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(sometimes initial capital letter), a governmental system led by a dictator having complete power, forcibly suppressing opposition and criticism, regimenting all industry, commerce, etc., and emphasizing an aggressive nationalism and often racism.(sometimes initial capital letter), the philosophy, principles, or methods of fascism.(initial capital letter), a political movement that employs the principles and methods of fascism, especially the one established by Mussolini in Italy 1922–43.the political movement, doctrine, system, or regime of Benito Mussolini in Italy, which encouraged militarism and nationalism, organizing the country along hierarchical authoritarian lines"Collins English Dictionary — Complete & Unabridged" 2012 Digital Edition © William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd. 1979, 1986 © HarperCollins Publishers 1998, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012any ideology or movement inspired by Italian Fascism, such as German National Socialism; any right-wing nationalist ideology or movement with an authoritarian and hierarchical structure that is fundamentally opposed to democracy and liberalismmany ideology, movement, programme, tendency, etc, that may be characterized as right-wing, chauvinist, authoritarian, etcprejudice in relation to the subject specified"Collins English Dictionary — Complete & Unabridged" 2012 Digital Edition © William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd. 1979, 1986 © HarperCollins Publishers 1998, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012A system of government that flourished in Europe from the 1920s to the end of World War II. Germany under Adolf Hitler, Italy under Mussolini, and Spain under Franco were all fascist states. As a rule, fascist governments are dominated by a dictator, who usually possesses a magnetic personality, wears a showy uniform, and rallies his followers by mass parades; appeals to strident nationalism; and promotes suspicion or hatred of both foreigners and "impure" people within his own nation, such as the Jews (see also Jews) in Germany. Although both communism and fascism are forms of totalitarianism, fascism does not demand state ownership of the means of production, nor is fascism committed to the achievement of economic equality. In theory, communism opposes the identification of government with a single charismatic leader (the "cult of personality"), which is the cornerstone of fascism. Whereas communists are considered left-wing, fascists are usually described as right-wing.Today, the term fascist is used loosely to refer to military dictatorships, as well as governments or individuals that profess racism and that act in an arbitrary, high-handed manner.antifascism nounprofascism nounOrigin of fascism1First recorded in 1915–20; from Italian fascismo, equivalent to fascio("bundle, political group" ( fascies ) + -ismo -ismOrigin of fascism1C20: from Italian fascismo, from fascio political group, from Latin fascis bundle, see fasciesExamples are provided to illustrate real-world usage of words in context. Any opinions expressed do not reflect the views of Dictionary.com.In a pointed historical parallel, Xi also asserted that since China and the U.S. "fought side-by-side against fascism and militarism" during World War II, they should now work together to safeguard those achievements.Read more on The Wall Street JournalAfter all, even if one doesn't care about men's loneliness in itself, there can be little doubt that it's driving them into destructive behaviors — such as embracing fascism — that have negative impacts on everyone.In the charged political climate of the 1930s, Boud becomes obsessed with fascism, goes to Germany and stalks Hitler until she is admitted to his inner circle.Read more on The Wall Street Journal"But if they can kinda figure it out and, you know, not succumb to fascism, that would be great."Read more on Los Angeles TimesIt doesn't surprise me that men my age are enraptured by Mr. Fuentes's memeified fascism.Read more on The Wall Street JournalWhat does fascism mean?Fascism is a system of government led by a dictator who typically rules by forcefully and often violently suppressing opposition and criticism, controlling all industry and commerce, and promoting nationalism and often racism.The word is sometimes capitalized, especially when it specifically refers to the dictatorship of Benito Mussolini in Italy from 1922 to 1943, or authoritarian systems similar to his, including those of Adolf Hitler in Germany and Francisco Franco in Spain.Fascism can also refer to an ideology based on this form of rule, or to the use of its methods. More broadly, fascism is used to refer to any ideology or movement seen as authoritarian, nationalistic, and extremely right wing, especially when fundamentally opposed to democracy and liberalism.The term fascist can be a noun referring generally to someone who has such views, or, more specifically, to a member of such a government or movement. Fascist can also be used as an adjective describing something involving or promoting fascism.Apart from their literal (and often capitalized) use to refer to the regime of Mussolini, the words fascism and fascist are typically used negatively as a criticism of such practices and ideologies—fascists typically avoid calling themselves fascists due to the negative history associated with the terms.That history includes the rise of fascism in the 1920s and '30s, the Holocaust perpetrated by Hitler and the Nazis, and other atrocities and oppression committed under fascist regimes. Interest in the history of fascism and the word itself has increased in the 21st century, along with a global rise of nationalism and movements associated with fascism.fasciolopsiasisfascismoBrowse#aabccddeoffghhijjkkllmmnnnooppqrrssttuuvvwxxyyzAboutCareersContact usCookies, terms, & privacyHelpFollow usGet the Word of the Day every day!© 2025 Dictionary.com, LLC Skip to main content In this free resource, learn how Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler rose to power and the lessons their political journeys hold for today. Over the past few years, people have thrown around the term 'fascism' pretty loosely. It has been used to criticize any number of issues—proposed environmental regulations aimed at curbing greenhouse gas emissions, stay-at-home orders during a global pandemic, and even legislation limiting the size of sodas.But usage of the term extends to issues far more serious than Big Gulps. Authoritarian leaders in various countries have been labeled fascists by critics in recent years. The term fascism is used broadly today, but it has very specific origins rooted in a history of highly divisive and highly destructive European political movements. These movements arose in the era between World Wars I and II and fundamentally changed the political nature of the European continent.So what exactly does fascism mean? Where does this political ideology come from? And to what extent do leaders today display fascist tendencies? This resource explores those three questions by diving into the history of the world's most notorious fascist leaders: Benito Mussolini of Italy and Adolf Hitler of Germany.What does fascism mean?Many experts agree that fascism is a mass political movement that emphasizes extreme nationalism, militarism, and the supremacy of the nation over the individual. This model of government stands in contrast to liberal democracies that support individual rights, competitive elections, and political dissent.In many ways, fascist regimes begin as revolutionary. They advocate for the overthrow of existing systems of government and the persecution of political enemies. However, such regimes are also highly conservative in their championing of traditional values.And although fascist leaders typically claim to support the everyman, in reality, their regimes often align with powerful business interests.Let's unpack a few of these hallmark characteristics of fascist leaders and their movements: Extreme nationalism: Fascist leaders believe in the supremacy of certain groups of people based on characteristics such as race, religion, ethnicity, and nationality. Hitler and his Nazi Party, for instance, advanced the idea of Aryan (essentially white Germanic Christian) racial superiority. The most extreme example of this ethnocentric nationalism manifested in the Holocaust. During the Third Reich, the Nazis executed a state-sponsored and systematic campaign of murder and persecution against those deemed inferior. At least eleven million people were killed, including six million European Jews and five million gay people, Roma people, and people with disabilities, among others.Cult of personality: Fascist regimes cultivate images of their leaders as great figures to be loved and admired. This cult of personality is often perpetuated through mass media and propaganda. In Italy, Mussolini's photograph hung in the walls of classrooms while his political party encouraged all good citizens to purchase a Mussolini-themed calendar each year. To maintain this powerful image, Mussolini prohibited journalists from reporting on his age or health issues. He often went as far as to take photographs posing with a lion or riding a horse to project his power. Mussolini, or Il Duce (Italian for "the leader"), took on a mythical status. The Pope chalked up Il Duce's survival of assassination attempts to divine intervention, adding to Mussolini's mystique.Popular mobilization: Although both authoritarian and fascist governments are anti-democratic, leave little room for dissent, and strive to centralize power, the two types of regimes are not the same. Authoritarian governments want their populations to remain passive and demobilized. On the other hand, fascist regimes seek to energize public participation in society through government-organized channels. Both Mussolini and Hitler, for instance, drew massive crowds in rallies intended to stir up enthusiasm for the country, the party, and the leader.How did fascists come to power?Mussolini and Hitler rose to power swiftly, but their countries' transformations from constitutional government to fascist regime did not take place overnight. Rather, the two countries experienced a similar pattern of liberal decay. First, fascist parties gained a foothold in government through initially democratic means. However, over time, the party consolidated power, and ultimately secured their dictatorship.In this section, we'll walk through the five stages of fascism—a framework coined by fascism scholar Robert Paxton. This framework illustrates the similar steps through which individuals like Mussolini and Hitler came to power. Stage one: Emerging out of disillusionmentMussolini and Hitler rose to prominence in the aftermath of World War I. The respective politicians capitalized on the political and economic fallout of the Great War by inflaming popular dissatisfaction with the countries' leaders. Hitler pointed to the harsh and humiliating terms of the Treaty of Versailles as a means to drum up popular support. The treaty forced Germany to accept blame for World War I, give up 13 percent of its European territory and overseas colonies, limit the size of its army and navy, and pay reparations (financial damages) to the war's winners. In the aftermath of the Great War, Germany was left in economic despair, international embarrassment, and political instability. Hitler would gain followers by promising to tear up the Treaty of Versailles and restore the country's honor.Meanwhile, the economic crisis that followed World War I further eroded public confidence in the existing political establishment. In the immediate aftermath of the war, Germany suffered hyperinflation—a situation in which prices skyrocketed so quickly that German currency lost much of its value. Moreover, Italy experienced a two-year period of mass strikes and factory occupations, with millions unemployed.

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