

# Questioning on Several Forms of Fascism

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## Abstract

The concept of fascism has been defined quite precisely by researchers in the field of political science and sociology, who also defined its main features or characteristics. However, with the word fascism (and its derivatives, e.g. fascists, fascist...) members of the left often label their opponents, thus, this word is often misused. In essence, fascism is a word that has become synonymous with the word totalitarianism. With the analysis that was based on similar characteristics we concluded that totalitarianisms of both poles (if the classical left–right political spectrum is applied) exhibit more common features than, for instance, totalitarianisms and classical dictatorships, which are also often called fascist or semi-fascist regimes. Thus, German Nazism (often also presented as one of the forms of fascism) and Russian Bolshevism (as one of the extremes forms of socialism) or Titoism in Yugoslavia have more in common than e.g. German Nazism and Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile or the dictatorship of colonels in Greece (both also frequently referred to as fascistic regimes or semi-fascist regimes). Using the word fascism is often not so much about denoting the actual content as it is more for political propaganda and slandering the opponent. If it was based on actual characteristics, fascism (fascist, fascists...) could become an adjective to denote all totalitarianisms (left fascism, right-wing fascism, Islamic fascism...).

**Keywords:** fascism; totalitarianism; extrem left; extrem right; socialist regimes; ideology

## Introduction

In the last decade, the word fascism has often been abused. It is frequently used by the so-called extreme left (which calls itself anti-fascist) to refer to political opponents of the right of the center and to governments whose actions it disagrees with. Nevertheless, many of the actions of the extreme left nowadays have elements that could be called 'fascist.' The thin borderline that has emerged between today's extreme left and extreme right was supposedly pointed out by Churchill (Žužek, 2017): "The fascists of the future will be called anti-fascists." Even looking through history, there are very few differences between totalitarianisms, whether they are left-wing (socialism or communism) or right (fascism, nazism), since all are essentially characterized by totalitarian ideologies, state control over civil society and the cult of the leader. The differences are thus only in the details.

According to Patnaik (2020), fascism is defined by at least four characteristics:

- firstly, the constant raising of acute hatred against certain minority groups, which are treated as an enemy, while using the rhetoric of aggressive hypernationalism and attributing them or blaming them for all the weaknesses in society;
- secondly, fascism is based not only on prejudice but also on *complete irrationality*, i.e., that absolutely no evidence can disprove prejudice;
- thirdly, it poses as being a *movement* trying to gain social hegemony, unlike secret societies or murderous gangs (although the latter may also be inspired by fascist ideology and may find a place in these movements);
- and fourthly, they are not only in favor of using street violence to achieve their political goals and are thus using, despite the access to state authority, a combination of street violence and state power against targeted groups; they are also against all the liberal, democratic and progressive opinions that oppose them.

The same could be said of socialist regimes, where, unlike with the minority groups, their 'enemy' is the bourgeoisie. Trials of 'enemies' of socialism in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia (as well as in other socialist countries), where 'people's courts' massively, based on *complete* unreasonableness, condemned (pre-convicted) 'enemies' of socialism are well known. In fact, the socialist totalitarianisms were hegemonies of the so-called working class (Bolsheviks and communist parties, or a narrow circle of people as the leadership of these parties). Even though they were in power through their secret services and parastatal apparatus, the parties also used street violence against the so-called 'reactionary enemies,' e.g., often against the church in Yugoslavia.

What exactly is fascism? The term 'fascism' is commonly used for systems of government which are generally characterized by:

- elevating a nation (sometimes a race) above an individual,
- use of violence and modern techniques of propaganda and censorship to suppress political opposition,
- a large-scale economic and social organization,
- corporativism.

The word 'fascism' often (even unjustifiably) denotes various movements, actions of governments, economic measures, political opponents, etc., in short, everything that many do not like. On the other hand, however, many authors and researchers find a lot of similarities in fascism (Nazism); some even claim that all totalitarian extremes originate from Marxism, which calls for a more detailed analysis of totalitarianisms and a proper comparison of it. Of course, there are many similarities between

totalitarianisms themselves; however, are fascism and nazism actually more akin to socialist totalitarianism than to extreme right dictatorships? Do all three extreme totalitarianisms really have a common origin in Marxism? In what ways are they similar and in what ways are they different? To answer these questions two inquiry arguments have been delineated:

- Do nazism and fascism really have more in common with socialist regimes than with extreme right dictatorships, which many authors also call fascist or semi-fascist?

and

- Is the classical division into left and right totalitarianism even correct (Nazism and fascism as the extreme right and communism as the most extreme right version of socialism)?

### **Origin and ideology of totalitarianisms**

It is clear that there is no question about socialism (as a totalitarian system or dictatorship or regime) as we know it today; especially regarding the socialism of the Soviet type, which is clearly based on Marxism or scientific socialism and dialectics. According to Lenin it is about creating a type of social organization in which power is in the hands of the working people, and not vice versa, that power governs the proletarians. And if socialism is a combination of political force and power on the basis (mostly declaratively) of class affiliation (working class, proletariat), clearly defining the class enemy (bourgeoisie, aristocracy, etc.), what then distinguishes fascism from socialism and where does it come from?

The fascist manifesto (*Il manifesto dei fasci italiani di combattimento*), published on 6th June 1919 in the newspaper *Il Popolo d'Italia* (Ambris and Marinetti), offered the basic political views of the fascist movement. The manifesto was divided into four parts, describing the movement's objectives in the political, social, military and financial fields. From the point of view of comparison with other regimes, there are essential aspects mainly in the social and financial spheres (which very clearly indicate the influence of socialism on fascism):

- The rapid adoption of the law of the State, enforcing *an eight-hour* working day for all workers;
- Minimum wage;
- Participation of workers' representatives in the functions of industrial commissions;
- Demonstrating the same confidence in *workers'* unions (which prove to be technically and morally valuable) as is shown to industrial leaders or civil servants;
- Reorganization of railways and transport sector;

- Substantial progressive capital tax (to provide for 'partial expropriation' of concentrated assets);
- The seizure of all the properties of religious congregations and the abolition of all bishops, who represent the enormous responsibility of the nation and the privileges of the poor.

Mussolini was a member of the Socialist Party between 1903 and 1914. He finally parted with the doctrine of socialism in 1919 because he thought socialism was too rigid, inactive and backward-looking. Nevertheless, he retained many of the elements of the socialist doctrine, so it can be safely pointed out that the roots of fascism are in socialism. Similarly, several authors cite Hitler's sympathy towards socialism (Flood, 2018; Talgo, 2021), especially at his young age, immediately after the end of the First World War, when he returned to Bavaria. However, to a large extent, it would be wrong to equate socialism (especially its extreme form, communism) with nazism and fascism, since both totalitarian systems, while having many characteristics of socialism, also had quite a few extreme right elements (in nazism in particular there was a strong mixing of socialist and nationalist elements).

Mussolini (1935, p. 11) considered fascism to be superior to socialism; an upgrade of socialism, we might say: "Therefore, fascism goes against socialism, which limits the historical movement, turning it into a class struggle, while not being aware of the state unity in which classes are merged into a single economic and moral reality; it is also against class trade unionism. However, from the point of view of an all-governing State, the real needs are acknowledged, representing the origin of the socialist and trade union movement, asserting them in the corporate system of interests harmonized in the unity of the State." However, as the quotation shows, he acknowledged that at least part of the roots of fascism stemmed from socialism.

Just as Mussolini tried to upgrade socialism with fascism, in Germany, Hitler tried to upgrade socialism with National Socialism, which ultimately became a confused idea that advocated a mixture of nationalism, antisemitism and socialism. And finally, in Nazi theory, instead of religious, political and class divisions, a new, unified class was to be created. However, this was supposed to be done by rejecting liberalism, capitalism, and socialism ideologies. Instead, they sought a different idea of *volks-gemeinschaft* (national community) built on war and race, 'blood and soil' and German heritage, and instead of the rule of the proletariat (the ideal of socialism), the fuhrer was supposed to rule (Wilde, 2021).

Also, many of Hitler's quotations show that at least to a certain extent, National Socialism derives from Marxism, especially the beginning of its development in the 20s of the last century (Talgo, 2020):

- "Socialism is the ultimate concept of duty, an ethical duty to work, not only for oneself, but also for one's fellow man, and above all the principle: the common good before one's own good, the fight against all parasitism and, above all, against easy and undeserved income. And we realized that we can't rely solely on our own people in this fight. We are convinced that socialism in its true sense will only be possible in nations and races that are Aryan. To begin with, we have faith in our people, and we are convinced that socialism is inseparable from nationalism." – 15th August 1920, speech in Munich at the Hofbräuhaus.
- "Because it seems inseparable from the social idea, and we do not believe that there could ever be a country with lasting internal health if it is not built on internal social justice. We have thus joined forces with this knowledge." – 15th August 1920, speech in Munich at the Hofbräuhaus.
- "There are no classes: there cannot be.... there can be no class, there can be only one nation and nothing else." – 12th April 1922, speech in Munich.
- "The hammer will once again become the symbol of the German worker and the sickle the sign of the German farmer." – 1st May 1934, May speech in Berlin.
- "German economic policy is conducted solely in accordance with the interests of the German people. In this respect, I am a fanatic socialist, one who has thought of the interests of all his people." – 24th February 1941, speech on the 21st anniversary of the Nazi Party.

Hitler's concept of socialism is also discussed in the following quotation (Turner, 1985, p. 288):

"In fact, this is precisely why we are called nationalists! We want to start applying socialism within our nation and among our people! International socialism cannot be introduced until individual nations become socialist."

Although many authors defend the thesis that fascism is extreme right totalitarianism, distinguished from other totalitarianisms by using mass movements to attack working-class organizations, i.e., left-wing parties and trade unions, and a militant form of right-wing populism, they are mistaken. Fascism represents only a kind of upgrade or a specific form of an extreme populist movement with the admixtures of socialism, which is evident from both the fascist manifesto and the Doctrine of Fascism. In essence, the struggle of fascism and nazism with classical socialists (communists) was more about the struggle and dominance between two populist extremes than it was about the struggle between two politically extremist groups from both sides, with fascism in Italy at the time being more 'marketable' and, as such, more acceptable to the masses. The same applies to Nazism in Germany. Arguing that Hitler was not left-wing oriented or a socialist, because of the war with Stalin, is also wrong. The war that was launched between Germany and the Soviet Union was not a war of a centrally controlled economy against capitalism or a war of freedom against tyranny. It was a war

that was supposed to decide the form of 'socialism' at its final stage - making it either global (international) or national socialist. If the idea of classical socialism is based on the working class and the goal of achieving the rule of the working class, nazism is based on race, ethnicity and the rule of race as the ultimate goal. Both totalitarianisms are thus about creating a community in order to gain complete power over the State.

### **Attitude to religion**

In his *Doctrine of Fascism*, Mussolini compared fascism to religion (1935, p. 8, p. 46) and attributed spiritual values to God (p. 43) and Fascism to Catholic religion (the dominant religion in Italy). Also, as an extremely keen manipulator, with a deep understanding of the needs of the psyche, Lenin adapted his system to human religious impulses or needs. He wanted to make Bolshevism into a secular religion that would meet the human need for meaning. Stalin upgraded his ideas. Being religiously educated (he got his education at a seminary), he learned how to recognize the religious impulse and how to activate and manipulate it. He introduced copies of liturgy or religious rituals into the Party ceremonies and gave Lenin the status of a saint after his death (he raised the pilgrimage to Lenin's mausoleum to the level of worship of Christian relics). The Party began to be surrounded by mysticism and the admission into the Party was essentially also a religious ceremony. In doing so, he wanted to give Soviet communism, as one of the forms of socialism, the status of a religion.

Similarly, in the 1930s, the National Socialists led by Hitler in Germany used a great deal of the oldest techniques of religion, precisely thought-out rituals, rhythmic repetitions, rhetoric, color, and light in their rallies. Everything was deliberate, a cunningly staged theatrical performance that led the attendees to ecstasy. Headlights, banners, nighttime rituals, etc.; everything well calculated and with the church arrogance that led to mass hysteria, which was basically a religious passion that caused a mystical experience. However, National Socialism did not adopt only the accessories of religion; it wanted to become a religion in itself (Baigent, Leight and Lincoln, 1996). The Communist Party of the former Yugoslavia was not immune to Soviet role models either but further perfected them. Just in the Soviet Union at the time, it adopted a lot of liturgies and adapted them accordingly. The first Holy Communion was substituted with the admission into pioneers, where children received red kerchiefs and caps with a star while repeating the pioneering vow in a 'solemn' environment; and confirmation was substituted with the admission into the youth. Everything took place in an almost liturgical atmosphere. However, if church sacraments are a kind of family ceremony, which also unites the wider family and strengthens family ties, family ties were completely severed at the time of pioneer or the youth initiation, and parents and relatives were replaced by the State. The Easter liturgy, as the most important Christian ceremony, was replaced by the 'Mass,' which was held every year at the JNA – Tito's Relay Stadium, when Tito, in

the role that combined the function of a ruler and a high priest, took over the relay that the youngsters brought to the stadium. Even Hitler would not be ashamed of the pomp that ruled the stadium at his party rallies in Nuremberg.

All the dictators around whom the cult of personality was built wanted to unite, or at a certain point even *did* unite both secular and quasi-religious power. In fact, they were some kind of pharaohs of the new era. This is precisely where many extreme right dictatorships (although many authors refer to them as fascist) differ from socialism, communism, classical fascism and nazism - because they were not characterized, apart from military parades, by a kind of a 'mass' system that would replace religious rituals, nor was there a deep indoctrination of the youth with which the classical family as the basic cell of society was to be broken up and the family replaced by a state or Party.

Although the Spanish regime of Francisco Franco also had certain characteristics of fascism, it differed from classical fascism, or nazism, above all in its treatment of religion and the family and the classes on which it relied. If fascism and nazism (the same as socialism) relied primarily on wider working-class masses (also with the help of socialist ideas), Spanish fascism had a base mainly among monarchists, businessmen, landowners and conservative Catholics. Historian Corum (1995, p. 75) made this clear: "The interference of Faupel (Wilhelm Faupel, ambassador of Nazi Germany to Spain) in the domestic policy of Spain at the time, with the intention of building a strong fascist party, was contrary to Franco's policy of building a nationalist coalition of businessmen, monarchists and conservative Catholics, as well as phalangists." In Austria, too, the Dollfuss regime was primarily a right-wing dictatorship rather than classical fascist totalitarianism. Based on the victory in a kind of civil war (between the federal army and Heimwehr on the one hand, and the Republican Protection League on the other) and with the banning of the Social Democratic Party and the arrest and execution of those directly involved in the rebellion, Dollfuss was dubbed 'worker murderer' (Staudinger, 2012),

### **Propaganda and cult of the leader**

If we take a broader look at how the propaganda worked in individual countries (fascist, socialist, etc.), a common denominator is quickly found. In all totalitarian governments, which share a common root in socialism, the behavior was very Machiavellian: the goal justifies the means, i.e., the operation of propaganda without any ethical or moral norms, with evident tightening of the communication space (monopoly), thus preventing any possibility of alternative methods of information. To a large extent, propaganda was based on lies and deceit (still typical of the Republic of China and the Democratic Republic of Korea).

The point is the manipulation of various propaganda means, including the understanding of supreme authority as a source of power to which powerless individuals turn for help. Thus, by means of verbal and non-verbal communication, the manipulator can bring a person closer to the adapted truth, thus 'enlightening' him and allowing him a reality without any critical distance. Manipulation was strongly expressed in the Nazi propaganda used by Hitler through subordinate manipulators, which created both new morals and new social values (Proha, 2017). Regarding the use of propaganda means for the purpose of manipulation - although they were also used in other dictatorships - the Soviet Union with Stalin and, of course, nowadays North Korea, came closest to Nazi behavior.

Indeed, the cult of the leader (Duce) in Italy greatly influenced the genuine enthusiasm of the nation and the affection for Mussolini, thus helping the regime create some kind of cohesion (Nolte, 1990). Accordingly, the cult of Lenin, created by Stalin and the cult of the 'comrade' Tito, or the cult of the leader (führer) Hitler, also acted as a binding agent. In a way, all these leader cults that denoted the leaders as infallible and righteous in countries where totalitarianisms had their origin in socialism, acted as a kind of state religion, which was not typical of other dictatorships (right-winged). The cult of the leader, however, was not typical of the classical right-wing dictatorships (Chile, Greece, Portugal, etc.), except perhaps partly in Spain, when Francisco Franco declared himself head of State in 1939 (Jefe del Estado) and later adopted the title of Caudillo de Espana (Head of Spain). However, in contrast to the above-mentioned cults of the leader, he introduced the sacralization and mystification of the homeland (Romero, 2008) in order to promote a unified national identity and to repress Spanish cultural diversity.

## Discussion

Do nazism and fascism really have more in common with socialist regimes than with extreme right-wing dictatorships, which many authors call fascist or semi-fascist dictatorships?

Sirico (Sirico in Ebeling, 1999) justified well the similarity between socialism and fascism (Nazism); not based on the ideology on which totalitarianism was supposed to be based, but on the misconceptions that were common to all totalitarianisms:

- The collective is important, not the individual (as is the case with all totalitarianisms).
- A collective will exists (totalitarianisms expect individuals to subordinate their individuality to the collective will embodied by the State).
- Society is based on conflict, not on cooperation (in the case of Marxists and Socialists, the class struggle, in the case of Fascists and Nazis, the struggle between races - in short, the constant conflict between those who are marked

by belonging to a class or bloodline with opponents who, if they did not exist, were invented).

- The truth is known only by a handful of people (in totalitarianisms, the very narrow circles of the ruling class acted literally like gnostics: the narrow circle of communist party intellectuals, the Fuhrer and his narrow circle, Mussolini and his close associates).
- Human nature can be changed (the socialists wanted to create a new, socialist man, the Nazis a thoroughbred superhuman, etc.).
- God is dead (in all totalitarianisms, God was replaced by the State; for the socialists, the religion was opium for the masses; the Nazis wanted to introduce pre-Christian paganism, and Mussolini also put fascism above religion).

In order to explain similarities and differences, a comparative table was made, where five reference countries from both poles (according to many authors) with the characteristics of totalitarianism, i.e., five socialist and five fascist countries, were entered. A comparison was made based on different characteristics that were supposed to characterize totalitarian regimes.

According to the studied literature and other available data, properties that are very characteristic of individual regimens are marked with an X and those that are partially characteristic with -. Where there is no characteristic or connection, the field is left blank.

	National Socialism Germany	Fascism Italy	Franco's Dictatorship Spain	Dictatorship of Colonels Greece	Pinochet dictatorship Chile	Communism Soviet Union	Socialism SFR Yugoslavia	Communism North Korea	Communism Cuba	Communism Albania
Strong youth indoctrination (pioneers, Hitlerjungend, etc.)	X	X				X	X	X	X	X
Personality cult – infallible leader	X	X	-			X	X	X	X	X
Negative attitude towards religion	X	X				X	X	X	X	X
Nationalisation (actual or in programme)	X	X				X	X	X	X	X
Nationalism	X	X	X							
Internationalism						X	X	X	X	
Evolution from Socialism	-	-				X	X	X	X	X
Declared fight against the bourgeoisie	X	X				X	X	X	X	X

*Table of comparison of selected countries*

*Source: Authors*

The table shows that the right-winged totalitarian states have much more in common with the left-winged totalitarian regimes than with the right-winged dictatorships, often called fascist. Thus, the elements of fascism can only be traced to Franco's Spain (partly Horthy's Hungary), while, if we ignore the classic elements of the dictatorship or regime (terror, restriction of freedom of speech, dealing with political opponents, etc.), Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile and the dictatorship of the colonels in Greece (this could include Salazar's dictatorship in Portugal, Pilsudski's dictatorship in Poland, Dollfuss's dictatorship in Austria, etc.), are on an entirely another side from the other countries in the table. Therefore, the fact is that nazism and fascism are much more similar or have more common features with left-winged totalitarianisms than with classical right-winged dictatorships (often called fascist or semi-fascist). Of course, there is the question of whether they are based on or originate from the same ideology.

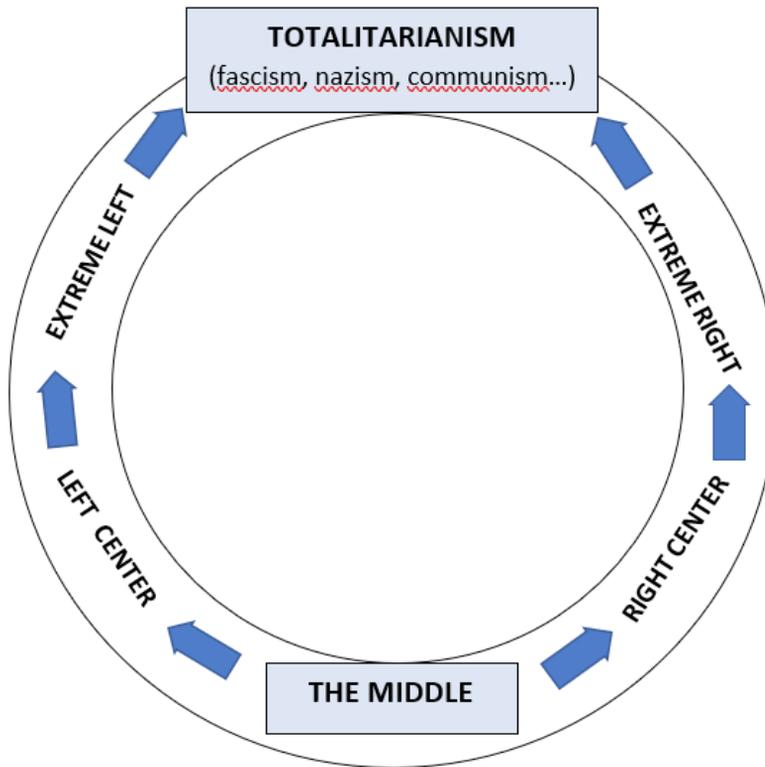
There is no way to say for sure that fascism as a whole is a heretical brother of totalitarian socialism, that is, that they have common roots. However, we can certainly say that once both ideologies are converted to totalitarianism, the differences between them become smaller, such as between fascism and classical right-winged dictatorships, or rather that they have more in common than fascism and classical right-winged dictatorships, often referred to as fascist or semi-fascist. On the other hand, Alexander Yakovlev, a member of the Soviet Politburo, a veteran of the Soviet Party and its secret services, defined nazism as a subspecies of Bolshevism, or rather, in his opinion, Bolshevism was a type of fascism, which was the largest anti-domestic power in Russia, and which destroyed its own nation (Turk, 2022).

Is the classical division into left and right-winged totalitarianisms even correct (Nazism and fascism as the extreme right and communism as the most extreme version of extreme right socialism)?

Many authors still use the classical division from the center to the right to the extreme right and vice versa. Such a division is actually obsolete; the situation is much more complex and, just the same as sometimes the programs or actions of the right-center or even the classical right in some countries have some completely liberal, social democratic or even left-wing admixtures, even the opposite side (left center, left-wing) often contains their program or also actions of admixtures that might fall into a completely different political pole.

Of course, it would be more advisable or sensible to show this (according to individual points of the program) in a three-dimensional form; however, in that case, the basic division would be lost entirely, and party definitions would create complete confusion.

Therefore, the figure below shows a more useful version, where it is easier to identify individuals and parties according to their basic values defined in the program.



*Figure: Two paths to fascism (synonymous with totalitarianism)*

*Source: Authors*

And why such a definition? Taking into account the center (the question arises as to how to define what that is), the more the two extreme poles approach the top of the circle (both the extreme left and the extreme right), thus turning into totalitarianism, the more similar they become (at the top of the circle). There are practically no differences between them (except in nuances), which is already shown in the Comparison of Selected Countries Table. No matter which totalitarianism is involved (left, right or Islamic), the same characteristics are encountered everywhere: violation of human rights, indoctrination of the youth, search for enemies (class enemy, religious enemy, racial enemy, etc.), total restriction of freedom of the press, power in the hands of an individual or a narrow group, massacres, torture, etc. It would thus probably be more correct to label all such totalitarianisms as fascist (right-wing fascism, left-wing fascism, Islamic fascism, etc.).

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