

# From Strongman Mussolini to the Present: Resurfacing Autocratic Tendencies

Throughout history, the rise of strongmen leaders has exemplified the allure and danger of autocratic rule. From Mussolini's iron grip on Italy to today's looming autocratic figures, understanding the complexities and impact of these leaders is crucial for safeguarding democracy. Join us on a deep dive into the world of strongmen, tracing their roots and examining their lasting influence on global politics.

## 1. Historical Perspectives: Identifying the Strongman Phenomenon

The concept of strongmen leaders traces back to early civilizations, where rulers sought to consolidate power through authoritarian means. However, the term gained prominence during the 20th century with the emergence of charismatic figures like Italy's Benito Mussolini. His powerful oratory skills and iron-fist policies captivated the masses, solidifying his image as a strongman.

Exploring historical figures like Mussolini helps shed light on the common traits shared by strongmen leaders. Their appeal often lies in promises of stability, national pride, and prosperity. By manipulating public sentiment and utilizing propaganda, these leaders justify their actions as necessary for the greater good of the nation.

### Strongmen: Mussolini to the Present

by Ruth Ben-Ghiat (Kindle Edition)

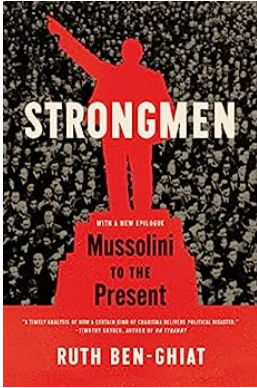
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## 2. The Modern Strongman: Recognizing Patterns and Trends

As we fast-forward to the present, the strongman phenomenon has not dissipated but rather evolved. Today, charismatic autocrats like Russia's Vladimir Putin and Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan command mass support by championing their countries' interests and asserting dominance on the global stage.

An analysis of contemporary strongmen reveals a convergence of tactics such as media manipulation, suppression of dissent, and cults of personality. Through modern technology and global connectivity, these leaders have harnessed social media platforms to exert control over public narratives, further blurring the line between truth and propaganda.

## 3. The Global Reach: Strongmen's Impact on Democracy

Beyond their respective countries, strongman leaders have far-reaching consequences that extend to the global political landscape. Their strategies of exploiting nationalist sentiments and undermining democratic institutions pose challenges to the values of equality, freedom, and human rights.

Notably, the rise of strongmen may be seen as a response to the failures of existing democratic systems. Societal disillusionment, economic inequality, and political polarization create fertile ground for the emergence of charismatic figures. Understanding and addressing these underlying issues is crucial in preventing the establishment of autocratic regimes.

#### **4. The Dangers of the Strongman Model: Lessons Learned from History**

History has taught us the dangers of embracing strongmen leaders without scrutiny. The unchecked power wielded by these figures often leads to corruption, human rights abuses, and the erosion of democratic values. Examining past examples, such as Mussolini's fascist regime and Hitler's Nazi Germany, serves as a chilling reminder of the catastrophic consequences that can arise from placing too much trust in charismatic autocrats.

In order to safeguard democracy, it is imperative that societies remain vigilant against the allure of strongmen. Robust checks and balances, free and independent media, and robust civil society are essential in countering the consolidation of power in the hands of a single individual.

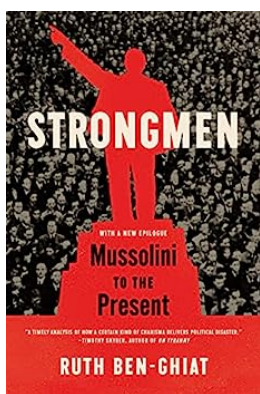
#### **5. Capitalizing on Democracy: The Strongman Threat in the 21st Century**

The transition from democratic rule to autocracy is a gradual process that often escapes immediate detection. This is particularly true in the current era, where democratic norms and institutions are being challenged worldwide. Leaders like Hungary's Viktor Orbán and the Philippines' Rodrigo Duterte have leveraged popular support to chip away at democratic foundations, threatening the very fabric of their societies.

#### **: Navigating the Strongman Currents in Today's World**

The resurgence of strongman leaders from Mussolini to the present is a sobering reminder of the fragility of democracy. By understanding the historical context, modern trends, and global ramifications of this phenomenon, we equip ourselves with the knowledge necessary to defend democratic principles.

Navigating the complex waters of strongman politics requires collective action and awareness. We must remain vigilant against the seductive allure of autocratic leaders, guarding the democratic values that ensure a just and inclusive society.



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What modern authoritarian leaders have in common (and how they can be stopped).

Ruth Ben-Ghiat is the expert on the "strongman" playbook employed by authoritarian demagogues from Mussolini to Putin—enabling her to predict with uncanny accuracy the recent experience in America and Europe. In Strongmen, she lays bare the blueprint these leaders have followed over the past 100 years, and empowers us to recognize, resist, and prevent their disastrous rule in the future.

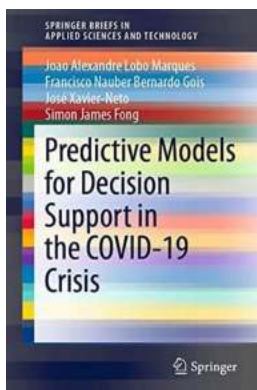
For ours is the age of authoritarian rulers: self-proclaimed saviors of the nation who evade accountability while robbing their people of truth, treasure, and the protections of democracy. They promise law and order, then legitimize lawbreaking by financial, sexual, and other predators.

They use masculinity as a symbol of strength and a political weapon. Taking what you want, and getting away with it, becomes proof of male authority. They use propaganda, corruption, and violence to stay in power.

Vladimir Putin and Mobutu Sese Seko's kleptocracies, Augusto Pinochet's torture sites, Benito Mussolini and Muammar Gaddafi's systems of sexual exploitation, and Silvio Berlusconi and Donald Trump's relentless misinformation: all show how authoritarian rule, far from ensuring stability, is marked by destructive chaos.

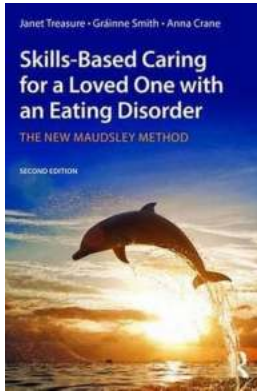
No other type of leader is so transparent about prioritizing self-interest over the public good. As one country after another has discovered, the strongman is at his worst when true guidance is most needed by his country.

Recounting the acts of solidarity and dignity that have undone strongmen over the past 100 years, Ben-Ghiat makes vividly clear that only by seeing the strongman for what he is—and by valuing one another as he is unable to do—can we stop him, now and in the future.



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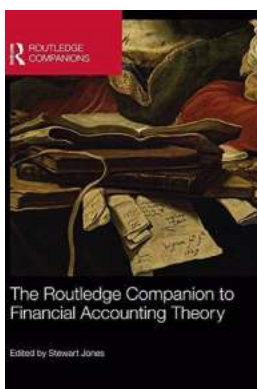
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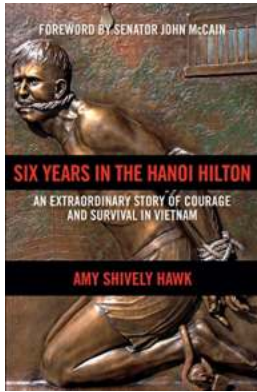
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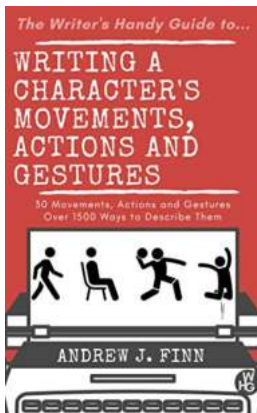
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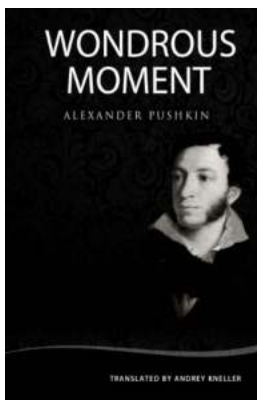
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