

## Common Characteristics of Fascist Movements

“Fascism may be defined as a form of political behavior marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion.”

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**Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Knopf, 2004), 218.**

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“The great ‘isms’ of nineteenth-century Europe—conservatism, liberalism, socialism—were associated with notable rule, characterized by deference to educated leaders, learned debates, and (even in some forms of socialism) limited popular authority. Fascism is a political practice appropriate to the mass politics of the twentieth century. Moreover, it bears a different relationship to thought than do the nineteenth-century ‘isms.’ Unlike them, fascism does not rest on formal philosophical positions with claims to universal validity. There was no ‘Fascist Manifesto,’ no founding fascist thinker. Although one can deduce from fascist language implicit Social Darwinist assumptions about human nature, the need for community and authority in human society, and the destiny of nations in history, fascism does not base its claims to validity on their truth. Fascists despise thought and reason, abandon intellectual positions casually, and cast aside many intellectual fellow-travelers. They subordinate thought and reason not to faith, as did the traditional Right, but to the promptings of the blood and the historic destiny of the group. Their only moral yardstick is the prowess of the race, of the nation, of the community. They claim legitimacy by no universal standard except a Darwinian triumph of the strongest community.

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**Paxton, “The Five Stages of Fascism,” *The Journal of Modern History* 70:1 (1998), 4-5.**

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“Mobilizing passions” of fascism: “a sense of overwhelming crisis beyond the reach of any traditional solutions; the primacy of the group, toward which one has duties superior to every right, whether individual or universal, and the subordination of the individual to it; the belief that one’s group is a victim, a sentiment that justifies any action, without legal or moral limits, against its enemies, both internal and external; dread of the group’s decline under the corrosive effects of individualistic liberalism, class conflict, and alien influences; the need for closer integration of a purer community, by consent if possible, or by exclusionary violence if necessary; the need for authority by natural chiefs (always male), culminating in a national chieftain who alone is capable of incarnating the group’s historical destiny; the superiority of the leader’s instincts over abstract and universal reason; the beauty of violence and the efficacy of will, when they are devoted to the group’s success; the right of the chosen people to dominate others without restraint from any kind of human or divine law, right being decided by the sole criterion of the group’s prowess within a Darwinian struggle.”

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**Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, 219-220. [16, 20]**

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“[Fascism] is for the only kind of liberty that is serious—the liberty of the State and of the individual in the State. Because, for the Fascist, all is comprised in the State and nothing spiritual or human exists—much less has any value—outside the State. [...] The State is not merely either the numbers or the sum of individuals forming the majority of a people. Fascism for this reason is opposed to the democracy which identifies peoples with the greatest number of individuals and reduces them to a majority level. But if people are conceived, as they should be, qualitatively and not quantitatively, then Fascism is democracy in its purest form.”

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**Benito Mussolini, “The Doctrine of Fascism,” trans. I.S. Munro, in *Readings on Fascism and National Socialism*, ed. Alan Swallow (Denver: University of Colorado, n.d.). Originally published in *Enciclopedia Italiana*, vol. XIV (Rome: Treccani, 1932).**

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“For Ur-Fascism [or ‘Eternal Fascism’] there is no struggle for life but, rather, life is lived for struggle. Thus *pacifism is trafficking with the enemy*. It is bad because *life is permanent warfare*. [...] In such a perspective *everybody is educated to become a hero*. In every mythology the hero is an exceptional being, but in Ur-Fascist ideology, heroism is the norm. This cult of heroism is strictly linked with the cult of death. It is not by chance that a motto of the Falangists was *Viva la Muerte* (in English it should be translated as “Long Live Death!”). In non-fascist societies, the lay public is told that death is unpleasant but must be faced with dignity; believers are told that it is the painful way to reach a supernatural happiness. By contrast, the Ur-Fascist hero craves heroic death, advertised as the best reward for a heroic life. The Ur-Fascist hero is impatient to die. In his impatience, he more frequently sends other people to death. Since both permanent war and heroism are difficult games to play, the Ur-Fascist transfers his will to power to sexual matters. This is the origin of machismo (which implies both disdain for women and intolerance and condemnation of nonstandard sexual habits, from chastity to homosexuality).”

**Umberto Eco, “Ur-Fascism,” *New York Review of Books*, June 22, 1995.**

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## Contemporary Considerations

“Today a ‘politics of resentment’ rooted in authentic American piety and nativism sometimes leads to violence against some of the very same ‘internal enemies’ once targeted by the Nazis, such as homosexuals and defenders of abortion rights. Of course the United States would have to suffer catastrophic setbacks and polarization for these fringe groups to find powerful allies and enter the mainstream. I half expected to see emerge after 1968 a movement of national reunification, regeneration, and purification directed against hirsute antiwar protesters, black radicals, and ‘degenerate’ artists. I thought that some of the Vietnam veterans might form analogs to the Freikorps of 1919 Germany or the Italian Arditi, and attack the youths whose demonstrations on the steps of the Pentagon had ‘stabbed them in the back.’ Fortunately I was wrong (so far).”

**Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, 202.**

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“[E]ven some participants in our own anti-fascist organizations are ambiguous on issues which should clearly differentiate right from left. These ambiguities, and actually this may be too mild a term, include romanticized views of violence, male supremacy, susceptibility to cults of omniscient leadership, and macho opposition to open debate and discussion with respect for individual and group autonomy. [...] We have to recognize and criticize the elitism and arrogance in our camp that writes off large sections of people as terminally corrupted. Blood and soil fascists, who are mainly concerned with ‘their own kind’, can, and do, treat masses of less favored people as redundant and mere objects. We can’t.”

**Don Hamerquist, “Fascism and Anti-Fascism,” in *Confronting Fascism: Discussion Documents for a Militant Movement*, ed. Don Hamerquist et al. (Montreal: Kersplebedeb, 2002), Kindle ed., 513-527.**

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“Far Right cross-recruiting from the Left has long been a problem, and some Far Right groups are now in a renewed period of doing it—while intentionally disguising and/or soft-selling their real aims. In recent years, this has been observed in anti-war, progressive populist, radical Left, anarchist, environmental, animal rights, anti-Zionist, counter-cultural, and religious- (especially esoteric, occult, and neopagan Heathen) circles. Some begin by repeating a sophisticated left-wing critique of problems with contemporary society, draw upon Leftist symbols and cultural orientation, and then offer racial separatism (along with the rest of the Far Right package) as the answer to these problems. [...]”

“Open political participation by the Far Right in progressive circles allows Far Right actors to teach their talking points to non-fascist activists. Over the years, the Far Right organization around Lyndon LaRouche has duped a variety of progressives into adopting their talking points, especially during the Iran-Contra affair in the late 1980s. More recently, right-wing critiques of the Federal Reserve gained traction within the Occupy Wall Street

movement. The most benign of these ideas were grounded in Libertarian economics, but they quickly slid into (non-bigoted) conspiracy theories, and from there into thinly veiled—or even openly—antisemitic arguments. And for decades, environmentalists have struggled against fascist and other xenophobic interpretations of environmentalism.”

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Spencer Sunshine, “Drawing Lines against Racism and Fascism,” *Eyes Right Blog*, March 5, 2015.

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## Resistance Tactics: Dialogue

“The cleverest trick is how the right has empowered and elevated spokespeople who, though often anecdotal, claim to represent vast constituencies: African-Americans who oppose affirmative action, women who oppose feminism, Mexican-Americans who call for immigration control. Their discourse is counterintuitive in its opposition to apparent self-interest, and thus the hardest to decode and confront as scapegoating.

“Our most effective response as progressives is to empower and elevate as leaders persons whose core identities and beliefs transcend boundaries: Latina artists who support free expression and immigration rights, Christians who support separation of church and state, African-American lesbians who speak out against racism and homophobia, veterans who oppose militarism, comedians who gleefully dissect the absurd claims of our emperor politicians who flap about wearing no intellectual clothes.

“In confronting scapegoating, it is important to isolate the handful of ideologues cynically promoting racism, sexism, homophobia, antisemitism and other forms of supremacy from their audience who may embrace these ideas consciously or unconsciously, but whose prejudice and discrimination has not hardened into a zealous worldview. The right has gained many of these converts because they are the only organized oppositional movement challenging the status quo in a coherent manner that provides seemingly plausible explanations and solutions. Labeling and demonizing the right as radicals and extremists who should be shunned is like helping miners pan for fool’s gold on Saturday when we should be spending our workweek organizing them to take control of the mines.”

**Chip Berlet, “Challenging the Political Right: Towards an Effective Response,” blog post on *Chip Berlet’s Blogsite: Research for Progress*, November 29, 2016. Originally published as “Following the Threads,” in *Unraveling the Right: The New Conservatism in American Thought and Politics*, ed. Amy E. Ansell (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998).**

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“It was always a too little noted hallmark of fascist propaganda that it was not satisfied with lying but deliberately proposed to transform its lies into reality. [...] The essential characteristic of fascist propaganda was never its lies, for this is something more or less common to propaganda everywhere and of every time. The essential thing was that they exploited the age-old Occidental prejudice which confuses reality with truth, and made that ‘true’ which until then could only be stated as a lie. It is for this reason that any argumentation with fascists—the so-called counter-propaganda—is so extremely senseless: it is as though one were to debate with a potential murderer as to whether his future victim were dead or alive, completely forgetting that man can kill and that the murderer, by killing the person in question, could promptly provide proof of the correctness of this statement.”

**Hannah Arendt, “The Seeds of a Fascist International,” in *Hannah Arendt, Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), 146-147.**

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## **Resistance Tactics: The Historical Role of Violence**

“Physical confrontation is just a small aspect of antifa direct action, but the history of anti-fascist, anti-racist action is not one of so-called allies standing in polite disapproval or donning safety pins. [...] Liberals who reject such a strategy in defense of the right to free of speech and assembly engage in an historical NIMBYism, in which only in the past, or in other countries, has militancy against white supremacy been a legitimate resistance. They forget, too, that while the First Amendment ensures that the government will not interfere with free speech, this has no bearing on neo-fascists having the right to be heard or countenanced by the rest of us. For the radical left, no such bad thought takes hold, because militant tactics against white supremacy never stopped being necessary—in the fight against slavery, Jim Crow, red-lining, and mass incarceration—with or without explicit white nationalists in center political stage.”

**Natasha Lennard, “Anti-Fascists Will Fight Trump’s Fascism in the Streets,” *The Nation*, January 19, 2017.**

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## **Resistance Tactics: Long-Term Social Transformation**

“[A] long-term right-wing dialogue and counter-recruitment process such as through a leftist version of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration [the process used by U.N. peacekeepers following an armed conflict] could potentially be utilized in an effort to undermine right-wing bleeding deacons. You may say this is absurd and unrealistic but I actually know of a number of Minutemen and Klansmen who were counter-recruited into left-wing, anti-racist community defense initiatives by the John Brown Gun Club (JBGC) through strategies such as tabling at gun shows and building long-term, trusting relationships and helping the poor whites realize they’d been hoodwinked (no pun intended). Then using the multi-racial armed collaborations they eventually created, the JBGC could provide at the request of these groups, extensive security and concrete protection for black churches, mosques, protests, abortion clinics and the like. These types of community defense [are] crucial antifa work. [...]”

“If fascism is built on theories of dominance and a sort of narcissistic group-selfishness and manipulateness, then, to that extent, it reflects the sociopathic tendencies which we must undermine in ourselves. When I speak of empathy as a solution to this, I am not speaking of some brittle and impulsive visceral reaction, but rather of a sustained and conscious blurring of the self in order to better understand the “other”. This does not mean that we lose ourselves in our process of recognition because, if our values are true, then they will always survive the encounter, no matter how deep.”

**Emmi Bevensee, “Towards a Transformative Anti-Fascism: The Relevance of Radicalized Peacebuilding to Antifa Praxis,” blog post on *Emmi Bevensee: Anarchist Participation, Nerd Stuff*, September 16, 2016.**

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