The Rise of Totalitarianism
A review of the 20th c. ideologies of totalitarianism, Fascism, Nazism, and communism

TOTALITARIANISM
Totalitarian states are one-party dictatorships that regulate every aspect of citizens’ lives; everything is subordinated totally to the state. The term is similar to (but not the same as) dictatorship, authoritarianism, autocracy, and absolutism. The basic distinction between totalitarianism and these other terms is degree of control. Totalitarian leaders exercised more total control than did leaders of absolutist states. For that reason, totalitarianism is reserved for only those states that truly meet the definition. Scholars even debate if Mussolini’s regime should be deemed “totalitarian,” for he was forced to compromise with conservative elites, such as the Catholic Church.

Here is a list of characteristics of totalitarianism:
✓ Forced to live by ruler’s beliefs
✓ Demands total mass conformity
✓ 1 political party only
✓ Propaganda
✓ Technology
✓ Secret police / terror
✓ Censorship
✓ State-controlled economy (in varying degrees; the USSR exercised the most control with the institution of communism and consequent abolition of private property; Mussolini instituted “corporatism,” which entailed the creation of government and privately run corporations to manage different sectors of the economy ... there is a good description here if you are interested: http://www.britannica.com/topic/corporatism)
✓ Strong military
✓ Leader tries to convince people he is democratic or has democratic support
✓ Youth, professional, cultural, sports groups (ex. Hitler Youth)

The first totalitarian states emerged in the 20th century, so the term does not apply to regimes prior to that era. And totalitarian leaders utilized 20th c. technology, namely film and radio, to spread propaganda whose purpose it was to win not just obedience from the country’s citizens, but their devotion as well. Totalitarian leaders sought to win hearts and minds, and to create a cult of the leader. This was something altogether new.

Some scholars speak of two totalitarianisms: totalitarianism of the left and totalitarianism of the right. This terminology highlights the key distinction between communism and fascism (the latter of which includes Nazism as a subset).

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<th>“totalitarianism of the left”</th>
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<td>Communism</td>
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<td>Collective ownership of wealth</td>
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<td>Working class support</td>
<td>Middle class support</td>
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<td>Ex: USSR under Stalin, China under Mao</td>
<td>Ex: Germany under Hitler, Italy under Mussolini</td>
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Now let’s take a look at the political spectrum, and where these systems belong. Thus far we have examined primarily a linear political spectrum, but there are a variety of ways in which a political spectrum can be designed to try to take into account similarities and differences between ideologies.

Here is a traditional linear political spectrum, with communism on the left and Fascism on the right:

![Political Spectrum Diagram](image)

Here is another linear political spectrum, with some additional information on it (note the blue and yellow flag is Sweden’s, as Sweden has a strong social welfare state; the maple leaf flag is Canada’s, and the NDP, Liberal, and PC emblems represent different Canadian political parties):
What the linear spectrum fails to reveal is the profound similarities between communist and Fascist regimes. A pie-shaped political spectrum shows that these systems are closer together than the linear model suggests:
Likewise, the horseshoe model shows that communism and Fascism are closer together than the linear model reveals, but that there is also a big divide between them (and that divide is on their relationship to the economy):
Finally, a 4-quadrant political spectrum gives some more information about what the totalitarian ideologies share in common (very strong authority) and where they differ (economically, with collectivism on the left and economic freedom on the right):

FASCISM
Fascism is a somewhat difficult ideology to define.

First, there is intense debate among scholars over its definition:
- Some scholars argue that it arose with World War I, but others argue that it existed before.
- Are there fascist(s) (more than one) or just one: Italian Fascism? Can other regimes, such as Hitler’s, be deemed fascist too?
- Is fascism on the right or on the left? Mussolini began on the left (socialism), but moved toward the right (fascism became anti-socialist).

Fascism has no inherent ideological doctrine, which also makes defining it quite difficult. Mussolini believed in action prior to doctrine. He asserted that the movement should never be sacrificed to its principles. In this way, Mussolini was very pragmatic.

So, how can we define fascism:
1. Fascism consists of a series of negations: it is anti-socialist, anti-communist, anti-radical, anti-democratic, anti-republican, anti-feminism, anti-liberal, and anti-conservative. Yes, some of this seems contradictory. Fascists regarded themselves as something altogether new.
2. What fascism is for:
a. Creation of a new nationalist authoritarian state. Emphasis here is on devotion to the state, whereas communists advocated devotion to the international working class. Fascism is nationalist, whereas communism is internationalist.

b. The goal of empire or a radical change in the nation’s relationship with other powers. Readiness to use the military to achieve these ends. Fascist states glorify war and build up their militaries.

c. Espousal of an idealist, voluntarist creed, resulting in the formation of a new, secular, self-created fascist man. Volunteerism was critical; fascist leaders sought to win the voluntary will of the people, who responded with devotion to the new state.

3. Organization and style are key to defining fascism. Fascists emphasize symbols and political choreography, stressing the romantic and mystical aspects of the regime (Leni Riefenstahl’s film, *Triumph of the Will* is a fantastic illustration of this). Fascists attempt to create a mass party militia. They are willing to use violence for political ends. They exalt youth above other phases of life, and mobilize the youth through party-run groups (ex. Hitler Youth, which reminds me of Scouts, but with a very different agenda). Fascist leaders tend to be younger than leaders of other movements. Leaders are dynamic and charismatic.

**NAZISM**

Nazism is Hitler’s form of fascism. What distinguishes Nazism from fascism is its racist/anti-Semitic agenda. Mussolini did follow Hitler’s lead on this front, for example establishing anti-Semitic laws in 1938, but he was a follower rather than a leader here.

**COMMUNISM (SOVIET-STYLE COMMUNISM)**

The key point to remember here is that in theory, communism is not totalitarian. In fact, Marx predicted the withering away of the state at the end of the process of establishing communism. In practice, communism has always resulted in dictatorship at best, and totalitarianism at worst. In every country that has adopted communism, the leaders did not want to relinquish power once they seized it.