

What is fascism (from HowStuffWorks)

The word "fascists" (or *fascisti*) as used in the 1930s by Benito Mussolini, the leader of the first Fascist movement and the Fascist dictator of Italy before and during World War II, most likely comes from the Italian word *fascis* and the Latin word *fasces*. *Fascis* means something along the lines of "bundle" or "unit." *Fasces* was a symbol of authority in ancient Rome, an axe surrounded by rods. These two roots offer a good glimpse into the basic tenets of fascism: unity and power.

Part of the reason why fascism seems to apply to so many different social and political viewpoints is that it is notoriously difficult to define. Mussolini's brand of Fascism is not exactly like Hitler's brand of Fascism, which is not the same as Francisco Franco's Fascism (in Spain) nor the neofascist (post-WWII) movements characterized by groups like the Skinheads. Still, there are some basic principles that can identify a Fascist movement:

- **Absolute power of the State:** The Fascist state is a glorious, living entity that is more important than any individual. All individuals are part of the State, but the State is greater than the sum of its parts. All individuals must set aside their own needs and supplicate themselves to the needs of the State. There is no law or other power that can limit the authority of the State.
- **Survival of the fittest:** A Fascist state is only as glorious and powerful as its ability to wage wars and win them. Peace is viewed as weakness, aggression as strength. Strength is the ultimate good and ensures the survival of the State.
- **Strict social order:** Social classes are strictly maintained in order to avoid "mob rule" or any hint of chaos. Chaos is a threat to the State. The State's absolute power and greatness depends on the maintenance of a class system in which every individual has a specific place, and that place cannot be altered.
- **Authoritarian leadership:** To maintain the power and greatness of the State requires a single, charismatic leader with absolute authority. This all-powerful, heroic leader maintains the unity and unquestioning submission required by the Fascist state. The authoritarian leader is often viewed as a symbol of the State. (<http://people.howstuffworks.com/fascism.htm>)

Fourteen Defining Characteristics Of Fascism

By Dr. Lawrence Britt

Dr. Lawrence Britt has examined the fascist regimes of Hitler (Germany), Mussolini (Italy), Franco (Spain), Suharto (Indonesia) and several Latin American regimes. Britt found 14 defining characteristics common to each:

1. Powerful and Continuing Nationalism - Fascist regimes tend to make constant use of patriotic mottos, slogans, symbols, songs, and other paraphernalia. Flags are seen everywhere, as are flag symbols on clothing and in public displays.

2. Disdain for the Recognition of Human Rights - Because of fear of enemies and the need for security, the people in fascist regimes are persuaded that human rights can be ignored in certain cases because of "need." The people tend to look the other way or even approve of torture, summary executions, assassinations, long incarcerations of prisoners, etc.

3. Identification of Enemies/Scapegoats as a Unifying Cause - The people are rallied into a unifying patriotic frenzy over the need to eliminate a perceived common threat or foe: racial , ethnic or religious minorities; liberals; communists; socialists, terrorists, etc.

4. Supremacy of the Military - Even when there are widespread domestic problems, the military is given a disproportionate amount of government funding, and the domestic agenda is neglected. Soldiers and military service are glamorized.

5. Rampant Sexism - The governments of fascist nations tend to be almost exclusively male-dominated. Under fascist regimes, traditional gender roles are made more rigid. Divorce, abortion and homosexuality are suppressed and the state is represented as the ultimate guardian of the family institution.

6. Controlled Mass Media - Sometimes the media is directly controlled by the government, but in other cases, the media is indirectly controlled by government regulation, or sympathetic media spokespeople and executives. Censorship, especially in war time, is very common.

7. Obsession with National Security - Fear is used as a motivational tool by the government over the masses.

8. Religion and Government are Intertwined - Governments in fascist nations tend to use the most common religion in the nation as a tool to manipulate public opinion. Religious rhetoric and terminology is common from government leaders, even when the major tenets of the religion are diametrically opposed to the government's policies or actions.

9. Capitalist Power is Protected - The industrial and business aristocracy of a fascist nation often are the ones who put the government leaders into power, creating a mutually beneficial business/government relationship and power elite.

10. Labor Power is Suppressed - Because the organizing power of labor is the only real threat to a fascist government, labor unions are either eliminated entirely, or are severely suppressed.

11. Disdain for Intellectuals and the Arts - Fascist nations tend to promote and tolerate open hostility to higher education, and academia. It is not uncommon for professors and other academics to be censored or even arrested. Free expression in the arts and letters is openly attacked.

12. Obsession with Crime and Punishment - Under fascist regimes, the police are given almost limitless power to enforce laws. The people are often willing to overlook police abuses and even forego civil liberties in the name of patriotism. There is often a national police force with virtually unlimited power in fascist nations.

13. Rampant Cronyism and Corruption - Fascist regimes almost always are governed by groups of friends and associates who appoint each other to government positions and use governmental power and authority to protect their friends from accountability. It is not uncommon in fascist regimes for national resources and even treasures to be appropriated or even outright stolen by government leaders.

14. Fraudulent Elections - Sometimes elections in fascist nations are a complete sham. Other times elections are manipulated by smear campaigns against or even assassination of opposition candidates, use of legislation to control voting numbers or political district boundaries, and manipulation of the media. Fascist nations also typically use their judiciaries to manipulate or control elections.