

Conclusion

Fascists, Dead and Alive

I first summarize my explanation of the rise of fascism. Then I ask whether fascism is just history or whether it may return to haunt the world again. Are all the fascists dead ones?

DEAD FASCISTS

I offered a two-part explanation of the rise of fascism. The first part concerns the forward surge of a broader family of authoritarian rightists who swept into power across one-half of interwar Europe, plus a few swaths in the rest of the world. In Europe the surge carried regimes further across the spectrum I identified in Chapter 2, from semi-authoritarianism to semi-reactionary and thence to corporatist. A few then went further, to fascism.

Authoritarian rightism was a response to both general problems of modernity and particular social crises left by World War I. Modernization was consciously pursued by most authoritarians: industrial growth and restructuring, more science and economic planning, more national integration, a more ambitious state, and more political mobilization of the masses. After some initial hesitation, most rightists embraced most of the modernist package while rejecting democratic mass mobilization. However, their embrace was also pressured by a series of crises – economic, military, political, and ideological – brought on or exacerbated by the war. Without these crises, and without the war itself, there would have been no major authoritarian surge, and fascism would have remained a series of sects and coteries rather than a mass movement.

Serious economic crises came at war's end and then again as the Great Depression struck in 1929. In between, in the mid-1920s, came lesser inflation crises. Yet few interwar economies were ever very buoyant. Since governments were now expected to have economic policies to ameliorate

hardship, economic crises destabilized governments. “Old regimes” also feared the secular economic trend of the period, since many members lived as rentiers from the profits of the least modern parts of the economy. Modernity and crisis-induced restructuring might be their nemesis. Ruling regimes, especially “old” ones, felt they had to do something.

The war produced military crisis, defeat for some, and dislocation plus sudden demobilization for all. Crisis was felt more severely in the center and east of the continent, which contained most of the defeated powers. But military crisis also endured where “revisionists” continued to challenge the terms of the peace treaties and to seek restoration of “lost territories.” Embittered refugees and aggressive nationalist movements kept the pot stirred. Would revisionists triumph in Austria, Germany, and Hungary, would the many new successor regimes of the vanquished multinational empires survive, would France or Romania keep their territorial gains, would Serbia keep its Yugoslav dominance? Then military crisis became more general, as a second world war loomed and as the threat and influence of revisionist Nazi Germany grew.

The political crisis was distinct to the center, east, and south of the continent. The northwest had already stabilized liberal regimes before 1914. Its governments and electorates confronted the economic and military crises with orderly changes of government leaving unchanged the basic constitution of liberal democracy. Yet the center, east, and south were at this very time attempting a transition toward liberal democratic parliaments while leaving many old regime state powers intact. There crisis was confronted by dual states, half liberal democratic, half authoritarian. Since old regime conservatives usually controlled the executive part of the state, including its military and police, they had the option of using repression to solve crisis – reducing or overturning the power of the state’s parliamentary half. Indeed, the war had enhanced the resonance of militarism, while a short postwar burst of class conflict had normalized the deployment of troops in civil strife. Yet most of the right felt that repression was no longer sufficient to maintain rule in the modern era. It was also necessary to undercut democracy with alternative ways of mobilizing the masses. Conservatives responded differently in the two halves of Europe. In the northwest the dominance of liberal institutions pushed conservatives toward building more populist political parties playing according to the rules of electoral democracy. But in the center, east, and south, conservatives launched coups by their executive half of the state linked to more mobilizing authoritarian movements. Let me emphasize: Fascism was not a crisis of liberalism, since institutionalized liberalism weathered all these crises without serious destabilization. Fascism

was a product of a sudden, half-baked attempt at liberalization amid social crises.

These crises were exacerbated by an ideological crisis. On the right, though only in one half of Europe, this became a sense that modernity was desirable but dangerous, that liberalism was corrupt or disorderly, that socialism meant chaos, that secularism threatened moral absolutes – and so cumulatively that civilization needed rescuing before modernization could proceed further. So there emerged a more authoritarian rightist view of modernity, emphasizing a more top-down populist nationalism, developmental statism, order, and hierarchy. Such values began to circulate widely, especially among young moralists – middle-class youth in high schools, universities, and military academies, as well as in “established” churches that leaned toward nationalism or statism anyway. So across one-half of the more developed world occurred a conservative political offensive by the propertied classes, led by an old regime wielding state repression while sponsoring mass political parties with nationalist and statist ideologies. This insurgent authoritarian rightism was not purely reactionary (as Mayer 1981 suggests), since it wielded novel visions of modernity.

Nor was it merely a class strategy, explicable in straightforwardly functional Marxian terms. It was not even the most economically rational strategy available to the possessing classes. These had two alternative economic motives: “property defense” and “profit maximization.” The early post-war burst of class struggle might threaten private property, so might some later Spanish revolutionaries, so might too close a proximity to the Soviet Union. But there was no general fundamental threat to property looming across Europe after about 1921. The revolutionary left had been defeated. Most of the rightist offensive thus occurred *after* any serious revolutionary threat from below had died away. During the relevant period no determined property defense was necessary. “Profit maximization” is more likely a motive, though it is also more complex. It is less zero-sum, since it is not necessarily the case that for one side to gain, the other must lose. It is also more difficult to calculate alternative profits. Some leftist governments and the pressures of the Great Depression led to a squeeze on profits, and it might make some short-term sense for capitalists to redress the balance by forcing labor bear more of the costs – thus to repress labor. But political elites in the countries of the northwest and beyond were devising much better strategies of profit maximization – corporate liberalism in the United States, social democratic compromise in Scandinavia, splitting the Labour Party in Britain. The first of these policies may have benefited both sides in the class war, the second certainly did, while the third probably benefited

only capitalists. These were effective democratic strategies to protect the survival and profitability of capitalism – and this was the primary goal of the northwest’s leading economist, Keynes.

Why were the possessing classes so hypersensitive to opposition from the left that they reached for the authoritarian gun so quickly, when neither property nor profits were much threatened? I found five reasons for their overreactions, ranging over all the sources of social power.

(1) The last decades had revealed that revolution was a real possibility in modern societies. The prospect appeared now to be receding, but property owners could not be certain of this. One version of the “security dilemma” stressed by recent political scientists suggests that people may overreact to a threat that is “life-threatening” even if the threat has a low probability of being realized. The chance of a Bolshevik Revolution occurring in Germany after 1922 might be low, but German capitalists might overreact to leftists on the principle “better safe than sorry.” For the political right, “certainty,” “safety,” and “order” were linked values.

(2) A particular class fraction had greater reason to fear. The property rights of agrarian landlords *were* more vulnerable. Land reform was considered desirable through much of interwar Europe; there was also some direct threat to them from below in several countries; and their hold on old regime states would probably not last much longer. For the moment, however, they still possessed unusual executive political power, especially through officer corps and ministries of the interior. *Cacique* patronage systems also still conferred on them a certain parliamentary strength in relatively backward areas. For them “certainty” of possession could be ensured through a combination of repression and disproportionate political power within the propertied classes as a whole. Why risk uncertainty when property preservation could be *guaranteed* through authoritarian rightism? Note, however, that whereas the old regime’s own motivation was economically rational, that of their allies among the possessing classes was probably not. They were being led by the nose by the political and military power of the old regime, especially agrarian landlords.

(3) Some military officer corps reasoned similarly. Their caste-like autonomy, linked to the old regime, was threatened by demands for civilian control over the military by liberals and the left. Their budgets were threatened. Some officer corps were used to staging coups, others were not, but the appearance of more military-minded rightist movements seemed to offer them succor.

(4) Some churches reasoned similarly. They faced leftist secularism threatening their own property and wealth, plus their control over education,

marriage, and other social practices. They were also part of the old regime and their stress on “order” and “hierarchy” also carried a more diffuse ideological power among the community of the faithful, especially in more rural areas. These possessors of ideological power favored authoritarian rightism to protect their own material and moral interests.

(5) “Order” and “threat” were not merely problems of domestic class relations but also of geopolitics. These made some ethnic, religious, or political minorities seem especially threatening because linked to foreign powers. The right characteristically fused together supposed domestic and foreign “enemies” – leftists were seen as (Russian) “Bolsheviks” and “Judeo-Bolsheviks”; foreign, finance, and Jewish capital and liberal separatists and so on were all seen as both domestic and foreign threats.

Combined, these fears worsened the overall sense of threat. As threats became more diffuse, they seemed more vaguely threatening, so the response was to “root them out,” “stifle them at source.” So goals were displaced away from a narrow instrumental rationality calculating about economic interest to a broader “value rationality” in the sense of Max Weber’s use of the term. Order, safety, security, hierarchy, the sacred rather than the secular, national rather than class interest become the primary slogans, while the enemy was demeaned, even demonized, as the antithesis of all these values, unworthy of democratic or (in extreme cases) of humane treatment. What might have begun as the economically motivated behaviour of propertied classes was displaced through the mediation of others’ sense of threat onto far more diffuse goals of nationalism and statism. Thus the propertied classes (even perhaps agrarian landlords) did not pursue the most instrumentally rational course of action. The ensuing authoritarian rightism then developed its own economic rationality by pioneering statist economic policies useful both for late development and for combating depression. But the search for order, hierarchy, and risk avoidance made most rightists lower their sights below what countries in the northwest were beginning to accomplish with increased capacity for democratic mobilization.

So though class struggle played a substantial part in the surge of the authoritarian rightist family, we must also link it in our explanation to political, military, and ideological power relations. When multiple crises generate multiple goals among collective actors who overlap and intersect in complex ways, ensuing actions rarely follow narrow interest group rationality. This led authoritarian rightist regimes into dangerous areas that threatened their own survival. Relying on a more militarized and more sacred nation-state “threatened” by domestic-foreign enemies had dangerous consequences. It made war more likely, and modern total warfare produces far more losers

than winners. Some of these regimes provoked wars with the potential to destroy them all. This actually happened in 1945. Endorsing rightist authoritarian values also made them vulnerable to being outflanked by more radical rightists.

Enter the fascists. We reach the second part of the explanation as fascists piggy-backed on top of all this. They would not have grown large without war-induced crises faced by dual states and panicking old regimes and possessing classes generating nation-statist values. Fascists did not grow large where crises came without dual states and panicking old regimes, in the northwest of the continent. Fascists were nurtured among the authoritarian rightists and continued to have close family relations with them. As in all families, their relationships could involve love or hatred. Thus the second part of the explanation involves explaining which occurred, and where.

I have emphasized that fascists were distinctive. Neither their organization nor their values allowed them to be simply a vehicle for class interests. Organizationally, they were unlike other authoritarians, for they were a “bottom-up” movement, not a top-down one. And they were driven in “radical” directions by their own core values: They believed in a paramilitary, transcendent, and cleansing nation-statism. Fascism was not committed to the existing state nor to its military arm but sought to revolutionize them, “knock class heads together,” cleanse the nation of its enemies, and so transcend class and political conflict. Since they saw themselves as a “popular” movement, they were not averse to elections as a strategy of coming to power. Most fought elections vigorously, pioneering mass electoral techniques of ideological manipulation. Only in Italy, where they came very rapidly to power, was electioneering not a central part of fascist activity. Unlike the more conservative authoritarian rightists, fascists could not use the power of the state to manipulate and fix elections (until after they came to power). Though fascists did not believe in democracy, it was vital to their success.

But electoralism sat alongside a second form of popular struggle. Their activist core consisted of voluntary paramilitary formations committed to organized street violence. This had three purposes. It was “provocative,” intended to produce a violent reaction from its political rivals. This would enable fascists to declare that their own violence was “self-defense.” Second, it would repress enemies, since fascist paramilitarism conferred logistical superiority in street warfare, enabling them to bring “order” to the streets. It was hoped that both “self-defense” and “success” would bring more support and legitimacy to the notion that fascist “orderly violence” could end social chaos. This was then further exploited electorally. Third, paramilitarism

could in the last resort launch a coup – provided the army was also immobilized (since most fascists knew that their paramilitarism was inferior to the military power of the state).

Such paramilitary activism brought distinctive recruits and distinctive values to the movement. The first cohort of recruits, without whom fascism would never have got off the ground, consisted largely of young military veterans transmitting wartime values of comradeship, hierarchy, and violence into a peacetime political movement. In this respect fascism as a mass movement would never have surged beyond being a coterie of intellectuals without World War I. Indeed, fascist activists remained cross-class gangs of young men for whom the combination of demonstrating, marching, and brawling had a special attraction. Hence they were disproportionately students, cadets, athletes, and young working-class roughnecks (who are also well represented among the perpetrators of atrocities in my forthcoming volume on ethnic cleansing). Fascism also reflected modernization impacts on young people: the liberation of young males from family discipline, and of young females from much of the burden of childbirth, the growth of organized sports, and the growth of professions requiring extensive further or higher education, especially the profession of war. Scholars of fascism (or indeed of the twentieth century in general) have paid insufficient attention to these age-cohort effects that contributed to the emergence of a general feature of the twentieth century, the cult of youth. Fascism was the first great political manifestation of this cult.

Bottom-up nationalism and statism were fascist values everywhere, drawing distinctive core constituencies of popular support. Fascism resonated especially among embittered refugees, “threatened border” regions, state employees (especially including armed forces), state-owned or state-protected industries, and churches that saw themselves as “the soul of the nation” or “the morality of the state.” As class theorists have observed, fascism would not have surged without the prior surge in class conflict, and not surged so much without the Bolshevik Revolution. But it does not follow – as class theorists have argued – that fascists represented only one side in this class struggle or indeed any single class at all. Their core constituencies reflected the appeal of the goal of transcending that struggle. Fascism tended to appeal neither to the organized working class nor to persons from the middle or upper classes who were directly confronted by organized labor. Instead, it appealed more to those on the margins of such conflict, persons of all classes and various sectors, in smaller or newer industries and the service sector, persons likely to cry “a plague on both your houses.” The fascist core, especially fascist militants, rested preponderantly on macho

youth receptive to paramilitarism and on social environments receptive to the message of either extreme nation-statism or class transcendence.

Nonetheless, fascist regimes did not succeed in transcending class. Since they were not actually anticapitalist, they could come to terms with the capitalist class; since they were promilitarist, they could come to terms with the armed forces; and since most of them cared little about religion, they were willing to sign concordats with powerful churches. Thus in practice, and once they neared power, fascist movements became biased on questions of class struggle. They tilted toward the capitalist class, the propertied classes more generally, and the old regime in particular. Yet, of the main fascist values, class transcendence was the one that varied most among the various national movements. Italian fascism was rather conservative and bourgeois in outcome, Romanian became decidedly proletarian.

Since big fascist movements were varied and emerged in rather varied circumstances, it is not so easy to generalize about their rise as it was for the whole family of authoritarian rightists. I first summarize their variations case by case, then move to their overall similarities.

Italian fascism rose and seized power early, in the immediate postwar years when class conflict was only just beginning to decline (and was still raging in agriculture). Thus it had a more direct class component than the other cases. There was an obvious fascist/propertied class alliance, and so Italian fascism can be partially explained in functional Marxist terms: The upper classes turned to fascists to rescue them from class revolution. But the closeness of World War I also made for a more direct military/paramilitary contribution to fascism through young male military veterans. One might almost say that paramilitarism was the means and agrarian-led class repression was the goal of Italian fascism. This would be to oversimplify, however, since paramilitarism also brought distinctive recruits and goals. Though not geared to electoralism, Italian fascism's combination of "self-defense" and success (it did destroy socialist and *popolari* power) increased fascism's popularity among those valuing social order. Fascism's broader nation-statist goals were also popular and undermined the will to resist of the old regime and state executive. Geopolitical and political power relations also mattered. Since Italy had largely uncontested borders and was unthreatened from abroad, its nationalism contained little external aggression or racism inside Europe (Africa was a different story).

The Italian state was also dual, and both halves of the state were in weakened condition. This made it vulnerable to a coup. Liberal parliamentarism was not directly challenged by fascism, since fascism's sudden rise occurred between elections. But parliament had been weakened by the traditional

hostility of the church and the rapidity of the transition toward full democracy. Socialists, Catholic *popolari*, liberals, and conservatives were not yet socialized into the rules of the parliamentary game and failed to form the coalitions that would have best served them and democracy. But since the church had hitherto stood aside from politics and since Italy was characterized by uneven economic development, the country also lacked a homogenous old regime. Landowners, big capitalists, the army, and the church could not subvert the transition to democracy with their own conservative authoritarianism. Some were quickly driven toward the fascists (who were often their own sons). There were thus three causes of the triumph of Italian fascism: intense class struggle, postwar paramilitarism, and a weakened old regime.

German Nazism rose later, after a sustained attempt to make Weimar democracy work. Again, the condition of the old regime was extremely important. War defeat had unseated the monarchy and its loyal conservative and national liberal parties, and it had greatly shrunk the armed forces. The old regime could not now rule. As democracy faltered from 1930, conservative authoritarianism had little support outside the state executive itself.

Second, paramilitarism was again important, though its role differed from the case in Italy. Military veterans were important to the first cohort of Nazis and other populist extremists, but they needed reinforcing by later cohorts of Germans who had not fought in the war. From 1928 the Nazis were thriving on the electoral process of the republic, quite unlike Italy. This meant that their paramilitarism was more geared to gaining electoral support and rolling over its enemies in street brawling than to seizing the state.

Third, class conflict, though relevant, was not dominant. It grew during the Great Depression, but was much less severe than in the immediate postwar period and was insufficient to threaten capitalist property rights. However, there was a squeeze on profits, and one solution would be to repress labor. There was thus some complicity in the Nazi coup by the propertied classes, though much less than in Italy.

Fourth, Nazism was also a popular electoral movement, unlike Italian fascism, making two main mass appeals to the voters. The apparent “class stalemate” during the Depression made Nazi claims to class transcendence appealing, especially since the Nazi movement was the most classless in Germany. Second, its populist nation-statism thrived on Germany’s geopolitical and ethnic bitterness. A Great Power resenting its loss of territories, sucked into the Central European (formerly Habsburg-centered) tensions of Germanic, Jewish, and Slav peoples, Germany had refugees, “threatened

borders,” and ethnic “enemies” at home and abroad. Organic cleansing nationalism had quite broad appeal. Nazism’s statism was limited to Führer worship and militarism. But its nationalism was more intense and racist. Thus Nazi transcendent nation-statism was sufficiently popular to bring it to the brink of power. Its own paramilitarism and the weakness (sometimes the complicity) of the old regime took it over the top. This is a broad explanation entwining ideological, economic, military, and political power relations.

Austrian fascism was divided between two rival fascist movements. Though the monarchy and empire were gone, there was much continuity from pre-war times in the institutions of parliament, the state executive, and the Catholic Church, and the old regime lived on in Christian Social governments. “Austro-fascism” and the Austrian Nazi movement both emerged as rivals out of postwar revisionist paramilitaries and continued to thrive on discontents expressed through the electoral process. Both movements exploited the intensity of Austro-German antipathy toward Slavs and Jews. Austro-fascism was the less populist and radical of the two movements, being more top-down and more procapitalist. It strengthened as the mild semi-authoritarianism of the Christian Socials seemed unable to overcome Austria’s class stalemate, which the Depression helped perpetuate. But the rise of Hitler next door in Germany was the decisive factor. This intensified the appeal of fascism, undermined Austro-fascism, and gave the prize to the Austrian Nazis. The paramilitaries of both parties attempted coups but got into power only with help from the military power of a state (respectively, Austria and Germany). The final result was *Anschluss* between two Nazi movements, though they had got to power in different ways, and one was vastly more powerful than the other.

Hungarian and Romanian fascisms differed substantially from the others. The two countries had fought on opposite sides in the war, Hungary emerging as a big loser, Romania as a great victor. Yet the contrast was weakened by the ensuing civil war in Hungary, which resulted in the crushing of the Hungarian left and allowed the Hungarian old regime to reemerge, if in embittered and radicalized form. Rule was by a dual state composed of the traditional executive and bureaucracy and a parliament dominated by the gentry. Yet the old regime now contained many younger radical rightists, making more populist, revisionist (i.e., demanding the return of “lost territories”), and modern appeals to the country. Romania differed somewhat. Its (mainly foreign) landed gentry had been dispossessed, but this and the great war victory allowed the monarch, bureaucracy, and army to reemerge, as a more nationalist though still corrupt regime. Thus the old regimes survived quite

well in both countries, if somewhat radicalized and then destabilized by further radicals emerging within and around them. The political competition on the right was especially fierce within the universities and military schools and through the electoral process. Large fascist movements only emerged in the mid-1930s, well after the threat from the left had subsided. Thus fascists had no capitalist bias; indeed, they became rather proletarian in their composition. In both cases paramilitarism was used more as an electoral tool than to repress rivals or to seize power. An unequal dance of death ensued, in which military triumphed over paramilitary power, and radicalizing regime authoritarians triumphed over fascists. Only the chaos of the last war years allowed the fascists a brief, doomed victory.

Spanish fascism was different again. Neutral in World War I, Spain's old regime experienced the least disruption among all my case studies, and so conservative authoritarians, not fascists, dominated. Indeed, this, and not fascism, was the most common outcome across the center, east, and south of the continent. Portugal, Bulgaria, Greece, and the Serb core of Yugoslavia resembled Spain in this respect. The new successor states of the collapsed empires – the three Baltic republics, Poland, and Albania – also moved in crisis only to reactionary or corporatist authoritarianism. Though their political regimes were not “old” but brand new, they had the power and legitimacy of being “national liberators.” They, not fascists, developed veterans associations and populist parties.

The Spanish old regime did have one weak element, an unpopular monarch, and this let in the military regime of General Primo de Rivera. His failure led to the democratic Third Republic, the breakup of which did eventually produce a sizable fascist movement, complete with hastily formed paramilitaries. But these remained subordinate to the Nationalist army in the civil war and were marginalized under Franco's regime. His main props were the army, the church, and the “old” propertied classes. His regime is largely explicable in terms of my earlier general explanation of the surge of the authoritarian rightist family.

All these cases differed. To explain them required analysis attuned to local histories and social structures. Nonetheless, through the variety I perceive common forces determining the power of fascists. One potential cause actually played relatively little role: the threat from the working-class movement. This was not correlated with fascist strength. The threat was probably greatest in Spain, where there was not much fascism. The threat may have seemed substantial (though it had already peaked) in Italy; it seemed substantial though was actually more formal than real in Austria; Germany had a large but mostly moderate labor movement; Romania and Hungary had

negligible lefts by the time fascism loomed – indeed, fascism itself provided their main labor movements. Fascism was to a limited and variable degree supported by the propertied classes to save themselves from labor, but this is not a very powerful general explanation of fascism.

The main attraction of fascism was the intensity of its message. This always brought committed support from mainly young people, willing to give more of their time and energy than were activists in any other political movement. Fascist militancy, always with a paramilitary component, was necessary to fascist success. By their energy and violence, the thousands could hope to both attract and defeat the millions. This militancy centered on the ability to trap young single men within comradesly, hierarchical, and violent “cages.” Fascist parties and paramilitaries were almost “total institutions.” Fascism also attracted substantial (though not majority) electoral support, attracted by varying combinations of statism, nationalism, and class transcendence, though less by paramilitarism and cleansing. As we have seen, the first three of my five fascist characteristics had much greater plausibility in the countries that generated large fascist movements.

But the popularity of fascism was also greatly affected by the political strength and stability of old regime conservatism, which (more than liberal or social democracy) was fascism’s main rival. Only weakened and factionalized old regimes let in large fascist movements. United old regimes repressed or subordinated them, weaker ones enabled fascists to find military and political organizing space. World War I provided the space for legitimate paramilitarism, initially provided by discontented war veterans. Their values were then transmitted to two further generations of recruits drawn predominantly from among young students, cadets, and workers. Democratic elections provided the second space. Fascists thrived on a three-way electoral struggle, pitting the left against a conservative/liberal center and radicalizing conservatives. Fascists could then swallow up part or all of the radical right while the center was hollowed out and the left repressed. That was how the fascists achieved electoral success.

As they said themselves, fascists were not mere “reactionaries” nor “stooges” of capitalism or anyone else. They offered solutions to the four economic, military, political, and ideological crises of early twentieth-century modernity. They propounded plausible solutions to modern capitalism’s class struggles and economic crises. They transmitted the values of mass citizen warfare into paramilitarism and aggressive nationalism. They were a product of the transition of dual states toward “rule by the people,” proposing a less liberal and more “organic” version of this rule. Finally, they bridged the ideological schism of modernity. On the one hand lay the tradition

of the Enlightenment, “the party of humanity,” that would steadily widen the sphere of reason, freedom, democratic citizenship, and rational planning in human society. On the other hand lay the modernist renewal of Romanticism: the perception that human beings also possessed sentiments, emotions, souls, and an unconscious and that modern forms of organization – crowds, mass movements, total war, mass media – might encourage these quite as much as it encouraged reason. Fascists claimed to have fused these two aspects of human and mass behavior. We may not like any of their four solutions, but we must take them seriously. Fascists were and remain part of the dark side of modernity.

So fascists were generated in large numbers by postwar crises in ideological, economic, military, and political power relations to which a transcendent nation-statist ideology spearheaded by “popular” paramilitaries offered a plausible solution. Fascism occurred only where rule was by dual states containing weakening “old regime” executives and vibrant but only half-institutionalized democratic parliaments. Dual states with more stable old regimes produced more conservative forms of authoritarianism. Fascism resulted from the process of *democratization* amid profound war-induced crises. Fascism provided a distinctly statist and militarist version of “rule by the people,” the dominant political ideal of our times. Fully parliamentary regimes (in the northwest) survived all four crises with their institutions intact and fascists as small minorities.

LIVE FASCISTS?

Are there fascists still among us, poised to revive and dominate once more? Will we find such preconditions and consequence again? Or was fascism “European epochal” rather than “generic”? Clearly, some of the causes I identified were not merely conditions specific to the interwar period but remain perennial possibilities of modern societies. Having identified five characteristics as key to fascism – nationalism, statism, transcendence, cleansing, and paramilitarism – we will obviously find some of them scattered around the world, probably in varied combinations. Movements can be more or less fascist. Yet it is doubtful whether comparable movements appearing in the future will call themselves fascist. As a word in usage today, it appears largely as the exclamation “Fascist!” – a term of imprecise abuse hurled at people we do not like. Only a few crackpots and thugs call themselves fascists or Nazis. Since a few Italians and Romanians carry a somewhat romantic view of Mussolini and Codreanu as well-meaning victims, they have styled themselves “neofascists.” But labels are not necessarily reality. There are currently

movements in the world with more than a passing resemblance to fascism, on which I will spend a few final moments.

Yet there are few in fascism's original heartland, Europe. Fascism was defeated, its top leaders executed or imprisoned, and many others purged. Liberal democracy and communism triumphed and imposed their orders on Europe. There were no mass veterans' movements, no politics of territorial revisionism after 1945. There was prolonged economic growth in Western Europe and the institutionalization of quite effective communist authoritarianism in the East. In the West there was stable democratic competition between broad-based "catch-all" parties of the center-left and center-right. Since the present was clearly superior to the past, fascism withered. For the vast majority of Europeans, fascism still evokes images of evil. In Spain and Portugal corporatist regimes were decaying from within and were gone by 1975, unlamented. From 1989 authoritarianism began departing from the East. Fascism seemed finished.

From the 1970s, however, there seemed to be a bit of a revival in Western Europe. First, on the outer fringes many small but violent self-styled neo-fascist and especially neo-Nazi small groups achieved some prominence. They are historical revisionists (denying the Holocaust) and imitate the style and rituals of traditional fascism. They proclaim allegiance to fascist doctrines: hypernationalism grounded in biological racism, cleansing of alien foreigners, antidemocratic statism, the "third position" (though stated none too convincingly), and violence disguised as a call for "action" rather than words. Most of these small groups meet to some extent four of my five criteria of fascism, though open paramilitarism has not yet emerged. But they are tiny and likely to remain so. They mirror small groups of the far left: highly splintered, without popular support, thriving mainly off each other. They provide sensational copy for journalists and loom larger in the virtual reality of the Internet than in the reality of the street, still less the hustings.

More menacing has been a series of uneven upsurges of new radical rightist parties, usually followed by declines, but on a slightly upward secular curve. At their peaks these parties have so far received between 10 and 27 percent of the electoral votes in a number of countries. Following Ignazi (1997), I distinguish two main types. The first consists of those who style themselves neofascist. They do display some though not all of the five fascist attributes. Yet only two of these neofascist parties have ever achieved electoral significance, the Italian MSI and the German NDP, which inherited the two major national traditions of fascism. Other neofascist movements, such as the British BNP and the Dutch CP'86, have remained tiny. But only the MSI reached up to even 10 percent of the vote, and the peak of these neofascist parties was in the 1970s and 1980s (Taggart 1995). The MSI drew

disproportionate support (as had interwar Italian fascists), from the service and public sectors and from the more marginal working class (Ferraresi 1998; Weinberg 1998). But both declined during the 1990s. The German NDP declined in the face of the nonfascist Republikaner, and in 1994 Gianfranco Fini renamed the MSI as the National Alliance and declared it not neofascist but postfascist. Under his leadership the party has grown into a major conservative “system” party, though some party stalwarts are unhappy with this makeover. A rump neofascist MSI splinter group remains, but it has shriveled. During the 1990s neofascism retreated to the margins of European politics and is currently insignificant.

Now dominating the extreme right are parties normally termed “populist” or “radical populist.” Taggart (1995) says they emerged at “the end of the post-war settlement,” responding to problems associated with globalization and postindustrialism. Ignazi sees them as “postindustrial”: Globalization, the end of the Cold War, and the decline of the far left and of class conflict created new problems for the populist right to mobilize on. But it is rising immigration into Western Europe that offers the greatest opportunity to such parties during recent decades. The main parties in this group have been Le Pen’s Front National in France, the German Republikaners, the Austrian Freedom Party of Haider, and the Flemish Volksunie and Vlaams Blok. Even more recent has been the rise of radical populist movements in Denmark (the DPP) and Norway (the FrP), receiving 12 to 15 percent of recent votes, and the late Pim Fortuyn’s anti-immigration List in the Netherlands. As yet only Ireland, Portugal, and Spain appear to be entirely immune from such parties. They are now a persistent minority feature of Western European politics.¹

Yet on three of the key characteristics of fascism they remain ambiguous. They denounce in very general terms “the system” and “the establishment,” as well as the “sham” of a liberal democracy dominated by establishment parties that they say have lost touch with the real lives of ordinary citizens. But they rarely denounce democracy itself, and their goals are strictly electoral. They even sit united as a small bloc in the European Parliament. They are also ambivalent over the state. Since they tend to represent some of the most vulnerable citizens, they want state protection for them, sometimes including welfare state support. They always demand that the state enforces law, order, and traditional morality more toughly – because, they claim, immigrants dominate crime, prostitution, and drug pushing. Yet they resent a state controlled by the big parties, big business, and big unions, and so often say they want the state off their backs. Some even endorse neoliberal policies. In Austria Haider says he wants business radically deregulated, a flat tax rate of 23 percent, and the Austrian civil service cut by two-thirds.

On balance, this sounds closer to the state-hating Republican right in the United States than state-worshipping fascism. Thirdly, their *ninisme* – neither right nor left – sometimes influenced by the “third position” of neofascism, is rather vague and falls far short of the class transcendence offered by interwar fascists. But the main problem here is that the steam has been taken out of such principles by the decline in salience in class struggle. Liberal democracies have successfully institutionalized it. These three ambiguities and weaknesses of principle and policy also make for instability, as either extremists or moderates seek to enforce a more consistent line that then results in splits and expulsions, such as the makeover of the Italian MSI and the disintegration of the German Republikaner in the mid-1990s.

Though the most enduring of these parties do have a full complement of policies, their main attribute is a xenophobic and exclusionary nationalism derived from a single issue: the desire to end recent immigration into Europe (though this is less true of Italy). The enemy is nonwhite, non-Christian or East European, and asylum-seeking immigrants, the mixture varying by country. This does meet my nationalist and cleansing criteria of fascism. It also enables them to connect up to a number of other issues – law and order, moral decline, unemployment, and housing – supposedly posed by immigrants. But their nationalist xenophobia is unlike that of fascists or neofascists, since it rarely derives from a general hierarchical theory of collective will, culture, or race identity. Wieviorka (1994) has described this as a shift within racism from a “logic of [hierarchical] inferiorisation” to a “logic of differentiation.” All that is claimed is that immigrants are incompatible with the culture and traditions of France, Germany, Austria, Denmark, and so on, and so should get out or be deported. Some even claim they are the true multiculturalists: All cultures and ethnicities should be free to develop as they choose, but separately. There is no desire to rule over them, or indeed over any foreigners. They do not support territorial revisionism or aggression toward other nations, as was the case with interwar fascism. In fact, they also claim allegiance to “European civilization,” threatened by a flood of immigrants. Their international *bête noire* is American imperialism. They themselves are a long way from militarism.

Finally, there are no genuine paramilitaries organized by any of these Western European parties. Shocking though sporadic violence is committed by quite small fringe groups, very loosely organized, composed mainly of poorly educated and unemployed youths, the so-called skinheads, fueled by alcohol, their violence almost entirely aimed at immigrants. The vast majority of those committing offenses against public order are not affiliated with any far-right party or neo-Nazi group. The party leaderships are also

unhappy about their violence, considering it a vote-loser. More people show some sympathy for their violence, but these tend to be poorly educated and mostly elderly (Willems 1995; Gress 1998: 238–50).

Surveys show that the rightist populist parties' core constituency lies among persons seeing themselves betrayed as citizens, supposedly fully enfranchised in their own states but in reality being pushed down by elites, big business, and immigrant newcomers. They tend to be the less educated, less skilled, middle-aged to elderly, small town working-class, small business, and small farming males – different from the core constituencies of classic fascism. So their xenophobia is not merely a response to direct job or housing competition from immigrants, nor indeed of any “objective” cultural incompatibility, nor merely of the prevalence of racism in the society at large. All these are mediated by a sense of betrayal of citizen rights that is especially strong among more disadvantaged citizens (Betz 1994; Wimmer 1997). As Eatwell (2001) notes, their support is more sectoral than class, since they seem to attract the sectors within each class that are most economically threatened today (though “globalization” is too trite a label for the diverse sources of current threats). The Austrian Freedom Party deviates somewhat, having broader-based support deriving from the third great fascist tradition that was not totally destroyed in 1945 (Bailer-Galanda 1998).

But the biggest electoral successes of these parties come when they can enlarge on their limited core constituencies by capturing broader discontent with the traditional governing parties. Such “protest voting” appears greatest where there are distinct regional grievances against the capital, as for the Flemish and Austrian parties – and, if we count it, the Italian Northern League. That such protest voting goes to the right and not to the left probably results (outside countries with strong fascist traditions) from the race issue, which leftist parties avoid (sometimes despite the sentiments of their supporters). However, their support does fluctuate considerably, between both districts and points in time. They can achieve very large votes in quite particular places, from Burnley to Antwerp to Carinthia (Eatwell 2001). This is probably a consequence of their dependence on a broad but not deep protest vote that they have the militants to mobilize in only a few places.

Yet their problems mount with success. Their ideological and policy vacuity (outside immigration) then becomes more closely scrutinized and criticized. If they are successful enough to share in coalition governments (as in Austria) or rule local districts (as in Belgium), their performance in office also comes under critical scrutiny. So far, the major system parties have then made a comeback. Austria's conservative party scored a major electoral

success at the expense of the Freedom Party in 2002. The up and down cycles continue, which lead me to doubt whether they can continue on an upward trajectory. Indeed, if the major parties responded to the upsurge in xenophobia by severely restricting immigration, then support for radical-right parties would probably collapse. This is what happened in the first postwar European case, Britain in the 1960s. Tacit agreement between the Conservative and Labour Parties to restrict further nonwhite immigration ended the electoral threat from the radical right.

The rightist populist parties are nationalist and they support ethnic cleansing in the relative mild form of orderly and either voluntary or compulsory deportations. But they are not statist; they are only in the vaguest sense making claims to “transcend” class conflict – and this is no longer a burning issue in Europe – and they have no paramilitaries. Above all, the salience of their major issue, immigration, tends to undercut any general *Weltanschauung*, whether fascist or other. For these reasons they are not seriously fascist under the terms of my definition nor in terms of the definitions I quoted from Nolte, Payne, Eatwell, or Griffin.

I have argued in this book that institutionalized liberal democracy is proof against fascism. Postwar Western Europe has entrenched liberal democracy far too strongly for much support to be offered to neofascists or rightist populists on grounds more general than the immigration issue. Western Europe has successfully institutionalized the class conflict that helped to generate classic fascism. It is capable of institutionalizing most forms of conflict, just as it did in northwestern Europe in the interwar period. Only immigration raises a potentially intractable issue, for capitalism encourages immigration while liberal democratic or social democratic citizenship can be easily turned toward privileging native-born citizens. This contradiction enables rightist populism to flourish. It can make life unpleasant for immigrants but is unlikely to generate either fascism or any other totalizing ideology. These radical populist parties may be disturbing, but provided that European “system parties” adapt themselves to the changing macro-environment, remaining responsive to citizen demands, European fascism is defeated, dead and buried.² After their terrible twentieth century, Europeans can at least take comfort from this.

The ex-communist zone of Greater Europe has its own distinct problems. There liberal democracy has existed for only just over a decade and remains fragile. Authoritarianism lingers on among former communist regimes, and some pockets of ethnic conflict entwine with conflict between states. As we saw, Romania had the biggest interwar fascist movement. Predictably, it has the biggest neofascist movement. The Greater Romanian Party, nationalist

and rather statist, tracing back its lineage to the Iron Guard, is neofascist and obtained nearly 30 percent of the vote in 2000. However, this is rare in the region. Hungary, closer to the European Union, does not seem set to recreate its interwar trajectory. Authoritarianism is not openly proclaimed in Eastern Europe; it is denied. Nor is it likely to be openly proclaimed as long as regimes desire entry into the EU or NATO or as long as they desire resources from the EU, the United States, or international financial institutions. Around the fringes of the continent, the EU requirement of democracy for entry has remained influential. Though in a sense we once again have “two Europes,” the western part is now larger, it combines Social, Christian, *and* liberal democracy, and it is now dominant over the other Europe of dual states.

It is possible to envisage (e.g., in Russia) a future radical rightist movement that would combine elements of nationalism and communism to proudly proclaim extreme nation-statism. This would be much closer to fascism – though almost certainly without the name. Fascism did terrible damage to the region and then took fifty years of abuse from communist regimes. Few will endorse it now.

Across parts of the south of the world statism and nationalism are often more important than in the north. Though dented somewhat by recent neoliberalism, most southern countries accept that states must play a substantial role in promoting their social and economic development. In some of them mass-mobilizing nationalism, usually ethno-nationalism directed at internal minorities assisted by a “homeland” state next door, is reinforced by territorial revisionism and military aggression. Many of these states also have the dual destabilizing form we observed in the interwar period, combining parliamentary institutions and a strong executive power. Militaries play an especially important role across much of the South. Where states weaken and factionalize, paramilitaries also often emerge, especially in Africa.

But these various elements, which all contributed to fascism, are almost never found together. The statism of countries such as Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico did originate in corporatist regimes highly influenced by fascism. Yet even in the heyday of Peron, Vargas, and the PRI they never added paramilitarism or aggressive nationalism, and they sought to incorporate and pacify the masses, not mobilize them. Today their statism has become conservative, a remnant of past import substitution polices plus institutionalized provision of job and business opportunities for clients, tinged in some cases (as in other countries, such as India) by Keynesianism. Many statist regimes are conservative and procapitalist, such as South Korea or Singapore. Military regimes tend to on domestic repression, ethno-nationalists on

monopolizing state resources for their own ethnic group. Few military or ethno-nationalist regimes have serious macro-economic programs. A few do weave statism and populism into developmental rhetoric, but this generates more leftist than rightist populism, as in present-day Latin America (exemplified by Hugo Chavez in Venezuela). The whole fascist package of statism, nationalism, and paramilitarism is absent, as is any ambitious current theory of society and progress. There is no utopian Third Way, no transcendence.³

Perhaps fascism has come closest to resurrection in surprising, religious garb. *Theodemocracy* was the term used by the Islamic fundamentalist scholar Madoudi to indicate rule not by priests (which would be theocracy) but by the whole community of the faithful following the precepts of their religion.⁴ Such populism often has fascist strains, especially in Islamic and Hindu political movements. Some of these strains were historically contingent, a product of which Great Powers supported their independence struggles. Arabs and Indians struggled against British and French domination. They did imbibe liberal and socialist anticolonial ideologies from their own oppressors. But they could extend socialism into communism with help from the Soviet Union and China. These were all secular ideologies, hostile or indifferent to Islam and Hinduism.

But the fascist powers, Germany and Italy, were also willing to support their liberation struggles, in order to weaken the liberal empires. But Nazis, fascists, Muslims, and Hindus were also struck by the compatibility of some of their ideas. Middle Eastern and Indian nationalists studied in Berlin and Rome during the interwar period, and some pronounced that their own movements could adapt fascism to their needs. Nazi theorists respected Hinduism as a pure Aryan religion, and the Hindu *varna* (classical caste) hierarchy also fitted well with fascist elitism. All these movements believed that the state should express the spiritual essence of the people, and all stressed the martial history and spirit of their people. Hindu nationalist theorists emphasize *hindu rastra* (Hindu nation) and *Hindutva* (Hinduness), both rather *völkisch* ideas. Muslim and Hindu nationalists of the 1930s also explicitly adapted fascist organizations, emphasizing hierarchy, discipline, paramilitarism, and segregation of male and female activists. The leaders of the large Hindu nationalist paramilitary, the RSS, often praised fascism and Nazism. Its most prominent theorist, Savarkar Gowalkar, noted of Hitler's "purging" of the Jews in 1939, "Race pride at its highest has been manifested here . . . a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by." Fascist tendencies were most obvious in the Indian military formations: the Indian Legion in Germany and the Indian army of national liberation,

the INA, organized by the Japanese, both fighting the British in World War II.

But they backed the losing side and were destroyed. India was liberated not by them or by fascist-leaning Islamists but by moderate secular Indian and Pakistani movements. In any case, the similarities cannot be pressed too far. These movements found Italian statism exaggerated and were uneasy with Nazi racism, preferring to regard the Hindu nation as a “society” into which others could be assimilated. But in India, Hinduism, the religion of the overwhelming majority, has been bent toward a nation-statism that rivals the secular Indian nationalism proclaimed by the Congress, Socialist, and Communist Parties. Of course, since the Hindu Nationalist BJP party came to power in India in the 1980s, it has imbibed some of the secular moderation of previous governments, while the BJP also advocates neoliberal economic policies. Its opposition to the statism of the Congress Party partly derives from the fact that state patron-client networks favored Congress supporters. Overall, Hindu nationalism offers no distinctive role for the state in secular matters, and it offers only spiritual, not secular transcendence. There is no Third Way in the fascist sense. The paramilitaries remain active, though in recent years the RSS has been outflanked by more radical but less ideological local Hindu paramilitaries. Hindu nationalism does spawn off some fascist tendencies, but it is not really fascism.

The term “Islamic fascism” has recently become widespread, especially among Americans and Israelis denouncing the Islamist *jihad* launched against them. The label is not without foundation. The new *jihadis* (popularly called “fundamentalists”) do seek to create a monocratic, authoritarian regime that will enforce a utopian Koranic ideal. This regime will create a new form of state and a new man (and woman). Its predominant organization is the paramilitary, taking various but always dominant forms – guerrilla international brigades in the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan, armed bands of terrorizing enforcers under the Taliban and Iranian Islamists (rather like the SA or SS), and clandestine terrorist networks elsewhere. All this is decidedly fascist.

However, there are also some major deviations. Islamism is not nationalist. Islam is much wider than any single state or its people – there are currently fifty-four member states of the Islamic Conference. Thus Islamists oppose nationalists and see them as among their deadliest enemies – leaders such as Saddam Hussein and Hosnei Mubarak. In principle, Islamists aim for one giant Muslim state, the caliphate, and that would constitute a kind of pan-nation-state. But almost all acknowledge that this may be an impossible ideal. Nor do they have any role for the state except to enforce their

conception of the sharia. We have three actual Islamist regimes as examples. The Taliban was ferocious on cultural matters such as burqas or videos, but had no policies on the economy, health, or education. Afghanistan degenerated materially under their stewardship. The Sudanese Islamists at their peak in the 1990s offered some development projects, together with attacks on Christians and pagans and therefore endless civil war, which also degraded the country. The Iranian ayatollahs were not as destructive, but their economic policies seemed largely unconnected to their policies on moral purity. Al Qaeda has said nothing whatever about economic policies. Jihadis have no principled role for the state or for its people in their doctrine, outside the sacred realm.⁵ Once again, we do not find the complete fascist package.

It is clear that the term “Islamic fascism” is really just a particular instance of the word “Fascist!” – a term of abuse for our enemies. It is the most powerful term of abuse in the world today – much stronger than “Communist!” – and so it is understandable that Americans and Israelis, reeling under the impact of terrorism, should deploy it. But neither Islamism nor Hindu nationalism is really fascist. This is for a simple reason: Unlike fascism, they really *are* political religions. They offer a sacred, but not a secular ideology. They most resemble fascism in deploying the means of moral murder, but the transcendence, the state, the nation, and the new man they seek are not this-worldly. We might call this “sacred fascism,” of course, though perhaps it is better to recognize that the human capacity for ferocious violence, cleansing, and totalitarian goals can have diverse sources and forms, to which we should give different labels – fascist, communist, imperialist, religious, ethno-nationalist, and so on.

So it does not seem that fascism, as I and other scholars have defined it, is flourishing in the world today. Fascism was generated by a world-historical moment when mass citizen warfare surfaced alongside mass transitions toward democracy amid a global capitalist crisis. Fascism made a not implausible claim to solve these worldly problems in a brave new world in which the nation, the state and even war might be seen as the bearers of progress. That moment has passed. War is now widely reviled (outside the United States and parts of the south of the world) as bringing social regress. Capitalism will always generate crises, while the transition to democracy remains difficult. But compromise blends of capitalism, democracy, and socialism are generally seen as bringing solutions and progress. Major crises will recur. In an increasingly global world, it is less likely that a combination of transcendent, cleansing, paramilitary nation-statism will be seen as providing the best solution.

However, fascist-leaning movements are most likely to recur in the south of the world if the north, led by the United States, continues besmirching the attractions of mild and democratic nation-statism to the south through their capitalist exploitation, American military imperialism, and widening north-south inequality. Then our descendants may have to cope with new social movements bearing more than a passing resemblance to fascism, mixed in with socialist tinges and with whatever local ideological sources of resistance they can also mobilize – as Islamism provides today. But for now fascists are dead and their resurrection is not imminent. Until now interwar fascism has been not generic but “European epochal” fascism. Its legacy currently lives on mainly in a different type of social movement: ethno-nationalists seeking murderous cleansing. In more recent years it is ethnic, religious, and more single-mindedly nationalist versions of “rule by the people” that have supplanted the more statist and militarist versions offered by fascism. But that story is for another book.

