

FASCISM AND THE LURE OF POPULIST AUTOCRACY – PAST AND PRESENT

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Abstract: *In recent years, some politicians and scholars have claimed that the new right-wing populist and radically nationalistic movements that have emerged in countries such as the United States, Britain, France, Germany and Hungary since the 2000s can or should be interpreted as a resurgence of 'fascism'. By contrast, the contribution argues that these parties represent a new type of populist authoritarianism that has spread fear and promised quick solutions to pressing problems. Inspired by autocratic regimes, right-wing populists have also cooperated across borders, despite their radically nationalistic programmes and agendas. Even though they cannot extricate themselves from the haunting legacy of interwar fascism, the Holocaust and the Second World War, the lure of populist autocracy continues to be a dangerous temptation in the face of present-day concerns about the dark sides of globalisation in the post-fascist present. Similar to the 1920s and 1930s, conservatives play a key role in the slide to right-wing populism.*

In recent years, some politicians and scholars have claimed that the new right-wing populist and radically nationalistic movements that have emerged in countries such as the United States, Britain, France, Germany and Hungary since the 1990s can, or even should be, interpreted as a resurgence of “fascism”. According to some other authors, however, new radically nationalist, xenophobic, and anti-parliamentarian groups, parties, and leaders are merely populist and opportunistic, lacking any clear political programme and political agenda. By contrast, this article argues that they represent a new type of populist authoritarianism that has spread perceptions of insecurity, de-liberalised democracy and promised quick solutions to pressing problems. Disregarding political institutions, political regulations and traditional conventions, populist authoritarian politicians have promised strong leadership against the backdrop of multiple crises that they have highlighted in order to lend their far-reaching claims and appeals credibility, legitimacy, and urgency. Seeking to deprive minorities of their rights, they aim to undermine pluralist democracy from within. This gradual process of seeping authoritarianism is no less dangerous to democracies than fascism.

Due to the above-mentioned close associations in public debates, political contests, and even academic studies, interwar fascism and its relationship to authoritarianism merit some attention in the first section of this contribution. The following detailed account deals with the transformation of neo-fascist and neo-Nazi groups into populist authoritarian parties which have assumed a specific political profile. Their characteristics as well as their tensions will, therefore, be dealt with, as well. The conclusion will outline the distinctions between fascism and populist authoritarianism while acknowledging some overlaps.

Interwar Fascism and Authoritarianism

Ever since the formation of the *Fasci di Combattimento* by Benito Mussolini in March 1919, “fascism” has been both a political label and an analytical concept. According to the generic understanding, Italian Fascism has been associated with similar movements, including German National Socialism, by contemporary followers as well as by their adversaries. Fascist parties and groups undoubtedly shared a common ideology and political style in the 1920s and 1930s. Rejecting democracy, liberalism, communism, and socialism, as well as the politics of compromise and negotiation, they strove for comprehensive integration into the nation, authoritarian one-party rule, and territorial expansion. Not least, fascists cultivated a specific political style that was characterised by a commitment to action (instead of discussion), mass rallies, violence, and mystical, palingenetic rituals.¹ Deliberately heightening crisis consciousness and invoking apocalyptic visions of decline in democracies, they built on the backlash to the economic and cultural globalisation that had left many losers even before the First World War, and disrupted the process in 1914. As a response to these experiences of decline, depreciation, and humiliation, fascists promised salvation through authoritarian leadership.²

Based on these commonalities and a sense of destiny, a continuous interchange and communication between fascists emerged in interwar Europe. Beyond overtly political issues such as propaganda, it comprised fields as diverse as labour relations, youth, violence, and mutual assistance in war, but also seemingly non-political activities such as cultural and aesthetic representations. For instance, fascists wore uniforms not only in order to impress and intimidate their opponents in domestic politics, but also to demonstrate their claim to represent a transnational movement of warriors.³ This vision concentrated on Europe, but also assumed a global dimension, especially during the Second World War.⁴

Yet interwar Europe was home not only to fascist movements and regimes, but also to various authoritarian parties and dictatorships. Scholars such as Stanley Payne and Juan Linz have sharply distinguished them from fascism. According to their interpretation, authoritarian groups and regimes sought to stabilise the existing order. Not coincidentally, their leaders and rulers relied on entrenched elites in the monarchy, the military, and churches. They also cherished religion and espoused a corporate organisation of the economy and society, while allowing limited and tightly controlled pluralism. By contrast, fascist movements and parties were latecomers (compared to movements such as conservatism and socialism) that aimed at a new civilisation to amend or obliterate the perceived drawbacks of modernisation, especially economic liberalism, social upheaval and the degeneracy of liberal cultural pluralism in Europe since the *Belle Époque* of the late 19th century. Fascists also called for revolutionary social and political change in order to empower underprivileged strata and groups.⁵ Roger Griffin has added to this list by highlighting the role of “palingenetic populist ultra-nationalism” as the supposedly most important ideological driving force of fascism.⁶ According to Roger Paxton’s attempt to summarise the essential features of fascism, it “may be defined as a form of political behaviour marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in un-

easy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion.”⁷

Recent research, however, has superseded ideal-typical definitions of fascism by specific characteristics as well as rigid distinctions between fascists and authoritarian politicians. In fact, various studies have conceived fascism as a process, distinguishing specific stages of development (especially movements and regimes), and highlighting the role of actors and practices.⁸ These investigations have demonstrated that authoritarian politicians sometimes borrowed from fascism or fascistised themselves when it promised political gains. Dictators such as Francisco Franco in Spain, and Antonio de Oliveira Salazar in Portugal tapped the social base of fascists, partially adopted their agenda, and harnessed it to their political ends. Ion Antonescu's and Miklós Horthy's dictatorships in Romania and Hungary, respectively, as well as the regimes of Antanas Smetona in Lithuania and of Józef Piłsudski in Poland appealed to their countries' fascist parties. At the same time, however, they subjugated them to their rule and even fought them in their states. Altogether, scholars have analysed processes of fascistisation and identified a continuum of non-democratic movements, parties, and regimes, ranging from authoritarian to para-fascist (for instance the Irish “Blueshirts”), and fascist variants.⁹ They were interrelated by mutual perceptions, transfers, borrowings, and even learning. As a result, historiography has emphasised “the fluid character of interwar fascism as a political ideology and practice beyond narrow and static definitions, entangling proponents of fascism, the radical right and conservatism.”¹⁰

The New Threat: The Emergence, Characteristics and Limitations of Populist Authoritarianism

Mainly due to its catastrophic consequences, especially the Second World War and the Holocaust, “fascism” became a political spectre and sometimes even a swearword in political discourse after 1945. Some minor neo-fascist and neo-Nazi parties such as the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI, founded in 1946 in Italy) and the National-Demokratische Partei (NPD, established in 1964 in the Federal Republic of Germany) achieved short-lived electoral successes. The NPD managed to get elected to parliaments in seven states of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) from 1966 to 1968 (passing the 5% barrier), and the MSI gained 8.7% of the votes in the parliamentary elections in Italy in 1972. Some ideological and personal continuities with interwar fascism were obvious. For example, Giorgio Almirante, an influential functionary of Mussolini's Repubblica Sociale Italiana (1943–45), led the MSI from 1946 to 1950, and from 1969 to 1987. Oswald Mosley, the leader of the British Union of Fascists from 1932 to 1940, founded the Union Movement in 1948, propagating a “European patriotism” against the United States, the Soviet Union, and the Global South. Like their interwar predecessors, neo-fascists and neo-Nazis shared a radical nationalism, a rabid anti-communism, and an uncompromising rejection of pluralist, liberal democracy. Some of them also cooperated across borders. The MSI, for instance, established close contacts to Francoist Spain. Yet a broad consensus in favour of parliamentary rule, a liberal order, and political pluralism gradually emerged in the affluent societies of the West. Fascism and Nazism were largely seen as ghosts of a bygone age.¹¹

Nevertheless, neo-Nazi and neo-fascist parties successfully exploited and spread xenophobia which was no longer primarily directed against Jews, but against the rising number of immigrants from the 1950s to the 1970s. Moreover, some of these groups successfully transformed into right-wing populist authoritarian parties. Disenchanted by political failure under Almirante's leadership, the MSI, for instance, attempted to shed the shackles of Italian Fascism and turned into the populist, seemingly more moderate Alleanza Nazionale (AN) in 1983. Led by Gianfranco Fini, it scored 13.5% in the parliamentary elections of 1994, and entered Silvio Berlusconi's coalition government. Although the dissolution of the existing party system in Italy in the early 1990 fuelled the rise of the AN, populist appeals, the endorsement of authoritarian attitudes (including the quest for strong leadership), as well as xenophobia in general, and campaigns against immigrants, in particular, increasingly stroke a chord in the 1990s. This also applies to the Front National (FN), which Jean-Marie Le Pen had established in France in 1972. Thirty years later, he drew more votes than the candidate of the Socialist Party, Lionel Jospin, and got into the second ballot in the presidential elections of 2002. Similarly, the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ), which former National Socialists had set up as early as 1955, received a share of 27% of the vote in Austria in the parliamentary elections of 1999. Its leader, Jörg Heider, joined Wolfgang Schüssel's Conservatives of the Österreichische Volkspartei to form a coalition government.¹²

Against the backdrop of this gradual transformation of former neo-fascist parties into populist authoritarian organisations and the formation of new right-wing groups such as the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD, founded in Germany in 2013), political and academic observers have warned of a "new fascism". Most prominently, former U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright has closely linked the rise of radical nationalist politicians such as Donald Trump, Viktor Orbán, and even Vladimir Putin, to the increasing electoral successes of right-wing parties like the FN (since 2018 Rassemblement National) and the AfD. According to this perspective, the supposedly overarching trends towards "fascism" also encompasses the radicalisation of formerly moderate conservative parties in countries such as Britain (the Tories) and the United States (the Republicans).¹³ Writer Umberto Eco's warnings of the 1990s have received new attention, as well, and philosopher Jason Stanley (who has recently announced his intention to leave the United States for Canada) has identified tropes, tactics and themes that fascist movements have used to achieve power.¹⁴ Not least, journalists such as Paul Mason have argued that fascism has returned, even though he has distinguished between right-wing extremism, right-wing populism, and authoritarian conservatism.¹⁵

By contrast, most historians have been more reluctant to apply the term and label of "fascism" to the new right-wing political parties and leaders. According to their interpretation, interwar fascism was closely related to the context of the early 20th century, especially the consequences of the First World War, the global economic depression of the late 1920 and early 1930s, as well as the multiple crises of liberal democracies. As they have argued, the devastation of the Second World War and the Nazi's extermination policies largely discredited "fascism". Not coincidentally, almost all right-wing extremists have shied away from the very term which no longer seems advantageous as a self-designation. In addition, decolonisation and large-scale migration since 1945 differs from the context of the 1920s and 1930s, when warlike attitudes still loomed large.

Moreover, new communications technologies (especially the internet) have facilitated radicalisation, polarisation, and hate politics.¹⁶ Dissatisfaction with the seemingly boundless usage and exploitation of “fascism” for political gains and vested interests have even led some experts, for example Austrian political scientist Anton Pelinka, to take up Gilbert Allardyce’s early plea for a deflation of the term as a generic concept, and to privilege German National Socialism as a field of research.¹⁷

Because of objections to directly applying the word “fascism” to present-day forms of right-wing extremism, scholars have proposed the concept of “populism”. As a political movement, it has taken up and fuelled concerns about the limitations of representation and national sovereignty in Western democracies. Populist politicians consider “society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’.” They argue “that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.”¹⁸ Claiming that the despised “establishment” disregards “the people” as a supposedly homogeneous and united force, populists have demanded to introduce or reinforce forms of direct representation such as referenda at the expense of the traditional institutions and conventions of representative parliamentary democracy. In a similar vein, populist right-wing extremists have largely reduced democratic rule to majority vote, ignoring, or rejecting key characteristics such as the division of political power, the rule of law, and the protection of minorities which are vital for thriving pluralist democracies. The adulation of “the people” also comprises inclusion and exclusion as well as Manichaeic worldviews. Juxtaposing “us” and “them”, populist politicians have demanded comprehensive assimilation into a homogeneous community and attempted to achieve cultural hegemony by advertising themselves as guardians of ethnic identity and national sovereignty. As a corollary, they have nourished xenophobia and fuelled anti-immigrant resentments. Not least, the rejection of economic globalisation, multilateral negotiations as well as supra- and international institutions such as the United Nations, and the European Union has been a central pillar of populist authoritarian politics.¹⁹

However, some limitations of “populism” as an analytical tool are conspicuous. First, it is an ambivalent concept, as it can also serve as a corrective force in defective democracies marred by limited representativeness, weak responsiveness, corruption, or excessive party strife. In this sense, populist groups address real problems in existing democracies. Second, whereas the term “fascism” has usually been applied to the interwar years, “populism” refers to different temporal contexts. The word had been coined and propagated as a political concept in the United States, where the People’s Party emerged in the 1890s. Not coincidentally, the concept has primarily been used to describe and explain the rise of Donald Trump as much as his electoral successes in 2016 and 2024, even though European right-wing parties like the FPÖ had espoused the word “populism” as a self-designation in the 1990s. Moreover, the campaign by Republican politician Newt Gingrich against Bill Clinton’s administration had already shown key features of populism, especially during the midterm elections of 1994. The roots of radical nationalism (“America First”) even reach back to the late 19th century.²⁰

Third, “populism” can refer both to right-wing and left-wing movements and parties. For this reason, it is related to “extremism”. As “populism” appears to be more neutral, and

less contaminated than “right-wing extremism”, however, it has served its proponents as a camouflage for demands to undermine representative institutions in democracies and limit political pluralism. Fourth, the discourse about “populism” disregards some basic similarities between authoritarian populism and fascism. As Griffin has indicated in his definition, fascists relied on populist appeals in the 1920s and 1930s, exploiting and creating the impression that the institutions of representative democracy no longer took up concerns and grievances of large groups of the population. Like populists, they conceived of the people as a homogeneous unit and actor. Fascists also tapped into and heightened fears of losing jobs, security, traditions, and identities because of globalisation, liberal internationalism, and multilateral interdependencies. In addition, they shared xenophobia, a Manichaeic worldview, and the demonisation of “foes” with recent populist authoritarian politicians. Not least, the belief in the efficacy of strong leadership and political staging have been similar. Despite these overlaps between fascists and authoritarian populists, the former outrightly rejected and directly attacked existing democracies, whereas the latter seek to undermine them from within, especially by winning elections. Populists have usually respected electoral results. Furthermore, the different degrees of violence and repression against “enemies” distinguish the two groups from one other.²¹

Ultimately, however, these are differences in degree, not absolute ones. Fascists also attempted to subvert democracies by exploiting commitments to liberty and pluralism for their own ends. They hollowed out democratic institutions and tailored existing laws to non-democratic ends. Emergency legislation is a case in point. Following the burning of the Reichstag building on February 27, 1933, for instance, German President Paul von Hindenburg signed a decree at the request of Hitler. It was based on Article 48 of the constitution of the Weimar Republic and suspended most civil liberties while not officially renouncing the constitutional order *per se* (which officially remained in force until 1945). Moreover, conservative elites vested the German Nazis and the Italian Fascists with power under the impact of their electoral successes, even though they never gained an absolute majority of votes. Not least, by no means have all populist politicians respected the outcomes of elections. Donald Trump, for example, not only claimed fraud after he had been defeated by Joe Biden in November 2020, but he also incited his radical supporters to attack the Capitol Building in Washington on January 6, 2001.²²

Seeking to establish autocratic rule and impose strong leadership in “illiberal democracies” (Orbán) or “managed democracies” (Putin), populists have spread authoritarian attitudes of leadership and submission. In academic discussions and research on the emergence of new nationalist, illiberal, and anti-democratic forces, the concept of “populism” has, therefore, to be qualified by highlighting authoritarian streaks. Exclusionary populists, in particular, rely on central, hierarchical rule by one ruler, a single party, or group. They aim at restricting pluralism, imposing strong leadership on the population and implanting a mentality based on obedience at the expense of critical reflection. In essence, authoritarian rule is a top-down process. By contrast, populist leaders seek to mobilise the population “from below”. The fusion of populism and authoritarianism in new right-wing extremist parties and movements, therefore, creates tensions that they must paper over. Yet populist politicians have repeatedly failed to

harness protest, unrest, and dissatisfaction for their ideology and political mission. In a last resort, authoritarian populists not only rely on previous expansions of political participation in democracies, but they also depend on previous experiences of superseding these systems of rule. Authoritarian populism as a political goal and practice is, therefore, by no means simply post-democratic and post-fascist.²³

Whereas earlier autocratic rulers usually sought to preserve the political status quo in general, and in the state in particular, populist authoritarian populists seek to undermine the existing order by appealing to the masses and tapping into widespread resentments in order to propose and promote fundamental change. Suspicions of a “deep state” are a case in point. In order to nourish protest and undermine trust in established institutions like the judiciary, authoritarian populists have relentlessly spread their propaganda. Distorting or inventing news, its goal has often been identical with outright indoctrination, fuelling crisis perceptions, nourishing anxiety about impending doom, and whipping up emotions. New social media has played an important role in this process. Like interwar fascists, populist authoritarian politicians meticulously stage their appeals for support, their assaults on “the system”, and their attacks on political adversaries. Their commitment to strong and unrestricted leadership, as well as a quest for protection and security, closely resembles fascism. As in the 1920s and 1930s, when the preceding process of increasing worldwide (though uneven) exchange and entanglement backlashed, the “dark sides” of globalisation have lend these demands more urgency in recent years. As a corollary, populist politicians and rulers have also pursued and spread self-assertive narratives of a supposedly untarnished national history. With respect to their memory politics, overlaps with radical right-wing groups are clearly discernible, particularly in Hungary, Germany, and Russia.²⁴

Yet populist authoritarian rule is a contradictory tenet and practice. In the first place, its representatives strive for control of social movements, especially with regard to the exercise of civil liberties. At the same time, however, they claim to represent “the people” and, therefore, need popular support, which has to be mobilised and orchestrated. Populist authoritarian politicians combine repression with appeals, as well as incentives and rewards. A pronounced cult of leadership, too, is to integrate members and distract voters from the fissures and even contradictions inherent in populist authoritarian movements. Yet social and political mobilisation may unleash a dynamic that populist authoritarian politicians had not intended. In fact, (self-)empowerment of large sections of the population can even endanger their rule. Resembling a tightrope walk, populist authoritarian rule therefore depends on preconditions and contexts that defy comprehensive control “from above”.

As a second tension, populist authoritarian politicians are usually nationalistic and protectionist while interacting with like-minded politicians across borders. They have even actively supported each other, not only when in power.²⁵

In conceptual terms, at least three dimensions of transnationality are to be distinguished. First, populist authoritarian politicians have founded parties and established governments in various countries. Spreading across borders, specific national manifestations are nevertheless distinct. For instance, President Vladimir Putin has rigorous-

ly suppressed any opposition in Russia, whereas protests are still possible in Hungary, even though to a limited degree. Second, populist authoritarian rule has been perceived as a transnational political tenet and practice, both by its adherents and its foes. In fact, it relies less on specific parties than on a free-floating movement and discourse. Third, populist authoritarian movements and regimes should be analysed from a transnational perspective. This includes comparative studies, as well as investigations of transfers, exchanges, and even entanglements. Leaders, minor functionaries, and members from different European parties and movements have met on innumerable occasions and different levels, not only to exchange views on ideological questions and policies, but also to communicate on political styles, and support each other in their political campaigns.

Populist authoritarian politicians have rejected globalisation while cultivating European or even global cooperation, and agreeing on common initiatives, for instance in the European Parliament. The political group “Europe of Nations and Freedom” (which consists of representatives of several populist and anti-immigration parties), for example, held a convention in the western German city of Koblenz in January 2017. Participants included the leaders of the AfD and the FN, Frauke Petry and Marine Le Pen, as well as the chairman of Italy's Northern League, Matteo Salvini, and Geert Wilders of the Dutch Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom).²⁶ Similar to the attempts to forge a “Fascist International” in the 1930s and early 1940s, however, nationalism and strife for hegemony have repeatedly impeded a comprehensive cooperation. In May 2024, for example, Le Pen, broke with the AfD after the party's lead candidate in the European elections of June 9, Maximilian Krah, had summarily exculpated the members of the Nazi Schutzstaffel. Like the interwar fascists, moreover, populist authoritarian politicians have rejected globalisation without calling the capitalist economic order into question.²⁷

Like all ideologies and forms of government, populist authoritarianism has no clearly defined boundaries, while intersecting with other forms of non-democratic rule. As already mentioned, it also takes up some elements of fascism which had preceded it. Yet populist authoritarian politicians usually do not admit to this legacy as they fear the charge of “fascism”. They also seek to avoid the impression that they are imitating foreign “models”. This resembles tensions in the transfers and appropriations between fascist, para-fascist, and authoritarian movements and regimes during the 1920s and 1930s. Whereas the German Nazis emulated the Italian Fascist before they were invested with power in 1933, the relationship reversed after 1935–36. At the same time, minor fascist movements adapted to, and borrowed from Adolf Hitler's and Mussolini's regimes. At the same time, they attempted to maintain their nationalist credentials.²⁸

Conclusion: Fascism, Populist Authoritarian Politics, and Democratic Defiance

As demonstrated in this article, it is misleading to apply the term “fascism” to the new right-wing authoritarian populist groups and parties that have emerged in the new millennium. Despite some undeniable overlaps, scholars should stick to an analytical distinction between the two political movements. First, the context of the interwar years differs from present-day conditions. The devastations of the First World War, and the

global economic crisis that had triggered social unrest and political dislocation in the late 1920s and early 1930s were unprecedented and have remained unique up to the present, at least in the Western world. Second, the Second World War and the extermination policies of the Third Reich had unleashed extreme violence and horror that largely discredited right-wing extremism after 1945, although this effect has lessened since the 1990s. Third, “fascism” has been inflated in public discourses and thereby degenerated into a slogan lumping together diverse dictatorships. As Richard Evans has argued in his critical review of Madelaine Albright’s book, it has become a catch-all word that may give rise to false analogies in historical and political education.²⁹

Whereas fascism is dead, populist authoritarian politicians are not only alive but thriving at present. Rather than directly attacking democracies, they attempt to subvert them by creating unrest, distrust, disorientation, polarisation, and hate. Their leaders and members aim at replacing democracy through the hierarchical, centralised rule of one group or person through appeals to popular sentiments and resentments. Based on a comprehensive crisis consciousness, (perceived) social upheaval, and political polarisation, populist authoritarian politicians seek to stem the repercussions of globalisation by promoting ethno-nationalism and rigorously restricting immigration. In a similar vein, they promise quick and easy solutions to complex problems. Although they cannot extricate themselves from the haunting legacy of interwar fascism, the Holocaust and the Second World War, the lure of populist autocracy continues to be a dangerous temptation in the post-fascist present. Even the United States no longer seems entirely “dictator-proof”.³⁰ Yet populist authoritarian rule as a political agenda and practice uneasily combines mobilisation with rule from above, both within parties and countries (after rising to power).

Like the fascists and communists, populists have successfully cast doubts on the legitimacy and efficacy of democratic governments that had been contested throughout the 20th century, especially during the interwar years.³¹ Yet democrats have by no means been helpless. While acknowledging and taking up pressing problems that may alienate large sections of the population from existing institutions, they should avoid dystopian narratives. Moreover, democrats can defend themselves by strengthening their institutions, thereby providing security, order, and orientation. Ameliorating their constitutions in order to fend off the challenge of populist authoritarian politics is another response to efforts to exploit weaknesses of democracy. As the policies and measures taken against fascist and communist parties in democracies such as Britain in the 1930s demonstrate, however, governments have to balance restrictions of political freedom and civil liberties to preserve the core of pluralist democracies. Restrictive legislation, excessive policing, and unrestrained surveillance by secret services is counterproductive, as it gives rise to charges of repression and undermines the legitimacy of democracies.³²

In general, contexts and constellations are of crucial importance for calibrating reactions to populist authoritarian politics. In this respect, a close investigation of the interwar period highlights the critical role of conservative parties and forces. After all, King Emanuele III of Italy appointed Mussolini as President of the Council of Ministers on October 30, 1922, and German President Paul von Hindenburg invested

Hitler with the chancellorship of Germany on January 30, 1933. The two regimes were initially coalition governments, before the Fascists and National Socialists, respectively, gradually sidelined and disempowered the conservative politicians. Hopes of having tamed Mussolini and Hitler as well as their supporters proved to be illusory, although remnants of conservatism persisted in the two regimes, in particular, the Fascist dictatorship. The fixation of fascism in scholarship should, therefore, give way to a more comprehensive perspective on extreme and moderate right-wing groups and parties (without equating them), as Martin Blinkhorn demanded as early as 1990.³³

At present, conservatives are important gatekeepers once again. In the United States, for instance, the entrenched elites selected Trump as their candidate for the presidential elections of 2016 and 2024. They even supported his claims of election fraud and refused to hold him accountable after he had openly called upon his supporters to storm the Capitol.³⁴ Yet the crucial role of conservatives does not relieve other democratic parties and groups in politics and civil society of their responsibility to protect liberal, democratic, and representative rule from the onslaught of populist authoritarian forces. They are different from, but no less dangerous than their interwar fascist counterparts.

Notes

1. See, for instance, Oswald Mosley, *Fascism in Britain* (Westminster, 1935), 11: "We have had enough talk; we will act!" Also see Mike Cronin, "The Blueshirt Movement, 1932-5: Ireland's Fascists?," *Journal of Contemporary History* 30 (1995), 211-332, 315.
2. Tara Zahra, *Against the World: Anti-Globalism and Mass Politics between the World Wars* (New York: Norton, 2023). For an overview, see Tara Zahra, "Against the World: Anti-Globalism and Mass Politics between the World Wars," *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute Washington* 73 (2024), 3-22.
3. *Fascism without Borders. Transnational Connections and Cooperation between Movements and Regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945*, ed. Arnd Bauerkämper and Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017); *Nazism Across Borders. The Social Policies of the Third Reich and Their Global Appeal*, ed. Sandrine Kott and Kiran Klaus Patel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Nils Fehlhaber, "Netzwerke der „Achse Berlin-Rom“. *Die Zusammenarbeit faschistischer und nationalsozialistischer Führungseliten 1933-1943* (Köln: Böhlau, 2019); Helen Roche, "Nazi Elite-School Pupils as Youth Ambassadors: Between Fascist Italy and the Third Reich," *European History Quarterly* 54 (2024), 258-275; Patrick Bernhard, "Colonial Crossovers: Nazi Germany and its Entanglements with Other Empires," *Journal of Global History* 12 (2017), 206-227.
4. *A New Nationalist Europe Under Hitler. Concepts of Europe and Transnational Networks in the National Socialist Sphere of Influence, 1933-1945*, ed. by Johannes Dalfinger and Dieter Pohl (London: Routledge, 2019); Daniel Hedinger, *Die Achse. Berlin-Rom-Tokio 1919-1946* (München: C.H. Beck, 2021); Reto Hoffmann, *The Fascist Effect. Japan and Italy, 1915-1952* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2015), 38-135; Federico Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism. Ideology, Violence and the Sacred in Argentina and Italy, 1919-1945* (Durham: Duke University, 2010); *Fascist Warfare. Aggression, Occupation, Annihilation*, ed. by Miguel Alonso, Alan Kramer and Javier Rodrigo (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); David Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).
5. Stanley Payne, *Fascism. Comparison and Definition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press 1980), 7; idem, *A History of Fascism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 15; Juan J. Linz, "Some Notes Toward a Comparative Study of Fascism in Sociological Historical Perspective," *Fascism. A Reader's Guide*, ed. Walter Laqueur (London: 1976), 3-121, 30-36; idem, "The crisis of democracy after the First World War," in *International Fascism: Theories, Causes and the New Consensus*, ed. Roger Griffin (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), 175-188, 182-184. Also see Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Kevin Passmore, *Fascism. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 27-31; Philip Morgan, *Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945* (London: Routledge 2003), 113.
6. Roger Griffin, "Introduction," in *International Fascism*, 13; idem, *Fascism. An Introduction to Comparative Fascist Studies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 40-47. For discussion about Griffin's concept, see the contributions to *Fascism Past and Present, West and East. An International Debate on Concepts and Cases in the Comparative Study of the Extreme Right*, ed. Roger Griffin, Werner Loh and Andreas Umland (Stuttgart: ibidem Verlag, 2006); Arnd Bauerkämper, "A New Consensus? Recent Research on Fascism in Europe, 1918-1945," *History Compass* no. 4 (2006), 1-31 (http://www.blackwell-compass.com/subject/history/section_home?section=hico-europe; last access: 10 December 2024).
7. Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Random House, 2018), 218.
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