

Fascism

Fascism, political ideology and mass movement that dominated many parts of central, southern, and eastern Europe between 1919 and 1945 and that also had adherents in western Europe, the United States, South Africa, Japan, Latin America, and the Middle East. Europe's first fascist leader, Benito Mussolini, took the name of his party from the Latin word *fascis*, which referred to a bundle of elm or birch rods (usually containing an ax) used as a symbol of penal authority in ancient Rome. Although fascist parties and movements differed significantly from one another, they had many characteristics in common, including extreme militaristic nationalism, contempt for electoral democracy and political and cultural liberalism, a belief in natural social hierarchy and the rule of elites, and the desire to create a *Volksgemeinschaft* (German: "people's community"), in which individual interests would be subordinated to the good of the nation. At the end of World War II, the major European fascist parties were broken up, and in some countries (such as Italy and West Germany) they were officially banned. Beginning in the late 1940s, however, many fascist-oriented parties and movements were founded in Europe as well as in Latin America and South Africa. Although some European "neofascist" groups attracted large followings, especially in Italy and France, none were as influential as the major fascist parties of the interwar period.



Mussolini, Benito

Benito Mussolini addressing a rally.

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National fascisms

Fascist parties and movements came to power in several countries between 1922 and 1945: the National Fascist Party (Partito Nazionale Fascista) in Italy, led by Mussolini; the National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei), or Nazi Party, led by Adolf Hitler and representing his National Socialism movement; the Fatherland Front (Vaterländische Front) in Austria, led by Engelbert Dollfuss and supported by the Heimwehr (Home Defense Force), a major right-wing paramilitary organization; the National Union (União Nacional) in Portugal, led by António de Oliveira Salazar (which became fascist after 1936); the Party of Free Believers (Elefterofronoi) in Greece, led by Ioannis Metaxas; the Ustaša ("Insurgence") in Croatia, led by Ante Pavelić; the National Union (Nasjonal Samling) in Norway, which was in power for only a week—though its leader, Vidkun Quisling, was later made minister president under the German occupation; and the military dictatorship of Admiral Tojo Hideki in Japan.

Spain's fascist movement, the Falange ("Phalanx"), founded in 1933 by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, never came to power, but many of its members were absorbed into the military dictatorship of Francisco Franco, which itself displayed many fascist characteristics. In Poland the anti-Semitic



Adolf Hitler

Adolf Hitler (third from right) participating in a Nazi parade in Munich, c. 1930s.

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Falanga, led by Boleslaw Piasecki, was influential but was unable to overthrow the conservative regime of Józef Piłsudski. Vihtori Kosola's Lapua Movement in Finland nearly staged a coup in 1932 but was checked by conservatives backed by the army. The Arrow Cross Party (Nyilaskeresztes Párt) in Hungary, led by Ferenc Szálasi, was suppressed by the conservative regime of Miklós Horthy until 1944, when Szálasi was made a puppet ruler under the German occupation. In Romania the Iron Guard (Garda de Fier)—also called the League of Christian Defense, the Legion of the Archangel Michael, and All for the Fatherland—led by Corneliu Codreanu, was dissolved by the dictatorial regime of King Carol II in 1938. In 1939 Codreanu and several of his legionaries were arrested and “shot while trying to escape.” In 1940 remnants of the Iron Guard reemerged to share power but were finally crushed by Romanian conservatives in February 1941.



José Antonio Primo de Rivera, marqués de Estella.

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In France the Cross of Fire (Croix de Feu), later renamed the French Social Party (Parti Social Français), led by Colonel François de La Rocque, was the largest and fastest-growing party on the French right between 1936 and 1938. In 1937 it was larger than the French communist and socialist parties combined (one scholar estimated its membership between 700,000 and 1.2 million), and by 1939 it included some 3,000 mayors, about 1,000 municipal councilmen, and 12 parliamentary deputies. Other fascist movements in France included the short-lived Faisceau (1925–28), led by Georges Valois; the Young Patriots (Jeunesses Patriotes), led by Pierre Taittinger; French Solidarity (Solidarité Française), founded and financed by François Coty and led by Jean Renaud; the Franks (Francistes), led by Marcel Bucard; the French Popular Party (Parti Populaire Français), led by Jacques Doriot; and French Action (Action Française), led by Charles Maurras. After the German invasion in 1940, a number of French fascists served in the Vichy regime of Marshal Philippe Pétain.

The British Union of Fascists, led by Oswald Mosley, had some 50,000 members. In Belgium the Rexist Party, led by Léon Degrelle, won about 10 percent of the seats in the parliament in 1936. Russian fascist organizations were founded by exiles in Manchuria, the United States, and elsewhere; the largest of these groups were the Russian Fascist Party (VFP), led by Konstantin Rodzaevsky, and the All Russian Fascist Organization (VFO), led by Anastasy Vonsiatsky.

Outside Europe, popular support for fascism was greatest in South Africa and the Middle East. Several fascist groups were founded in South Africa after 1932, including the Gentile National Socialist



Sir Oswald Mosley at a fascist rally,
London.

Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

Movement and its splinter group, the South African Fascists; the South African National Democratic Party, known as the Blackshirts; and the pro-German Ox-Wagon Sentinel (Ossewabrandwag). By 1939 there were at least seven Arab “shirt” movements, including the Syrian People’s Party, also called the Syrian National Socialist Party; the Iraqi Futuwa movement; and the Young Egypt movement, also called the Green Shirts.

Several rival protofascist and fascist movements operated in Japan after 1918, and their activities helped to increase the influence of the military on the Japanese government. Among the most important of these groups were the Taisho Sincerity League (Taisho Nesshin’kai), the Imperial Way Faction (Kodo-ha), the Greater Japan National Essence Association (Dai Nippon Kokusui-kai), the Anti-Red Corps (Bokyo Gokoku-Dan), the Great Japan Political Justice Corps (Dai Nippon Seigi-Dan), the Blood Brotherhood League (Ketsumeis-Dan), the Jimmu Association (Jimmu-Kai), the New Japan League (Shin-Nihon Domei), the Eastern Way Society (Towo

Seishin-Kai), and the Great Japan Youth Party (Da-nihon Seinen-dan).

Following the Mukden Incident and the wider invasion of Manchuria by Japanese troops in 1931, several fascist-oriented patriotic societies were formed in China; the largest of these groups, the Blue Shirts, formed an alliance with the Kuomintang (National People’s Party) under Chiang Kai-shek. At Chiang’s order in 1934, the Blue Shirts were temporarily put in charge of political indoctrination in the army and given limited control of its educational system.

European fascism had a number of imitators in Latin America, including the Nacis, founded in Chile by Jorge González von Mareés; the Gold Shirts, founded in Mexico by Nicolás Rodríguez; and the Revolutionary Union (Unión Revolucionaria) of Peruvian dictator Luis Sánchez Cerro. The Brazilian Integralist Action party (Ação Integralista Brasileira), which had some 200,000 members in the mid-1930s, was suppressed by the Brazilian government in 1938 after a failed coup attempt.

In the United States the Ku Klux Klan, a white supremacist organization founded at the end of the Civil War and revived in 1915, displayed some fascist characteristics. One of its offshoots, the Black Legion, had some 60,000 members in the early 1930s and committed numerous acts of arson and bombing. In 1930 Catholic priest Charles E. Coughlin began national radio broadcasts of sermons on political and economic subjects; his talks became increasingly antidemocratic and anti-Semitic, as did the journal he founded, *Social Justice*. After running unsuccessfully for the U.S. presidency in 1936, Coughlin became an apologist for Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco. In 1942 *Social Justice* was banned from the U.S. mails for violating the Espionage Act, and in the same year the American Catholic church ordered

Coughlin to stop his broadcasts. The pro-Nazi German-American Bund, founded in 1933, staged military drills and mass rallies until it disintegrated with the U.S. entry into the war in 1941.

Varieties of fascism

Just as Marxists, liberals, and conservatives differed within and between various countries, so too did fascists. In some countries there were rivalries between native fascist movements over personal, tactical, and other differences. Fascist movements also displayed significant differences with respect to their acceptance of racism and particularly anti-Semitism, their identification with Christianity, and their support for Nazi Germany.

Acceptance of racism

Although not all fascists believed in biological racism, it played a central role in the actions of those who did. Nazism was viciously racist, especially in its attitude toward Jews. The Nazis blamed the Jews for almost everything wrong with Germany, from the Great Depression and the rise of Marxism to the evils of international capitalism and decadence in art. The Holocaust, culminating in the “final solution to the Jewish question,” was the immensely cruel outcome of this hatred. From 1933 to 1945 some six million Jewish men, women, and children were exterminated by gassings, shootings, hangings, and clubbings, and about three million Slavs (whom the Nazis regarded as only slightly less racially inferior than Jews), as well as approximately 400,000 Gypsies (Roma), were murdered as well.

Croatian fascists preached the racial inferiority of Serbs, and in the late 1930s they became increasingly anti-Semitic. When Germany invaded Yugoslavia in 1941, Ante Pavelić, the Ustaša's leader, became head of a German puppet state, the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), and established a one-party regime. The NDH moved against the more than one million Orthodox Serbs in Croatia, forcing some to convert and expelling or killing others in campaigns of genocide. About 250,000 Serbs in Croatia were eventually liquidated, many in village massacres. The regime also murdered some 40,000 Jews in concentration camps, such as the one at Jasenovac.

Elsewhere in Europe and in South Africa, Latin America, and the United States, fascist movements were racist, and sometimes specifically anti-Semitic, to varying degrees. In Poland members of the Falanga attacked Jews in the streets and created “ghetto benches” for Jewish students in the lecture rooms of the University of Warsaw. In the United States, the Ku Klux Klan and other groups preached the supremacy of the white race. Some fascists in Japan taught that the Japanese were a superior race, and Syrian fascists claimed superiority for their people as well.

In contrast to fascists in most other European countries, Mussolini opposed anti-Semitism during the first 12 years of his rule. After 1933, however, he sometimes allowed anti-Semites within his party to condemn “unpatriotic” Jews in the press. In 1938 the Italian government passed anti-Semitic legislation, and later it abetted the Holocaust. Prior to the German takeover of Austria, the fascist



A Ku Klux Klan initiation ceremony,
1920s.

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regimes of Dollfuss and Schuschnigg also rejected anti-Semitism, and many Austrian Jews—including Sigmund Freud—supported them for resisting Nazism.

During the early interwar period, France's largest fascist parties—the Faisceau, the Young Patriots, the Cross of Fire, and the French Popular Party—rejected anti-Semitism, and right-wing Jews were accepted into these movements until at least 1936, when the left-wing Popular Front, under the premiership of the Jewish socialist Léon Blum, came to power. Other fascist groups, such as French Action and French Solidarity, were more openly anti-Semitic, though they claimed to object to Jews on “cultural” rather than

racial grounds. In 1941 La Rocque placed responsibility for the “mortal vices” of France on Jews and Freemasons. Although British fascism was not anti-Semitic at the outset—Mosley's Blackshirts were trained by the British boxer Ted (“Kid”) Lewis, who was Jewish—it became so by 1936.

Identification with Christianity

Most fascist movements portrayed themselves as defenders of Christianity and the traditional Christian family against atheists and amoral humanists. This was true of Catholic fascist movements in Poland, Spain, Portugal, France, Austria, Hungary, Croatia, Bolivia, Argentina, Chile, and Brazil. In Romania, Codreanu said he wanted to model his life after the crucified Christ of the Orthodox church, and his Legion of the Archangel Michael, a forerunner of the Iron Guard, officially called for “faith in God” and “love for each other.”

In France, Valois, Taittinger, Renaud, Bucard, and La Rocque were all Catholics, and Doriot, previously an atheist, appealed to Catholic sentiments after he became a fascist. Although Maurras was an agnostic, he defended the Catholic church as a pillar of social order, and there were many Catholics among his followers. The fascist intellectual Robert Brasillach described the Spanish Civil War as a conflict between Catholic fascism and atheistic Marxism. Drieu La Rochelle rejected liberal Catholicism but praised the “virile, male Catholicism” of the Middle Ages and the “warrior Christianity of the Crusades.”

Although fascists in Germany and Italy also posed as protectors of the church, their ideologies contained many elements that conflicted with traditional Christian beliefs, and their policies were sometimes opposed by church leaders. The Nazis criticized the Christian ideals of meekness and guilt on the grounds that they repressed the violent instincts necessary to prevent inferior races from dominating Aryans. Martin Bormann, the second most powerful official in the Nazi Party after 1941, argued that Nazi and Christian beliefs were “incompatible,” primarily because the essential elements of Christianity were “taken over from Judaism.” Bormann's views were shared by Hitler, who ultimately wished to replace Christianity with a racist form of warrior paganism. Although Hitler was cautious

about dangerously alienating Christians during World War II, he sometimes permitted Nazi officials to put pressure on Protestant and Catholic parents to remove their children from religious classes and to register them for ideological instruction instead. In the Nazi schools charged with training Germany's future elite, Christian prayers were replaced with Teutonic rituals and sun-worship ceremonies.

Despite the many anti-Christian elements in Nazism, the vast majority of Nazis considered themselves to be religious, and most German anti-Semites supported Christianity purged of its "Jewish" elements. The pro-Nazi German Christians, who were part of the Lutheran church in Germany, held that Christ had been a blond-haired, blue-eyed Aryan, and male members called themselves "SS men for Christ." In many German families children began their prayers before meals with the phrase, "Führer, my Führer, bequeathed to me by the Lord."

In Italy, Mussolini signed a concordat with the papacy, the Lateran Treaty (1929), which, among other things, made Roman Catholicism the state religion of Italy and mandated the teaching of Catholic doctrine in all public primary and secondary schools. Later, many practicing Catholics joined the conservative wing of the Fascist Party. In 1931, however, Pope Pius XI issued an encyclical, *Non abbiamo bisogno*, that denounced fascism's "pagan worship of the State" and its "revolution which snatches the young from the Church and from Jesus Christ, and which inculcates in its own young people hatred, violence and irreverence." Although many Italian fascists remained Catholic, the regime's mystique contained pagan elements that glorified the spirit of ancient Rome and the military virtues of its soldiers.

Support for Germany

Many non-German fascists were just as nationalistic toward their countries as Hitler was toward his. Many Polish fascists fell resisting the German invasion of 1939, and others were later condemned to Nazi concentration camps—as were some Hungarian fascists after 1942. Before he was assassinated in 1934, the Austrian fascist Dollfuss sought Mussolini's support against Hitler, and the Heimwehr received important financial support from Mussolini to create a fascist government in Austria that would resist the Germans.

Before 1940 all French fascists opposed a German invasion of France. Doriot enlisted in the French army when war broke out between France and Germany in 1939, and in 1940, as a sergeant, he commanded a unit that held back the enemy for several hours (he was later decorated for his exploits). Following France's military defeat, some French fascists, including Doriot, subordinated their nationalism to Hitler's crusade against bolshevism, as did many Hungarian, Croatian, and other non-German fascists. Others, such as Philippe Barrès, a former member of the Faisceau, crossed the channel in 1940 to serve under Charles de Gaulle, leader of the Free French movement. Eugène Deloncle, one of the leaders of the Cagoule, France's major right-wing terrorist organization of the 1930s, was killed in 1944 while shooting at Gestapo agents who had come to arrest him. Another Cagoulard, François Duclos, was awarded the Croix de Guerre for his heroism in the Resistance.

Salazar's Portugal and Franco's Spain remained officially neutral or nonbelligerent during World War II, despite the fascist characteristics of their own regimes.

Fascist Italy and fascist Japan were allies of Germany during the war, though Mussolini's autonomy in this alliance was lost when German divisions occupied Italy in 1942 following the landing of American and British troops in North Africa. In the mid-1930s, other non-German fascists, including members of the British Union of Fascists and the German-American Bund, expressed admiration for Hitler's forceful leadership without inviting a German invasion of their countries. Indeed, in 1938 La Rocque suggested that the best way for France to avoid such an invasion was to become more fascist itself. In 1941, following France's defeat by Hitler's armies, La Rocque called for "continental collaboration" with Germany and criticized de Gaulle and his British allies for threatening to "enslave" France. He soon became disillusioned with Germany's treatment of France, however, and in early 1942 he formed a resistance organization that provided military information to the British.

Fascism and nonfascist conservatisms: Collaboration and crossover

Although in principle there were significant differences between fascism and nonfascist conservatism, the two camps shared some of the same goals, which in times of crisis led some nonfascists to collaborate with fascists. As Weiss observed, "Any study of fascism which centers too narrowly on the fascists and Nazis alone may miss the true significance of right-wing extremism. For without necessarily becoming party members or accepting the entire range of party principles themselves, aristocratic landlords, army officers, government and civil service officials, and important industrialists in Italy and Germany helped bring fascists to power." Without the aid of President Paul von Hindenburg, Chancellor Franz von Papen, and other German conservatives, Hitler, who never won an electoral majority, would not have been appointed chancellor.

During the Great Depression, thousands of middle-class conservatives fearful of the growing power of the left abandoned traditional right-wing parties and adopted fascism. The ideological distance traveled from traditional conservatism to Nazism was sometimes small, since many of the ideas that Hitler exploited in the 1930s had long been common currency within the German right.

In Italy thousands of landowners and businessmen were grateful to Mussolini's Blackshirts for curbing the socialists in 1920–21, and many in the army and the Catholic church saw fascism as a bulwark against communism. Before the beginning of Franco's rule in Spain, many monarchists had close relations with the Falange. Although the Franco regime arrested some of its fascist rivals, it gave others important positions in its propaganda agencies. Horthy's government in Hungary was soft on fascism, and in its early stages it employed fascist methods itself, sending strong-arm squads to raid leftist trade unions, clubs, and newspaper offices and countenancing the slaughter of hundreds of communists and socialists throughout the country. In Greece, King George II and conservatives in the parliament helped Metaxas to establish his dictatorship in 1936.

Fascists also received support from Christian conservatives. Between 1930 and 1932 Hitler was supported by many Protestant voters in rural Prussia, and after 1933 the Catholic church in Germany largely accommodated itself to his regime. In 1933 the Vatican, which had previously interdicted Catholic membership in socialist organizations, signed a concordat with Germany that forbade priests to speak out on politics and gave Hitler a say in naming bishops.

In France the leading Catholic newspaper, *La Croix*, expressed early support for Hitler's crusade against bolshevism, and the largest Catholic parliamentary party, the Republican Federation (Fédération Republicaine), included fascists in its ranks. In 1936, when the Cross of Fire became an electoral party (changing its name to the French Social Party), it absorbed much of the Republican Federation's membership.

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