



# Democracy Despite Itself: Why a System That Shouldn't Work at All Works So Well (MIT Press)

By Danny Oppenheimer, Mike Edwards

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Voters often make irrational decisions based on inaccurate and irrelevant information. Politicians are often inept, corrupt, or out of touch with the will of the people. Elections can be determined by the design of the ballot and the gerrymandered borders of a district. And yet, despite voters who choose candidates according to the boxer--brief dichotomy and politicians who struggle to put together a coherent sentence, democracy works exceptionally well: citizens of democracies are healthier, happier, and freer than citizens of other countries. In *Democracy Despite Itself*, Danny Oppenheimer, a psychologist, and Mike Edwards, a political scientist, explore this paradox: How can democracy lead to such successful outcomes when the defining characteristic of democracy -- elections -- is so flawed?

Oppenheimer and Edwards argue that democracy works because regular elections, no matter how flawed, produce a variety of unintuitive, positive consequences. The brilliance of democracy, write Oppenheimer and Edwards, does not lie in the people's ability to pick superior leaders. It lies in the many ways that it subtly encourages the flawed people and their flawed leaders to work toward building a better society.

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**Democracy Despite Itself: Why a System That Shouldn't Work at All Works So Well (MIT Press)** By Danny Oppenheimer, Mike Edwards **Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

Democracy, like many other organizations and systems, is filled to the brim with flawed and irrational people. *Democracy Despite Itself* explains, with clever arguments, how we are able to transcend these limitations and harness them to our benefit through a perfectly imperfect democratic system.

(Dan Ariely, James B. Duke Professor of Psychology and Behavioral Economics, Duke University; author of *The Honest Truth About Dishonesty*)

A provocative meditation on a profound question: why does democracy work at all when voters are so often irrational? In lucid prose filled with compelling examples, Oppenheimer and Edwards grapple with one of the deepest questions society faces: how to organize itself, in light of the inherent frailty of the human mind."

(Gary Marcus, Professor of Psychology, New York University; Author of *Kluge: The Haphazard Construction of The Human Mind*)

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#### About the Author

Danny Oppenheimer is on the faculty at UCLA with a joint appointment in Psychology and the Anderson School of Management.

Mike Edwards founded and regularly contributes to Leftfielder.org, a blog on politics and media.

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**Susan Gaier:**

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