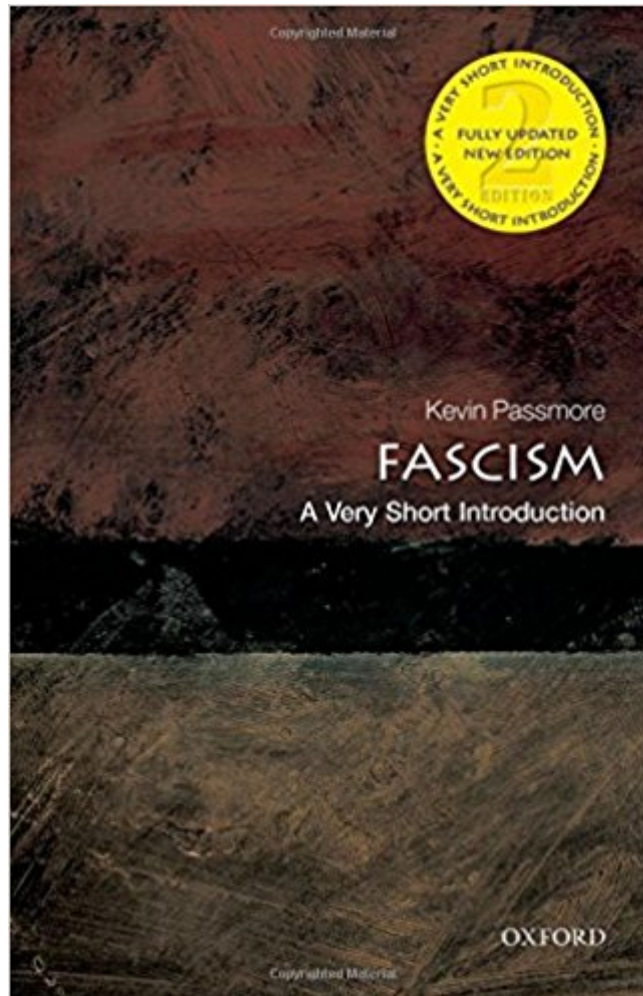




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# Fascism: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)



## Synopsis

What is fascism? Is it revolutionary? Or is it reactionary? Can it be both? Fascism is notoriously hard to define. How do we make sense of an ideology that appeals to streetfighters and intellectuals alike? That calls for a return to tradition while maintaining a fascination with technology? And that preaches violence in the name of an ordered society? In the new edition of this Very Short Introduction, Kevin Passmore brilliantly unravels the paradoxes of one of the most important phenomena in the modern world--tracing its origins in the intellectual, political, and social crises of the late nineteenth century, the rise of fascism following World War I -including fascist regimes in Italy and Germany -and the fortunes of 'failed' fascist movements in Eastern Europe, Spain, and the Americas. He also considers fascism in culture, the new interest in transnational research, and the progress of the far right since 2002.

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## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Dr Kevin Passmore is a Reader in History at Cardiff University. His *The Right in the Third Republic* was published by OUP in November 2012. He has continued to publish widely on fascism since publication of the VSI in 2002, but has also written on the history of the social sciences and historical writing.

For a movement that appears to deal in iron-hard certainties, fascism is notoriously inconsistent and difficult to define. In this short and interesting study, Kevin Passmore well brings out the unique and protean nature of fascist ideology and politics. His definition of fascism is quite lengthy and subtle, though its keystone is the primacy of the idea of the nation: fascists sought above all else to create a "mobilized national community". Passmore looks for the origins of fascism (and its sibling, Nazism) in various diverse places, including the Jacobins of the French Revolution, the Ku Klux Klan, the antisemitic Austrian politician Karl Lueger, Social Darwinism, and 19th-century French ultranationalism. He touches on some of the classic explanations for the rise of fascism, including the Marxist theory that it represented a kind of capitalism on steroids, and Max Weber's view that it was a vehicle for pre-capitalist ruling classes such as rural landowners in Spain and the old Japanese military caste. Passmore also notes, however, that fascism was closely linked to a particular time and place: Europe between the two World Wars. Every modern Western political movement of any importance -- conservatism, socialism, capitalism, liberalism, Christian democracy, nationalism, even feminism -- was in place by 1914, and the only two exceptions were environmentalism and fascism. Fascism, an exotic compound of nationalism and elements of conservatism and socialism, was essentially a product of a continent that had been brutalized and bankrupted by a catastrophic war and was fearful of the prospect of communist revolution. The links with older movements were tenuous: as Passmore notes, there was no clear link between Nazism and the antisemitic movements of Wilhelmine Germany. Passmore ends the book with the suggestion that fascism might re-emerge in the future, but this surely goes too far. The sheer strangeness of fascism is striking. Its extreme nationalism and its murderous hostility towards socialism mean that it tends to be placed on the far right of the political spectrum. Yet it differed significantly from traditional conservatism. Unlike conservatives, fascists were prepared to exert

state authority over the economy, interfere in private family life, disrespect monarchies and churches, and reshape traditional institutions like the army and the civil service. In some countries, such as Salazar's Portugal and Baldwin's Britain, orthodox conservative governments sought to suppress the local fascists, and Mussolini's original squadristi were radicals who fought with conservatives and Catholics as well as socialists. On the other hand, there was in practice more to unite conservatives and fascists than to divide them: fascists generally respected private property (as long it wasn't owned by Jews or other undesirables), and the two movements shared the common reference points of veneration for the nation -- the state and the military. There were intelligible reasons why they both viewed socialism as their mortal enemy. This is a good little book, judiciously written and containing a wealth of useful information. It is essential reading for anyone who wishes to inform themselves before using the political f-word.

Being the first very short introduction I have read, this book lives up to what Passmore has published it to be. It is very detailed on fascism and I also like the fact that he is not biased and delivers a professional approach. Not only do I understand fascism more but I have also been inspired to learn more about it and I have completed an essay on fascism. I highly recommend this book for people who want to learn more about fascism or do research on it.

A good discussion of the origins of fascism and the various forms it has taken. The author avoids the "checklist" of characteristics that some books on this subject use. This means he is able to show that fascism can adapt itself to a variety of situations and will not be identical in every country and time in which it appears.

This is the first one of these "very short introduction" books I've read and it didn't quite fit my expectations. In some instances it delves into an often not discussed section of extreme political movements in Europe or elsewhere assuming you have never encountered the topic and in other instances it relies on background knowledge of the actors involved or locations in the examples given. It is worth a read, but I'd say take it off the shelf and read it for a few hours - skipping the chapters you don't find interesting - and then if you still thirst for more information get a book that deals with an element of fascism more in-depth. One last comment, the premise of the book is that one cannot define fascism and that the elements of some common examples don't match up neatly to form an easily recognizable ideology. Since at the start the book is claiming there is no definition, sometimes the examples seem obscure, too broad, or too specific. Obviously this was intentional,

but it made me feel unsatisfied.

I'm guessing that sales of *Fascism: A Very Short Introduction* (by Cardiff University professor Kevin Passmore) have spiked since the election of Donald Trump! That is certainly why I chose to read this book. We on the Left are very fond of bandying about the word 'fascist' (count me guilty as charged!) so I wanted to educate myself a little more about what fascism is, at least so I can be somewhat intellectually honest should I seriously brand someone a fascist. Passmore goes to great lengths in pointing out that fascism is not easily defined (Fascist/Fascism- with a capital F- refers specifically to Mussolini's Italian political party) but that fascism can entail a number of traits. By giving a history of political parties and movements that might be labeled fascist, he shows that there are often differences between the goals, methods and make up of these parties. (Interestingly Nazism differs from fascism primarily in its racist policies. While fascists are generally racist, anti-immigrant and may even believe in a hierarchy of races, the actual pursuit of a policy of racial extermination like the Final Solution differentiates Nazism from fascism. And recent right-wing leaders like Thatcher and Messrs. Reagan and Bush Jr are more correctly defined as Neo-conservatives.) So what are some of the hallmarks of fascism? Some of the more obvious ones are ultranationalism, racism, a cult of personality/charismatic leadership, anti-constitutionalism and a level of violence. In addition, a true fascist movement will often have its own paramilitary wing. A strong element of Social-Darwinism pervades fascism as well (and the irony of American Evangelical voters supporting Social Darwin-like Republican economic policies is rich to me!) It can get a little more complicated when it comes to economics and fascism. While fascists often appeal to the working classes with a pro-worker sort of populism (particularly where socialist parties have failed in leadership or simply don't exist), fascists are often corporatist. They cosy up to big business for a variety of reasons, and as big business naturally lacks a moral compass besides that of making a profit, it will often tolerate fascist political leadership. The book also discusses fascism's often fluid relationship to religion and the role of women in a fascist state, fascism usually having an aura of machismo. Fascism of course didn't die with the defeat of Hitler and Mussolini and it has taken various forms in disparate places and populations around the globe since. It was interesting (and disheartening) to consider that while this book was revised and reprinted in 2014 and the author discusses various right-wing political movements especially across Europe, I don't think even he anticipated the rapid growth of parties like UKIP in the UK, the FN in France, etc. While the far-right parties today that may indeed be fascist, none really ever embrace the term openly. Ultimately, this book succeeded for me in that now I

better understand fascism. It's history, what fascism is (and is not) and its place in contemporary politics. I am far more comfortable in using it to describe one when I see one. A few final thoughts on the book itself. I would highly recommend it to anyone interested in the subject but while it's a relatively short and very engaging read, it does assume a fairly good knowledge base of 20th Century history and politics. Also, and this might sound silly, but it is important for context: the book is written with and embraces the assumption that fascism is in fact a BAD thing!

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