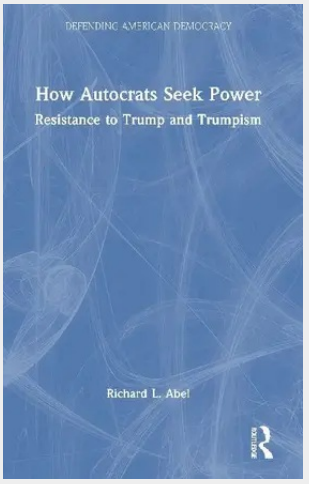
Abel

How Autocrats Seek Power

Resistance to Trump and Trumpism



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Chronicling and analyzing resistance to the threat that autocracy poses to American liberal democracy, this book provides the definitive account of the rise of Trump's populist support in 2016, and his failed efforts to nullify the result of the 2020 election. This book is about the threat of autocracy, which antedated Donald Trump and will persist after he leaves the stage. Autocracy negates both liberalism—which includes the protection of fundamental rights, the rule of law, separation of powers, and respect for specialist expertise—and democracy—which requires that the state be responsible to an electorate composed of all eligible voters—by concentrating unconstrained power in a single individual. Anticipating defeat in the 2016 election, Trump attacked suggestions that he had sought, or even benefited from, Russian assistance despite the evidence, and he made repeated claims of election fraud. In 2020, fearful that his mishandling of the pandemic had alienated voters, he intensified the allegations of fraud, demanding recounts, pressuring state legislatures and state election officials, advancing bizarre conspiracy theories, and finally, calling for a massive demonstration, urging protesters to march to the Capitol to pressure Congress, promising to accompany them. But as this book documents, Trump's efforts to nullify the result of the 2020 election failed. As the courts rejected his numerous challenges, state election officials loyally performed their statutory duties, the Justice Department found no evidence of fraud, and politicians from all sides certified Biden's victory, this book traces the many, and varied, forms of the defense of liberal democracy located within both the state and civil society, including law (judges, government lawyers, and private practitioners), the media, NGOs, science (and other forms of expertise), and civil servants (in federal, state, and local government). Evaluating their efficacy, the book maintains, is vital if—as history has repeatedly taught us—the price of liberal democracy, like that of liberty itself, is eternal vigilance. This definitive account and analysis of Trumpism and the resistance to it will appeal to scholars, students, and others with interests in politics, populism, and the rule of law and, more specifically, to those concerned with resisting the threat that autocracy poses to liberal democracy.

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