

Fascism

Introduction

Fascism—the word comes from the Italian *fascis*—a bundle of rods tied around an axe-blade. In ancient Rome, it symbolised **authority and unity**: “Together we are unbreakable, and we have the power to punish.” Mussolini didn’t pick this symbol by accident—it was a perfect metaphor for his dream: *one people, one will, one leader*.

It was born in the **interwar period**—that turbulent time after World War I, when the old world was in ruins, economies were shattered, and people no longer trusted the slow, messy process of democracy. Fascists claimed they were **revolting against modernity and the Enlightenment**—against the liberal ideas of equality, rational debate, and individual rights. The Nazis even shouted, “*1789 is dead!*”—a direct slap at the ideals of the French Revolution: liberty, equality, fraternity.

Look at the faces of history:

- **Mussolini** in Italy, 1922—marches into Rome and becomes Prime Minister. Soon, all opposition is silenced, and a **one-party fascist state** rises.
- **Hitler** in Germany, 1933—takes the Chancellorship, then the country, then the continent.
- **Prince Fumimaro** in Imperial Japan during the 1930s—expansionist, militaristic, ultra-nationalist.

The pattern is chillingly similar: extreme nationalism, cult of the leader, suppression of dissent, glorification of war and sacrifice.

Even when it was “defeated” in World War II, Fascism didn’t vanish—it **mutated**. **Neo-fascist movements** emerged: Neo-Nazis who didn’t just target communists, liberals, and Jews, but also **immigrants**. They learned to put on a suit and work within democratic systems—forming parties like the **Italian Social Movement**, **National Front** in the UK, and **Golden Dawn** in Greece.

Fascism thrives in times of fear. It promises *order* over chaos, *unity* over division—but always at the cost of freedom. That’s why it’s not just history—it’s a warning.

Core Themes

When we talk about **Fascism**, one of the first challenges we face is — *what exactly is it?* If you open a Marxist book, it’ll say one thing. A liberal scholar? Another thing. Why?

Because **Fascism** refuses to sit politely in a neat ideological box. It doesn’t have a **rational, coherent core** like liberalism or socialism. You can’t point to one neat manifesto and say: *Here, this is fascism in essence*.

The great historian **Hugh Trevor** put it bluntly — it’s “**an ill-assorted hodgepodge of ideologies**.”

Think of it like a Frankenstein’s monster: bits of ultra-nationalism stitched to racism, patched over with militarism, draped in anti-communism, and infused with mystical myths of past glory.

Now, here’s the trick — to a fascist leader like Hitler or Mussolini, this *wasn’t* a problem. Because fascism **did not want to be argued with**.

Hitler’s worldview wasn’t a thesis for discussion; it was **a complete set of attitudes**. It **demand**ed **commitment and faith**, not reason and debate. You didn’t *analyze* Hitler’s words — you *absorbed* them, chanted them, marched to them.

And this is where we must shift our lens — fascism works less like a political philosophy, and more like a **political religion**.

It offers myths, rituals, symbols — the salute, the uniform, the anthem — and expects you to surrender to them emotionally.

Historically, this religion was marked by **statism** — the state as the supreme authority, dwarfing the individual — and **racism**, the belief that some races were destined to rule and others to be erased or enslaved.

So, fascism isn't just about governing people. It's about **possessing** them — body, mind, and soul.

Anti-Rationalism

When we peel back the layers of **fascism**, one of the most striking things we find is its **Anti-Rationalism**. Fascism doesn't sit down for a nice, polite argument about policies and evidence. No. It **prefers emotion over reason**.

This is not random — it's drawing on thinkers like **Friedrich Nietzsche**, who spoke of the **will to power** — the idea that humans are driven not by cold logic, but by an inner surge of will, ambition, and domination. It also draws from **George Sorel**, who said that if you want to *move* people, you don't give them spreadsheets and speeches — you give them **political myth**. A story so powerful, so emotional, that it **provokes action**.

Mussolini understood this perfectly. His motto? **"Action not talk."** Why waste time in what he mocked as the parliamentary **"talking shop"** when you could be marching in the streets, seizing power, and rewriting history?

Now — here's the darker undercurrent — fascism's anti-character is rooted in **nihilism**.

It stands **against freedom**, because it doesn't want citizens to think for themselves; it wants **unquestioning submission**.

It stands **against democracy**, replacing it with **absolute dictatorship**.

It stands **against progress** in the liberal sense, preferring instead **constant struggle and war** as the lifeblood of the nation.

But here's the paradox — fascists didn't see themselves as destroyers only. They saw themselves as a **creative force**, building a **new civilisation** through **creative destruction** — smashing the "decadent" old order to forge something purer, stronger.

And the glue holding this community together wasn't rational agreement. It was **innate loyalties** and **emotional bonds** — a **common past**, a **higher collective purpose** that **subordinated all rivalries**.

In this world, the ideal citizen was the **New Man** — a **hero** driven by **duty, honour, and self-sacrifice**, dissolving his **personality into the social whole**.

It's intoxicating, it's dangerous — and it's why fascism could rally millions not through reasoning, but through sheer emotional possession.

Struggle

Imagine a political ideology that doesn't see peace as the end goal, but rather as a dangerous lull — a pause that weakens the nation. This is **Fascism's glorification of unending struggle**, rooted deeply in **Charles Darwin's natural selection** and **Herbert Spencer's Social Darwinism**. The idea is simple but ruthless: in nature, only the fittest survive — and nations, too, must constantly fight to prove they are the fittest.

Mussolini captured this raw, almost primal spirit when he declared, *"War is to men what maternity is to women."* To him, war wasn't destruction — it was creation. It forged the **"new man"**, hardened the collective will, and purified the nation.

This ideology didn't stop at glorifying military struggle. It seeped into **eugenics**, especially **racial eugenics**. Jews, Roma, and **persons with disabilities (PWD)** were targeted as "unfit" for the national body — a chilling combination of pseudo-science and political violence.

And this wasn't just inward-looking. Fascists set their eyes beyond their borders, pushing for **Lebensraum** — *living space* — particularly in the East. This expansion wasn't just territorial greed; it was framed as a

biological necessity for the survival and growth of the superior race. The ultimate, unblinking ambition?

World dominion.

In short, for fascists, life was a battlefield — literally and ideologically — where rest meant decay and only struggle promised rebirth.

Socialism

When fascists rose to power, they didn't come marching in saying, "*We love big business.*" No — they were clever. They used **national socialism** as bait to win over the **urban workers**, the **small shopkeepers**, and the **peasants**. They pointed to villains — giant **department stores** crushing small traders, huge **farms** swallowing peasant land — and promised protection.

They preached **collectivism**: *the common good before the private good*. To them, **capitalism** was dangerous not because it created wealth, but because it fostered selfishness that could fracture **national cohesion**. So, their early **economic policy** wore a **socialistic style** — full of **state regulations** and **planning** that seemed to favour the "little man."

But here's the twist. Once fascists had cemented their power, they shifted gears. The workers and small traders who had been courted early were sidelined. Big businesses were suddenly allies. In Nazi Germany, this shift was brutally clear during the **Night of the Long Knives (1934)** — when leftist factions within the Nazi movement were literally eliminated.

And make no mistake — while they flirted with socialist language, **anti-communism** was always stronger than socialism. Fascists rejected the idea of **international working-class solidarity**, replacing it with loyalty to one's **race** and **nation**. Your class allegiance didn't matter — your racial allegiance did.

So, fascist "socialism" was never about equality — it was a political tool, a mask worn until the real face of **authoritarian nationalism** could emerge.

Leadership & Elitism

First, forget the idea of equality. Fascism **radically rejected equality**. They believed people are **born with different abilities**, and only a rare few — forged through **struggle** — could rise to true leadership.

Society, in their view, had a **rigid hierarchy**:

- At the very top — the **supreme all-seeing leader**, the embodiment of the nation.
- Just below him — the **warrior elite**, exclusively male, symbols of **heroism**, **vision**, and **sacrifice**.
- And at the bottom — the **masses: weak, ignorant**, destined for **unquestioning obedience**.

This wasn't just politics — it was philosophy. They drew on **Nietzsche's Overman (Übermensch)**, an individual who rises above **herd morality** and lives by their **own will**. The leader wasn't bound by ordinary rules — he *made* the rules.

We can even analyse this with **Max Weber's three types of authority**:

1. **Traditional authority** — respect for old customs.
2. **Legal-rational authority** — rule by law.
3. **Charismatic authority** — power from personal magnetism.

Fascism thrived on **charismatic authority** but wrapped it in tradition and legality to make it look unshakable.

At the core was the **Leader Principle (Führerprinzip)**: **all authority emanated from the leader's personality**. He didn't just speak for the people — he **defined** the people's **real will** and **general will**. In fascist eyes, the leader wasn't accountable to the people — the people were accountable to him.

It's leadership not as service, but as destiny — reserved for the chosen few, obeyed by the many.

Ultra-Nationalism

If fascist leadership was about **destiny**, ultra-nationalism was about **mission**. And that mission was simple: **your nation must dominate — or be dominated**.

This wasn't the polite nationalism of waving flags on holidays. Fascist nationalism was **chauvinistic**, **expansionist**, and saw the world as a ruthless arena where **nations were rivals locked in a struggle for dominance**.

The promise? **National regeneration** — a grand rebirth of pride and power. How? By invoking **past glories**:

- For Italy, the dream of **Imperial Rome**.
- For Germany, the might of **Bismarck's Reich**.

These weren't just nostalgic daydreams — they were blueprints. The idea was: *We were great once. We will be great again. And if we must take land, crush enemies, or rewrite borders to do it — so be it.*

History gives us the proof points:

- **Manchuria, 1931** — Japan asserting its imperial will.
- **Abyssinia, 1934** — Mussolini's Italy flexing colonial muscle.

Economics became a weapon of nationalism. They pursued **autarky** — total **self-sufficiency**. Why depend on outsiders when your national survival is at stake? This meant strict **control over resources and energy**, ensuring that **economic strength fed directly into military and national regeneration**.

Ultra-nationalism fused pride, fear, and ambition into one unstoppable drive: to make the nation not just survive, but **tower over all others**.

Types of Fascism

Now, fascism was not just a *style* of politics — it had **types**, each with its own flavour of control and ideology. Two stand out: **Extreme Statism** and **Extreme Racism**.

Extreme Statism

Imagine a **totalitarian state** where **extreme collectivism** is the creed and the **leader principle** (*Führerprinzip*) is the engine. This meant **immediate contact between leader and citizen** — no bureaucratic buffers, no independent civil society.

Here, **state and society were one**. *No distinction. No private sphere.* Every citizen was expected to be an **active participant**, showing **total commitment**, with **complete politicisation of the masses**.

And it wasn't just political — it was **cultural control**. Fascism enforced a **monistic belief** in a **single value system**.

- Under **Nazis**: **total control** over **media, art, culture, youth organisations** — all channels for shaping the mind.
- In **Italy**, it looked different. The **monarchy** and **church** survived, but Mussolini innovated with **corporatism** — the so-called “third way” between capitalism and socialism. Here, **22 corporations** represented **workers, employers, and the government**, aiming for *social harmony* over class conflict.

- And then there was **Futurism** — glorifying **machines** and **industries** while also romanticising the **past glories** of the nation.

Extreme Racism

In **Italy**, the supremacy of the state over the individual was **voluntary** — it *could* embrace anyone willing to submit. But **Nazism**? That was different. Here, **race** was a **biological, genetic** category — something **impossible to change**.

Fascists also glorified a **peasant ideology** — the belief that **modern civilisation** was **decadent** and **corrupt**, while the **simple life close to the land** was pure and noble. This was **Nordic racism** fused with **rural romanticism**.

The irony? While they idealised peasant life, **war** demanded **industrial weapons**, factories, and modern technology — creating a tension between **romantic ideals** and **military reality**.

So, whether it was **Extreme Statism** binding every citizen into the machinery of the state, or **Extreme Racism** defining who could *ever* belong — fascism’s “types” always aimed for one thing: **total control, total unity, and total obedience**.

Modern Relevance of Fascism

Resurgence of Ultra-Nationalism

The **chauvinistic and expansionist nationalism** of fascism finds echoes in modern **far-right populist movements** worldwide. Leaders in countries across **Europe, Asia, and the Americas** use **national regeneration narratives**—recalling “past glories” to mobilise mass support, much like Mussolini’s **Imperial Rome** rhetoric or Nazi Germany’s Bismarck-era nostalgia.

For example, **Brexit campaigns, Make America Great Again**, show similar patterns of **myth-making** and **identity-based mobilisation**.

Emotional Politics & Anti-Rationalism

Fascism’s **anti-rationalism**, preference for **emotion over reason**, and reliance on **political myth** parallels the **post-truth era** where **social media** spreads **narratives over facts**.

Populist leaders often echo Mussolini’s “**action not talk**” disdain for parliamentary deliberation, prioritising **spectacle politics** and **direct leader-citizen connections**.

Authoritarian Leadership & The Leader Principle

The **leader principle**—where authority emanates from the leader’s personality—remains visible in **charismatic authoritarian populism**. In countries like **Turkey (Erdoğan), Russia (Putin), or Hungary (Orbán)**, politics is heavily centralised around the persona of the leader, similar to **Weber’s charismatic authority** applied in fascist regimes.

Control of Civil Society & Extreme Statism

Fascism’s **monistic belief in a single value system**, control over **media, culture, and youth organisations**, and **politicisation of the masses** resonates with modern **state-led narrative control** in **China, North Korea**, and even in some **democratic backsliding states** where press freedom is curtailed.

The **corporatist model**—state-led business-labour cooperation—is echoed in today’s **state capitalism** (e.g., China’s SOEs, Russia’s energy sector).

Identity-Based Politics & Racism

Fascist **extreme racism**, biological determinism, and **peasant romanticism** reappear in **white supremacist movements** (e.g., U.S. alt-right, Europe's Identitarian movement) and **ethno-nationalist policies** targeting immigrants or minorities (e.g., Myanmar's Rohingya crisis, anti-refugee policies in Poland and Hungary). The **biological race theory** is often replaced today by **cultural purity arguments** but serves similar exclusionary purposes.

Militarism & Glorification of Struggle

The fascist ideal of **unending struggle** finds modern form in **militaristic nationalism**—such as **China's military expansion in the South China Sea**, **Russia's Ukraine war**, and **revivalist military parades** in authoritarian regimes. The "**Lebensraum**" concept parallels geopolitical projects like **China's Belt and Road Initiative** (economic space) and **Russia's Eurasian vision**.

Economic Nationalism & Autarky

Fascist **autarky** re-emerges in **protectionist policies** and **economic self-sufficiency drives**—such as **Make in India**, **America First tariffs**, and **China's dual circulation strategy**. While not identical to fascist corporatism, these policies combine **economic nationalism** with strategic **resource control**.

Neo-Fascist Trends

Post–Cold War **Neo-Nazi** and **alt-right** movements—seen in Germany's **AfD**, Greece's **Golden Dawn**, and Italy's **Brothers of Italy**—adapt fascist aesthetics and rhetoric to **democratic frameworks**, often focusing on **anti-immigrant**, **anti-globalist**, and **Islamophobic** agendas. These show the **adaptability of fascist core ideas** even in electoral politics.

PYQ

1. Fascism displays an ambivalent stance towards parliamentary democracy. Explain. 2023, 20.
2. Comment on: "Nothing against the State, nothing over it, nothing beyond it." - Mussolini. 2018, 10
3. Examine the conception of the State in the ideologies of Fascism and Marxism. 2014, 15
4. Comment on: "Fascism is the destruction of liberal ideas and institutions in the interest of those who own the instruments of economic power." (Laski). 2008, 20