Signs of Fascism

During World War Two, the United States sent over 12 million citizens overseas to fight Japanese, German and Italian Fascists. This totalitarian and anti-democratic form of government had no respect for any human rights. The human being was only a resource to be used by the state and the corporations that supported it. Usually, when history books or films look at this period, they focus solely on the fascist governments and the people that led them. What is not commonly understood is that none of these anti-democratic movements could have existed, much less made war on the world, without the support of major national industrial companies and banks. In fact, Benito Mussolini, one of the “pioneers” of fascism said: **“Fascism should more appropriately be called Corporatism because it is a merger of state and corporate power”[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**What is Fascism?**

According to Merriam Webster:

1. often capitalized **:** a political philosophy, movement, or regime (as that of the Fascisti) that exalts nation and often race above the individual and that stands for a centralized [autocratic](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/autocratic) government headed by a [dictatorial](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dictatorial) leader, severe economic and social regimentation, and forcible suppression of opposition.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The Free Dictionary defines it as:

**1.** **Fascism** - **a.** A system of government marked by centralization of authority under a dictator, stringent socioeconomic controls, suppression of the opposition through terror and censorship, and typically a policy of belligerent nationalism and racism. **b.** A political philosophy or movement based on or advocating such a system of government.

**2.** Oppressive, dictatorial control.[[3]](#footnote-3)

After WWII ended, fascism did not disappear. Fascist dictatorships flourished in Latin America and many African nations, usually with the backing of the United States or nations in Western Europe[[4]](#footnote-4). Even today, similar dictatorships throughout the world, especially in the Middle East, enjoy the same kind of support. This may seem odd- why would countries that fought a world war against fascism support it later in other countries? The answer lies in Mussolini’s quote and the fact that money *does indeed* make the world go around. Corporations and their owners do not mind fascism because it is very friendly to business. In every fascist nation there is a “you scratch my back, I scratch yours” arrangement between the government and business. More proof of this reality is the type of governance used by the corporations themselves. The vast majority of major corporations (if not all) are dictatorships, not democracies. This statement may seem obvious, but is true and telling. If corporations and their owners actually respected democracy, wouldn’t it make sense for them to implement democratic policies in their own companies?

Many people assume that fascism requires huge rallies with flags and uniforms, or a psychopathic leader all follow as a god. The fact is that any society can become fascist if it accepts and internalizes fascist principles. Germany itself, before the rise of Hitler and the Nazis, was a democracy and in fact had one of the most progressive constitutions in human history (the Weimar Constitution[[5]](#footnote-5)) and still, within the space of little more than a decade, the nation changed completely and goose-stepped its way into death and destruction. Many have wondered how and why this happened. A large part of the answer is “salami tactics” meaning little by little, day by day:

The term is also known as a "piecemeal strategy", as used by the [Nazi Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazi_Party), and [Adolf Hitler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolf_Hitler) to achieve absolute power in [Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazi_Germany) in the early months of 1933. First, there was the [Reichstag fire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reichstag_fire) of February 27, 1933, which rattled the German population and led to the [Reichstag Fire Decree](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reichstag_Fire_Decree), which suspended many [civil liberties](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_liberty) and outlawed the [Communist Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communist_Party_of_Germany) and the [Social Democrats](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Democratic_Party_of_Germany). An estimated 10,000 people were arrested in two weeks, soon followed by the [Enabling Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enabling_Act_of_1933) on March 24, 1933, which gave Hitler [plenary power](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plenary_power), allowing him to bypass the [Reichstag](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reichstag_%28Weimar_Republic%29) and further consolidate power. Hitler and the Nazis continued to systematically establish totalitarian control by eliminating potential opponents, such as [trade unions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trade_union) and rival political parties. They also established organizations with mandatory membership, such as the [Hitler Youth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hitler_Youth), [Bund Deutscher Mädel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bund_Deutscher_M%C3%A4del) and [Arbeitsdienst](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arbeitsdienst). The Enabling Act was renewed in 1937 and 1941. Finally, on April 26, 1942, the Reichstag passed a law making Hitler the *oberster Gerichtsherr*, the supreme judge of the land, giving him power of life and death over every citizen and effectively extending the Enabling Act for the rest of the war.[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salami_tactics#cite_note-4) This gradual process of amassing power and control, was called [Gleichschaltung](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gleichschaltung) by the Nazis, but is now referred to as *Salamitaktik* (salami tactics).[[5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salami_tactics#cite_note-5)[[6]](#footnote-6)

**Why is this important?**

Some argue that Fascism is alive and well in our world. It is more subtle and now infects even the democratic societies that fought against it back in WWII. What is the proof? In 2003, Dr. Lawrence Britt wrote an article called *Fascism Anyone?* [[7]](#footnote-7)which defined 14 warning signs of fascism. He looked at a number of fascist governments and identified certain shared traits. Since building fascism tends to use slow, drawn out tactics, it is an interesting exercise to look at the list and debate whether the nation you live in is on the fascist path or not. His article focuses mostly on conditions within the United States.

**Facism Anyone?**

## By Laurence W. Britt, Free Inquiry Magazine, Vol 22 no 2, [15 July 2003]

**1. Powerful and continuing expressions of nationalism.**

From the prominent displays of flags and bunting to the ubiquitous lapel pins, the fervor to show patriotic nationalism, both on the part of the regime itself and of citizens caught up in its frenzy, was always obvious. Catchy slogans, pride in the military, and demands for unity were common themes in expressing this nationalism. It was usually coupled with a suspicion of things foreign that often bordered on xenophobia.

### 2. Disdain for the importance of human rights.

### The regimes themselves viewed human rights as of little value and a hindrance to realizing the objectives of the ruling elite. Through clever use of propaganda, the population was brought to accept these human rights abuses by marginalizing, even demonizing, those being targeted. When abuse was egregious, the tactic was to use secrecy, denial, and disinformation.

### 3. Identification of enemies/scapegoats as a unifying cause.

### The most significant common thread among these regimes was the use of scapegoating as a means to divert the peoples attention from other problems, to shift blame forfailures, and to channel frustration in controlled directions. The methods of choicerelentless propaganda and disinformationwere usually effective. Often the regimes would incite spontaneous acts against the target scapegoats, usually communists, socialists, liberals, Jews, ethnic and racial minorities, traditional national enemies, members of other religions, secularists, homosexuals, andterrorists. Active opponents of these regimes were inevitably labeled as terrorists and dealt with accordingly.

### 4. The supremacy of the military/avid militarism.

### Ruling elites always identified closely with the military and the industrial infrastructure that supported it. A disproportionate share of national resources was allocated to the military, even when domestic needs were acute. The military was seen as an expression of nationalism, and was used whenever possible to assert national goals, intimidate other nations, and increase the power and prestige of the ruling elite.

### 5. Rampant sexism.

### Beyond the simple fact that the political elite and the national culture were male-dominated, these regimes inevitably viewed women as second-class citizens. They were adamantly anti-abortion and also homophobic. These attitudes were usually codified in Draconian laws that enjoyed strong support by the orthodox religion of the country, thus lending the regime cover for its abuses.

### 6. A controlled mass media.

### Under some of the regimes, the mass media were under strict direct control and could be relied upon never to stray from the party line. Other regimes exercised more subtle power to ensure media orthodoxy. Methods included the control of licensing and access to resources, economic pressure, appeals to patriotism, and implied threats. The leaders of the mass media were often politically compatible with the power elite. The result was usually success in keeping the general public unaware of the regimes excesses.

### 7. Obsession with national security.

### Inevitably, a national security apparatus was under direct control of the ruling elite. It was usually an instrument of oppression, operating in secret and beyond any constraints. Its actions were justified under the rubric of protecting national security, and questioning its activities was portrayed as unpatriotic or even treasonous.

### 8. Religion and ruling elite tied together.

Unlike communist regimes, the fascist and protofascist regimes were never proclaimed as godless by their opponents. In fact, most of the regimes attached themselves to the predominant religion of the country and chose to portray themselves as militant defenders of that religion. The fact that the ruling elites behavior was incompatible with the precepts of the religion was generally swept under the rug.

Propaganda kept up the illusion that the ruling elites were defenders of the faith and opponents of the godless. A perception was manufactured that opposing the power elite was tantamount to an attack on religion.

### 9. Power of corporations protected.

### Although the personal life of ordinary citizens was under strict control, the ability of large corporations to operate in relative freedom was not compromised. The ruling elite saw the corporate structure as a way to not only ensure military production (in developed states), but also as an additional means of social control. Members of the economic elite were often pampered by the political elite to ensure a continued mutuality of interests, especially in the repression of have-not citizens.

### 10. Power of labor suppressed or eliminated.

### Since organized labor was seen as the one power center that could challenge the political hegemony of the ruling elite and its corporate allies, it was inevitably crushed or made powerless. The poor formed an underclass, viewed with suspicion or outright contempt. Under some regimes, being poor was considered akin to a vice.

### 11. Disdain and suppression of intellectuals and the arts.

Intellectuals and the inherent freedom of ideas and expression associated with them were anathema to these regimes. Intellectual and academic freedom were considered subversive to national security and the patriotic ideal.

Universities were tightly controlled; politically unreliable faculty harassed or eliminated. Unorthodox ideas or expressions of dissent were strongly attacked, silenced, or crushed. To these regimes, art and literature should serve the national interest or they had no right to exist.

### 12. Obsession with crime and punishment.

### Most of these regimes maintained Draconian systems of criminal justice with huge prison populations. The police were often glorified and had almost unchecked power, leading to rampant abuse. Normal and political crime were often merged into trumped-up criminal charges and sometimes used against political opponents of the regime. Fear, and hatred, of criminals or traitors was often promoted among the population as an excuse for more police power.

### 13. Rampant cronyism and corruption.

### Those in business circles and close to the power elite often used their position to enrich themselves. This corruption worked both ways; the power elite would receive financial gifts and property from the economic elite, who in turn would gain the benefit of government favoritism. Members of the power elite were in a position to obtain vast wealth from other sources as well: for example, by stealing national resources. With the national security apparatus under control and the media muzzled, this corruption was largely unconstrained and not well understood by the general population.

### 14. Fraudulent elections.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Elections in the form of plebiscites or public opinion polls were usually bogus. When actual elections with candidates were held, they would usually be perverted by the power elite to get the desired result. Common methods included maintaining control of the election machinery, intimidating an disenfranchising opposition voters, destroying or disallowing legal votes, and, as a last resort, turning to a judiciary beholden to the power elite.

Does any of this ring alarm bells? Of course not. After all, this is America, officially a democracy with the rule of law, a constitution, a free press, honest elections, and a well-informed public constantly being put on guard against evils. Historical comparisons like these are just exercises in verbal gymnastics. Maybe, maybe not.

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| *When fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the American flag.**-* **Huey Long** |

### *There is also some discussion regarding the 14 signs since the famous author Umberto Eco also came up with a list of 14 signs of fascism in 1995, though there has never been any accusation that Dr. Britt copied Mr. Eco’s work.*

# Eternal Fascism: Fourteen Ways of Looking at a Blackshirt - Umberto Eco

In spite of some fuzziness regarding the difference between various historical forms of fascism, I think it is possible to outline a list of features that are typical of what I would like to call Ur-Fascism, or Eternal Fascism. These features cannot be organized into a system; many of them contradict each other, and are also typical of other kinds of despotism or fanaticism. But it is enough that one of them be present to allow fascism to coagulate around it.

In spite of some fuzziness regarding the difference between various historical forms of fascism, I think it is possible to outline a list of features that are typical of what I would like to call Ur-Fascism, or Eternal Fascism. These features cannot be organized into a system; many of them contradict each other, and are also typical of other kinds of despotism or fanaticism. But it is enough that one of them be present to allow fascism to coagulate around it.
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1. The first feature of Ur-Fascism is the cult of tradition.

Traditionalism is of course much older than fascism. Not only was it typical of counterrevolutionary Catholic thought after the French revolution, but is was born in the late Hellenistic era, as a reaction to classical Greek rationalism. In the Mediterranean basin, people of different religions (most of the faiths indulgently accepted by the Roman pantheon) started dreaming of a revelation received at the dawn of human history. This revelation, according to the traditionalist mystique, had remained for a long time concealed under the veil of forgotten languages -- in Egyptian hieroglyphs, in the Celtic runes, in the scrolls of the little-known religions of Asia.

This new culture had to be syncretistic. Syncretism is not only, as the dictionary says, "the combination of different forms of belief or practice;" such a combination must tolerate contradictions. Each of the original messages contains a sliver of wisdom, and although they seem to say different or incompatible things, they all are nevertheless alluding, allegorically, to the same primeval truth.

As a consequence, there can be no advancement of learning. Truth already has been spelled out once and for all, and we can only keep interpreting its obscure message.

If you browse in the shelves that, in American bookstores, are labeled New Age, you can find there even Saint Augustine, who, as far as I know, was not a fascist. But combining Saint Augustine and Stonehenge -- that is a symptom of Ur-Fascism.

2. Traditionalism implies the rejection of modernism.

Both Fascists and Nazis worshipped technology, while traditionalist thinkers usually reject it as a negation of traditional spiritual values. However, even though Nazism was proud of its industrial achievements, its praise of modernism was only the surface of an ideology based upon blood and earth (Blut und Boden). The rejection of the modern world was disguised as a rebuttal of the capitalistic way of life. The Enlightenment, the Age of Reason, is seen as the beginning of modern depravity. In this sense Ur-Fascism can be defined as irrationalism.

3. Irrationalism also depends on the cult of action for action's sake.

Action being beautiful in itself, it must be taken before, or without, reflection. Thinking is a form of emasculation. Therefore culture is suspect insofar as it is identified with critical attitudes. Distrust of the intellectual world has always been a symptom of Ur-Fascism, from Hermann Goering's fondness for a phrase from a Hanns Johst play ("When I hear the word 'culture' I reach for my gun") to the frequent use of such expressions as "degenerate intellectuals," "eggheads," "effete snobs," and "universities are nests of reds." The official Fascist intellectuals were mainly engaged in attacking modern culture and the liberal intelligentsia for having betrayed traditional values.

4. The critical spirit makes distinctions, and to distinguish is a sign of modernism.

In modern culture the scientific community praises disagreement as a way to improve knowledge. For Ur-Fascism, disagreement is treason.

5. Besides, disagreement is a sign of diversity.

Ur-Fascism grows up and seeks consensus by exploiting and exacerbating the natural fear of difference. The first appeal of a fascist or prematurely fascist movement is an appeal against the intruders. Thus Ur-Fascism is racist by definition.

6. Ur-Fascism derives from individual or social frustration.

That is why one of the most typical features of the historical fascism was the appeal to a frustrated middle class, a class suffering from an economic crisis or feelings of political humiliation, and frightened by the pressure of lower social groups. In our time, when the old "proletarians" are becoming petty bourgeois (and the lumpen are largely excluded from the political scene), the fascism of tomorrow will find its audience in this new majority.

7. To people who feel deprived of a clear social identity, Ur-Fascism says that their only privilege is the most common one, to be born in the same country.

This is the origin of nationalism. Besides, the only ones who can provide an identity to the nation are its enemies. Thus at the root of the Ur-Fascist psychology there is the obsession with a plot, possibly an international one. The followers must feel besieged. The easiest way to solve the plot is the appeal to xenophobia. But the plot must also come from the inside: Jews are usually the best target because they have the advantage of being at the same time inside and outside. In the United States, a prominent instance of the plot obsession is to be found in Pat Robertson's The New World Order, but, as we have recently seen, there are many others.

8. The followers must feel humiliated by the ostentatious wealth and force of their enemies.

When I was a boy I was taught to think of Englishmen as the five-meal people. They ate more frequently than the poor but sober Italians. Jews are rich and help each other through a secret web of mutual assistance. However, the followers of Ur-Fascism must also be convinced that they can overwhelm the enemies. Thus, by a continuous shifting of rhetorical focus, the enemies are at the same time too strong and too weak. Fascist governments are condemned to lose wars because they are constitutionally incapable of objectively evaluating the force of the enemy.

9. For Ur-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. This, however, brings about an Armageddon complex. Since enemies have to be defeated, there must be a final battle, after which the movement will have control of the world. But such "final solutions" implies a further era of peace, a Golden Age, which contradicts the principle of permanent war. No fascist leader has ever succeeded in solving this predicament.

10. Elitism is a typical aspect of any reactionary ideology, insofar as it is fundamentally aristocratic, and aristocratic and militaristic elitism cruelly implies contempt for the weak.

Ur-Fascism can only advocate a popular elitism. Every citizen belongs to the best people in the world, the members or the party are the best among the citizens, every citizen can (or ought to) become a member of the party. But there cannot be patricians without plebeians. In fact, the Leader, knowing that his power was not delegated to him democratically but was conquered by force, also knows that his force is based upon the weakness of the masses; they are so weak as to need and deserve a ruler.

11. 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 Spanish Falangists was Viva la Muerte ("Long Live Death!"). In nonfascist 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.

12. 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). Since even sex is a difficult game to play, the Ur-Fascist hero tends to play with weapons -- doing so becomes an ersatz phallic exercise.

13. Ur-Fascism is based upon a selective populism, a qualitative populism, one might say.

In a democracy, the citizens have individual rights, but the citizens in their entirety have a political impact only from a quantitative point of view -- one follows the decisions of the majority. For Ur-Fascism, however, individuals as individuals have no rights, and the People is conceived as a quality, a monolithic entity expressing the Common Will. Since no large quantity of human beings can have a common will, the Leader pretends to be their interpreter. Having lost their power of delegation, citizens do not act; they are only called on to play the role of the People. Thus the People is only a theatrical fiction. There is in our future a TV or Internet populism, in which the emotional response of a selected group of citizens can be presented and accepted as the Voice of the People.

Because of its qualitative populism, Ur-Fascism must be against "rotten" parliamentary governments. Wherever a politician casts doubt on the legitimacy of a parliament because it no longer represents the Voice of the People, we can smell Ur-Fascism.

14. Ur-Fascism speaks Newspeak.

Newspeak was invented by Orwell, in Nineteen Eighty-Four, as the official language of what he called Ingsoc, English Socialism. But elements of Ur-Fascism are common to different forms of dictatorship. All the Nazi or Fascist schoolbooks made use of an impoverished vocabulary, and an elementary syntax, in order to limit the instruments for complex and critical reasoning. But we must be ready to identify other kinds of Newspeak, even if they take the apparently innocent form of a popular talk show.

\* \* \*

Ur-Fascism is still around us, sometimes in plainclothes. It would be so much easier for us if there appeared on the world scene somebody saying, "I want to reopen Auschwitz, I want the Blackshirts to parade again in the Italian squares." Life is not that simple. Ur-Fascism can come back under the most innocent of disguises. Our duty is to uncover it and to point our finger at any of its new instances — every day, in every part of the world. Franklin Roosevelt's words of November 4, 1938, are worth recalling: "If American democracy ceases to move forward as a living force, seeking day and night by peaceful means to better the lot of our citizens, fascism will grow in strength in our land." Freedom and liberation are an unending task.

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| “*The liberty of a democracy is not safe if the people tolerate the growth of private power to a point where it comes stronger than their democratic state itself. That, in its essence, is fascism - ownership of government by an individual, by a group*,” - Franklin D. Roosevelt |

Essential Questions

1. What is Fascism?
2. What are Salami Tactics and what makes them effective?
3. What is the role of different sectors of society in helping the government establish fascist control?
4. What are some reasons that fascism always seems to be good for large corporations?
5. What values need to be stressed in order to counter fascist ideals?
1. http://thinkexist.com/quotation/fascism\_should\_more\_appropriately\_be\_called/163211.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fascism [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Fascism [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/US\_ThirdWorld/dictators.html [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weimar\_Constitution#Main\_Part\_2:\_Basic\_Rights\_and\_Obligations\_of\_Germans [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salami\_tactics [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/27/076.html [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-8)