

# Fascism: Politics of 20th Century Europe

Fascism is a form of far-right, authoritarian ultranationalism marked by forcible suppression of opposition, dictatorial power, and strong regimentation of society and economy. The movement came to prominence following the end of World War I in the early 20th century, where it first took root in Italy before spreading to other European nations

The details about Fascism gathered from this article will be useful in the world history segment of the UPSC Mains exam.

## Definition of Fascism

The Italian term *fascismo* is derived from *fascio* meaning "a bundle of sticks", ultimately from the Latin word *fasces*.

Political scientists and historians have debated for long about the exact nature of fascism, with each definition having unique elements and many other definitions being criticised for either being too broad or too narrow

According to many scholars, fascism and its adherents have always attacked communism, conservatism and liberalism, drawing support mainly from the far-right to be in power

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One common definition of the term, frequently cited by reliable sources as a standard definition, is that of historian Stanley G. Payne. He focuses on three concepts:

1. Fascism is anti-liberalism, anti-communism and anti-conservatism
2. The goals of fascism are the creation of a nationalistic dictatorship that will regulate economy and structure social relations within a modern, self-determined culture to transform a nation into an empire
3. Fascism gathers support through romantic symbolism, mass mobilization, a positive view of violence and promotion of authoritarian leadership.

## What are the tenets of Fascism?

The tenets of Fascism are as follows:

**1. Nationalism (with or without expansionism):** Nationalism is a key foundation of fascism. The fascist view of a nation is that of a single organic entity that binds people together by their ancestry and is a natural unifying force of people. The ideology seeks to resolve economic,

social and political problems by achieving a millenarian national rebirth exalting the nation above all else and promoting traits of unity, strength and purity

**2. Totalitarianism:** Absolute control by the state is the hallmark of fascism. It opposes liberal democracy and rejects multi-party systems in favour of one-party systems that will, in its view, benefit the nation. In order to achieve this a fascist state pursues policies of social indoctrination through propaganda in education and the media and regulation of the production of educational and media materials. Such steps are undertaken to purge ideas that are not in line with the views of the state

**3. Economy:** Fascism presented itself as an alternative to both socialism and free-market capitalism. Fascism advocated economic control with self-sufficiency as a major goal. It advocated a resolution of domestic class conflict within a nation to secure national solidarity

Fascist economics supported a state-controlled economy that accepted a mix of private and public ownership over the means of production. Economic planning was applied to both the public and private sector and the prosperity of private enterprise depended on its acceptance of synchronizing itself with the economic goals of the state. Fascist economic ideology supported the profit motive but emphasized that industries must uphold the national interest as superior to private profit.

**4. Action:** Fascism emphasizes direct action which supports political violence and believes in its legitimacy as a core part of its politics. The basis of fascism's support of violent action is connected towards social Darwinism, which believes that a perceived superior race has all the right to dominate races that are thought to be weaker.

## A brief history of Fascism

The period following World War I in 1919 was marked by weak governments and economic hardship. Events such as the Russian Revolution and the Great Depression had further made economic prosperity a distant dream in post-war Europe. This was more evident in Italy and Germany. The Weimar Republic of Germany had inherited a country reeling from defeat and the harsh sanctions imposed on it by the Versailles treaty. The economic hardship in 1929 further aggravated matters as inflation rendered the German currency virtually useless.

This stopped the German government from paying war reparations under the Versailles treaty. France in a bid to force the Germans to repay the debt owed briefly occupied the Ruhr valley. Events such as these were fertile grounds for Hitler and his Nazi party (the German variant of Fascism) to offer an alternative. Hitler promised to do away with the 'injustices of the Versailles treaty' and usher in a new era of prosperity. Benito Mussolini of Italy also rose to power in similar conditions.

The Fascist movements in both countries met their end after the defeat of Germany and Italy in 1945 during World War II. But the ideology was alive in Spain under General Franco and under General Pinochet of Chile who ruled the country until the 1970s.

Today fascism exists as fringe movements in contrast to its past mobilisations. Even though such movements have yet to make any mark in national elections, they are gaining momentum due to ongoing issues of war, immigration and other crises that have effected their nations as of late.