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Book Review: The Myth of the Strong Leader: Political Leadership in Modern Politics

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Basic Books

The following review appeared in the December 2014 issue of CHOICE:

Comparative Politics

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Brown, Archie. **The myth of the strong leader: political leadership in modern politics.** Basic Books, 2014. 466p index ISBN 9780465027668, \$29.99.

In this broad, sweeping, even magisterial book, Brown (emer., Oxford Univ.) asks readers to reconsider what they understand as "strong leadership," and whether it is desirable. He pokes holes in the "central misconception" that "strong leaders ... who get their way, dominate their colleagues, and concentrate decision making in their hands, are the most successful and admirable." Often, Brown warns, such centralized power leads to major mistakes. Better the "redefining" leader such as FDR in the US and Thatcher in the UK, and better still, the "transforming" leader such as Charles De Gaulle, Mikhail Gorbachev, Nelson Mandela, and Deng Xiaoping. A transformational leader "plays a decisive role in introducing *systemic change*" (italics in original). The central paradox is that while these transforming leaders were indeed strong, their strength was not in imposing an authoritarian vision onto their systems, but in substantially changing the fundamental way the system operated in a way that both made a difference and improved the lives of ordinary people. Impressive in scope and sophistication, Brown offers a model of leadership that is both strong and purpose driven.

—M. A. Genovese, *Loyola Marymount University*

Summing Up: Highly recommended. Upper-division undergraduate, graduate, and research collections.