

The Rise of Fascism in 21st Century Democracies: A Case Study of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The rebirth of fascism has reintroduced global discourse, especially throughout democratic societies. Previously assumed to have been wiped out subsequent World War II, fascism is currently re-emerging in modified and subtle forms. This research explores the renewal of fascism in modern democracies through case studies of East and west, finding commonalities with past fascist regimes like those of Hitler and Mussolini. The study looks into through what means populism, militarism, digital media and nationalism play a role in the propagation of fascist doctrine. It also probes the Deterioration of liberal democracy and constitutionalism, drawing attention to the influence of collective narcissism and authoritarian leadership through this procedure. The study adopts a qualitative methodology based secondary sources and content analysis to analyses the development and manifestation of modern fascism. By means of this research, a deeper perspective of the ideological shifts and political strategies that spark the revival of fascism is expanding, providing strategies to combat this challenge in contemporary political systems(especially Pakistan).

Keywords: *Fascism, Nationalism, Digital Media, Populism, Anarchism, Militarism, Totalitarianism, Authoritarianism*

INTRODUCTION

In the last few years, fascism has reoccurred as a main subject in international political debate. Political analyst and Journalists have increasingly discussed the reemergence of fascist trends and patterns across various global regions. Fascism, formerly described as a radical form of authoritarian nationalism, stems from the Italian word *fascio*, meaning "a bundle of sticks" (Turner, 1975). The idea first stepped into political history in 1919, coupled with Benito Mussolini, who gained power in Italy in 1922. In English philology, however, "fascism" has as well been applied to regimes correlated with Nazism and different authoritarian governments (Serra, 2020). Fascism focuses not just individuals but whole nations, usually portraying the citizen as detached, Narcissistic, and ruled by natural law and self-serving. Fascist doctrine embrace technological progress yet reject at the same time modernity, Glorifying a mythical past and Rousing patriotic feelings rooted in considered historical injustices (Jayaram, 2023). Fascist leaders generally provide overly simplistic curse to societal problems, characterizing as exclusive understanding of the people's demands and sentiments. They commonly hint at that the nation was formerly powerful but has been eroded by leftist ideologies or communism, weakened military and national power (Stanley, 2022). As the fall of Mussolini and the end of World War II in 1945 appeared to indicate the defeat of fascism, scholars like German philosopher Ernst Nolte (1963) stated that fascisms imply altered , not disappeared (Paxton, 2017).

During the latter part of 1990s, fascism had reemerged in political conversations in the midst of ethnic cleansing in the Balkans and violence against immigrants in the Germany, UK, and Italy. In the current age, fascism is often linked with expansionist nationalism. A prominent example is Vladimir Putin's foreign policy, which strives to bring back Russia's pride and geopolitical supremacy lost after the Cold War. His government has been blamed for supporting toxic nationalism and fascist trends, primarily through the "Russian World Doctrine," showing reverence for Nazist and fascist ideologies (DW, 2022). The setback of global capitalism to tackle deeply rooted inequalities has provoked populism and the reawakening of right-wing politics across East and West, jeopardizing international stability. Muslim communities especially have been notably victims of this fresh influx of fascism, under the mask of counterterrorism and securitization. In India, the largest democratic nation, PM Narendra Modi's approach towards minorities finds similarities to Hitler's persecution of Jews, alerting to danger about fascist patterns in democratic nations (Farooq, 2019).

The youth of today, increasingly alienated from historical memory, becomes prone to ideological exploitation. It is therefore an ethical and rational responsibility to educate upcoming generations about the atrocities of fascism and set it apart clearly from well-founded nationalism. This research work aims to answer core question about the comeback of fascism in the 21st century: What are the core features of contemporary fascism? What socio-political and economic elements have led to its rise? As well as modern political movements exhibit attributes of fascism. The main objectives are to set apart between old fascism and its recent forms, and to analyse the relationship between nationalism, fascism and populism, in today's political structure. In addition, the study will investigate the global effects of renewal fascism, examine the part of digital media in spreading these ideologies, as well as follow historical evolution of fascist movements throughout various periods and regions. Though the principal priority is on the broader doctrinal trends and political dynamics of fascism, the study further explores a contextual reflection on Pakistan to explore regional standpoint. This integration is not framed as a criticism of any particular government or political party, rather as a tool to enrich the evaluation by showcasing how certain fascist patterns may surface in varying state-level context, thereby providing more border and nuanced interpretation of the phenomenon.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly literature has thoroughly analyzed the interlink between nationalism and fascism. An ongoing theme indicates that fascist ideologies commonly rely on strong nationalist ruler for their propagation and legitimacy. Like without Hitler and Mussolini, the historical validation of fascism and Nazism may not have been realized to the equal degree. Conventional and centrist media, unable to publicly endorse fascist regimes, have commonly swapped the term *nationalist* instead of *fascist*, thereby harmonizing extreme ideologies under par terminology. The latest revival of right-wing populist movements in several states has reignited intellectual focus in the reasons and factors underpinning the rebirth of fascism. Conventionally, the political right in the parliament of European Union between the World Wars took a handoff approach toward fascism, frequently facilitating its proliferation (Amin, 2014). Recent analyses show that much of today's extreme right has its root in lower socio-economic classes, fueled by disappointment and instability. Modern definitions of fascism have also been enlarging to cover ultra conservative movements and Islamist ideologies, revealing change in the application of the idea in modern settings (Laqueur, 1996).

The post-Cold War era has seen a revival rise of fascist movements across different continents. Researchers recognized this reappearance as a serious risk to democratic systems. A central issue is the rise of non-democratic world powers like Russia and China, whose despotism models threaten liberal democratic values.

in Europe and outside. Additional research points out that the global economic recession of 2008, protectionist policies, and the Covid-19 pandemic and digital media proliferation, as principle factor in the re-emergence of fascism. Middle-class stress throughout and following the 2008 recession, aggravated by the economic instability provoked by Covid-19, set the stage for authoritarian description . Capitalism's incapacity to grant economic stability during these crises has been regarded as a major downfall, shaking public confidence on liberal economic structure (Farooq, 2019). furthermore; digital media is seen as a major catalyst of contemporary fascism. It poses primary challenge to the stability of information system in both advanced and underdeveloped states (Zehra, 2022). The internet act as an effective instrument for disseminating authoritarian narratives, sabotaging the public's availability of balanced, accurate reporting (Snyder, 2018). The return of fascism triggers instability into a multipolar world system. While some researchers stated that nuclear deterrence may minimize the odds of large-scale war, history steadily shows that unchecked fascism has gave rise to extensive conflict. Under these circumstances, examining the history and socio-political elements conducive to fascism's return is key for sustaining democratic institutions and preventing upcoming turmoil.

METHODOLOGY

This research is based on exploratory research with secondary sources and qualitative data. Qualitative research is subjective in its nature and strives to collect the depth of individual insight and the sophisticated understanding of social issues. It enables for the advancement of rich insights into the subtext, ideologies, and mechanism that define present fascism within democratic nations. The study is based primarily on secondary data sources, such as academic books, peer-reviewed articles, newspapers, historical documents, blogs, previously recorded interviews and documentary films. The analysis based on the content analysis methodology devised by Hsieh and Shannon (2005), using both traditional and conclusive approaches to decode qualitative data. Within this context, textual data are read and re-read to extract pinpoint and conceptual types. These are classified and evaluated to derive relevant and insights. The Probabilistic essence of this content analysis enables for the emergence of data driven theories in the data instead of imposed from exterior. The method accounts for both written kinesics forms of data, providing in-depth examination of national propaganda in contemporary discourse.

Significance

This research is crucial in its effort to evaluate thoroughly the ideological, socio-economic and political factors leading to the reemergence of fascism. It gives an approach to identify the difference between nationalism and fascism ideologies that are often confused in contemporary political portray. Misconception or misrepresenting this creates a major risk to democratic peace and global security .The work also serves the purpose of moral and intellectual effort directed at younger generations who may have limited historical knowledge of fascism's horrors. By uncovering the mechanisms that fuel fascist worldview and their influence on governance, this study seeks to develop perspective civic engagement and organizational flexibility. In the present era, where, economic inequality, populism and information tampering are reforming democratic societies, it's vital to undertake comprehensive analysis of the drivers and ramifications of fascism's revival. This understanding is vital to securing the continuity of democratic institutions, the shielding of human rights, and the ongoing survival of civilization.

THE RETURN OF FASCISM

The 21st century has observed the emergence of ideologies redolent of fascism across both Western and Eastern state, in which populist movements focusing on nationalism, tyranny and marginalizing politics have attained considerable momentum. Frequently these populist rulers portray themselves as advocates of national sovereignty, at the same time criticizing the very democratic systems that granted them the opportunity to seize the power. The return of these kinds of ideologies is characterized by complex dynamics of economic discontent, ethnic based politics, and a focus on national homogeneity, together these factors challenge the stability of democratic governance. Their speeches commonly focus on nationalism, a protection of traditional cultural values, and anti-elitism, all of them align with populations feeling powerless by social change, globalization, and economic instability. Leaders like Viktor Orban (Hungary), Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil), and Donald Trump (United States) have effectively applied these themes to drum up endorsement, framing their take measures to revive order, unity and national pride. Donald Trump's "American First" policies are the most important example of his fascist narrative building in America. Still, in reality, these populist leaders frequently erode democratic institutions, destabilize judicial authority, and suppress media rights, claiming to safeguard the nation from considerable external and internal challenges.

The increasing disparities worsened by globalization have created a sense of isolation and left behind. Following, these communities pivot to political matters that pledge to bring back national sovereignty and uphold cultural values. These movements stress national purity, opposing cultural diversity, and supporting the concept that the nation must keep in line with protect its norms and custom. Leaders such as Salvini in Italy have exploited this sentiment, taking advantages of fear of immigration and cultural approach to modify and consolidate power, during the outline of these issues as ultimate danger to the nation's survival. At the foundation of many of these movements is emphasizing identity politics, primarily the concept of national or ethnic integrity. In states like China, India, and Russia nationalism is tightly bound to ethnic or cultural identity, frequently portrayed as defense opposed to external influence. Vladimir Putin's government in Russia has used nationalism to solidify power, pushing for the idea of Russia as a cohesive, ethnically Russian state ought to fight off influence of the West. He gave "Russian world Doctrine" in which he glorified the past of Russian empire and represented himself as "Peter the Great". President of China Xi Jinping has underlined the key position of Han Chinese identity and the duty to secure China's sovereignty, especially with respect to the West and other outside influence. Just as, in India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has pushed forward the cause of Hindu nationalism, perceiving India as a state for Hindus and undervaluing Muslim and other minority groups.

The military junta of Myanmar has promoted ethnic nationalism to rationalize its repression of the Rohingya Muslim community. In the same way Erdoğan's government in Turkey has increasingly approached authoritarianism, utilizing nationalism and populism to muzzle criticism and fortify power. In every case here, identity politics act as a way to isolate and blame marginalized communities, cultivating a more segregated vision of national identity. In these instances, the democratic structure is used as a strategy to reduce democracy itself, merging the boundaries between legitimate political systems and fascist government. Despite conventional fascism was frequently characterized by militaristic violence, present right wing extremists have growingly adopted street protests, hate-based movements, and acts of violence as political mechanism. The growing influence of extremist ideologies online has enabled the dissemination of these ideas, facilitating group coordination and distributes their messages more effectively than ever before. The surge in "lone wolf" attacks, where individuals undertake acts of violence motivated by far-right ideologies, has emerging as a troubling pattern in states like the United States and Europe. These acts of aggression, commonly assisted by digital platforms, make more

accepted political violence as an acceptable way to achieve political objectives , fostering a setting where hate driven narrative are more easily accepted .

From fascism to populism

In the current era, populism has surfaced as a significant domain of inquiry within the discipline of social sciences. Theoretically, *populism* describes a political ideology that illustrates society as classified into two adversarial groups: “the pure people” vs. “the corrupt elite.” Populist rulers claim sole authority of the will of the people, commonly presenting themselves as the exclusive legitimate voice of the mass. Nevertheless, no pervious example exists where a ruler has gained collective popularity. The nexus between populism and fascism stays apppoint of scholarly debate. Some experts assert that populism may serve in the capacity of a gateway to fascism, especially when confined to right-wing ideological blueprint. Roger Griffin, Emeritus Professor at Oxford Brookes University, claims that right-wing populism frequently lead to fertile ground for fascist doctrine. He point out that fascists, when failing to secure power by means of radical change , possibly instead leverage populist movements to achieve that end (John Cabot University, 2021). Populism and fascism possess number of traits: they typically arise in periods of crisis, dismiss conventional elites, and Put forth a reductionist, passionate solutions to intricate societal problems. Historical studies validate that populism has traditionally served a substaintional part facilitating and securing fascist regimes (Diehl & Cavazza, 2012).

Alternatively other scholar claims that while populism and fascism shows common attributes, they are radically different ideologies. Populism can be radical and conservative, with just the far-right alternative with common features with fascist doctrines. Justin Frosini stated that present day reactionary populism does not mimic the holistic and theoretical rigor of 20th-century fascism. Fascism was clearly anti-democratic and tried to eliminate democratic institutions completely, although populism frequently operates contained in democratic systems and manipulate elections to affirm its legitimacy (Finchelstein, 2021). Naysayers viewpoint state that ideological classifications shift over time. The fascism of 1929 was significantly varied from its 1938 modification, offering that modern fascism may appear different from its emergence based upon past examples but still grounded in similar authoritarian, extreme nationalism impulses (Nexon, 2023).based on this reasoning, to dismiss recent authoritarian populism as non-fascist merely because it is unlike the 1930s model is to neglect the ideological Deep-rooted continuity changes. Even though populism and fascism can find common ground in certain context, primarily under far-right regimes where they stay conceptually different. Still, under crisis situations and institutional decay, the point of distinction between two can blur, allowing the emergence of hybrid regimes that subvert democratic values under the veil of public representation

Common Characteristics of Populism and Fascism:

- Each possesses the capacity to seizing power through the oppression of conservative or traditionalist perspective.
- Both ideologies are justifies and normalizes the application of political violence in realization of its objective.
- Both are contentious toward free democracy and secular government.
- Each often port yard Women and femininity as symbolic threats to national or moral innocence.
- Each claims to fight corruption and assure extensive change, although their methods commonly eliminate corruption.
- Populism and fascism correspond to capitalist structures, while left-wing populists may challenge this claim.

Key Differences between Populism and Fascism:

- Populist rulers typically rise to power via democratic elections and public popularity, on the other side fascist leaders frequently seize power through force, vigor, or militaristic means.
- Fascism conventionally supports expansionist ambitions and pursues territorial exaltation; populist leaders seldom seek such objectives.
- Fascist ideologies often refuse free-market principles, supporting corporate dominance or state controlled economies, while populism, and frequently endorse free-market mechanisms, mainly in its right-wing form.

Populism and Pakistan

Fascism and Populism in Pakistan have developed via complex historical, social and political dynamics, indicating both global patterns and novel national settings. In Pakistan, both fads have surfaced sporadically across different regimes, commonly aligned with civil military tensions, authoritarianism, and religious identity politics. Simultaneously the country has unfamilially classical fascism in the standardize shape in 20th-century Europe; it has demonstrate oppressive behavior like suppression of dissent, ideological conformity and political centralization within diverse populist structure. Populism in Pakistan commenced with the emergence of the Pakistan People's Party under the rule of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in the final years of 1960s (Economic and Political Weekly, 1978). His movement was stemming from the left-wing politics of Reallocation and strengthening of the public. Bhutto's slogan, "Roti, Kapra, aur Makaan", formulated the populist discourse against feudal landlords, the military establishment and industrial cartels. General Zia-ul-Haq's (1977–1988) military regime brought a new variant of authoritarianism, characterized by the Islamization of law and society (Aqil, 2023). While not populist in the classical democratic sense, Zia exploited religious based majoritarian politics to justify his authority. His policies oppressed minority group, strengthened profanity laws and ruled back women rights by setting the stage for religious intolerance in society and public life (The Nation, 2023).

These practices parallel the doctrinal inflexibility of fascist regimes, which mandate uniformity under a singular national spirit. The influx of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) under Imran Khan symbolized fresh surge of populism in the 2010s (Rais, 2017). He built his garner appeal via anti-corruption discourse and valued-based revivalism, branding conventional parties as a self-serving elite and he as the singular voice of the peoples will. His populism was sentimentally charged, gaining support from youth, Expatriate community, and urban middle classes. Recently the reemergence of PPP and PML-N in coalition politics deals with a markedly polarized society, weakened institutions, and impacts of personalized populist leadership. At the same time both parties have stepped back from overt populist taglines, they remain subject to accusation of dynastic control, lack of internal democracy and elitism. concurrently, fascist trends Perivale through suppression of civil society, media censorship, and internet controls, often vindicated by national stability and security (Institute of Contemporary Islamic Thought, 2022).so not any party can be individually blamed; instead the political culture has facilitate authoritarian and populist trends to thrive in cycles.

Causes of Reemergence of Fascism in International Relations

Echoes of past put forward that the triggers of the rise of fascism in each waves shows similarities. Even so, the essence of the two surges is substantially different. A century back, fascism repelled democratic structures and liberties endorsing internal violence and territorial expansion outside the legal boundaries. Autocratic ruler sought to erect authoritarian regimes by means of coercion and military power, as evident

by Mussolini in Italy and Hitler in Germany. On the other hand, recent fascist leaders often rise to power via democratic systems, and then sabotage the entire system that authorized them to obtain power. In the 1930s, the “Great Depression” stimulate surge of fascism as like that, the contemporary resurgence of fascism has been led by a progression of global economic crises.as recent studies shows, the European Union's inefficiency to tackle the 2008 global recession had a pivotal role in the recent upsurge of fascism (Wang, Jiang & Lu, 2022). Moreover Globalization has played a role in the worldwide expansion of economic instability, like the 2008 recession swayed economies globally. In addition the COVID-19 pandemic worsened this economic crisis, causing in widespread hardship.as well, climate change has shaken the economies of many states. All These crises have set the stage for the emergence populist and fascist doctrines, with economic instability and extremist nationalism serving as leading causes. Scholarly work also analyses the contribution of the media in amplifying fascism. Individual like Hitler and Mussolini monitored the media to compel their ideologies on the public. They commonly used conspiracy to defame political opponents and reshape public opinion, depiction their enemies as reprimands to the states. Their paramount goal was to regulate intellectual setting by scattering misinformation.

In present world, digital media is a driving force in spreading fascist narratives such as The internet has become an effective instrument for right-wing populist rulers to spread their agendas (Fielitz & Marrcks, 2019).in the modern age , people habitually lack the time to reaffirm news, making them more prone to misinformation and extremist ideologies. Evidence indicates that people often share unauthentic information on social media that fascist leaders manipulate to circulate their views. The revival of fascism at present has political, economic and social, ramification for the global society .Unlike the brutal fascism of the 20th century, contemporary wave is discreetly violent, but it yet presents significant challenges. As a result of the rise of fascist leaders in different countries, a key transformation is evolving in the global economic structure .such as , the IMF's estimate for long term development have been altered as surge of populist policies in both developing and developed states (Muhammad, 2017). This change might result in increased economic contest among emerging and advanced economies, possibly shrining trade between them. Ultra nationalism and populism commonly result in the involuntary relocation of individuals. As stated in reports of the United Nations, millions have been conflict induced displacement, breach of human rights, and persecution, developing a refugee crisis and triggering social unrest in host nations. The resurgence of fascism also indicates a shift in global balance of power, from a unipolar to a multipolar world. The supremacy of the U.S. dollar is facing opposition, and states like China are growing more active in global geopolitics. Such as, China has taken on the role of a mediator in the present conflict among Iran and Saudi Arabia (Muhammad, 2017).

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the growth of fascist ideology be it in the 20th or 21st century is carries a serious risk to democracy, communism, liberalism and socialism. The collapse of capitalism, cultural shifts, fragile institutions and financial economic crisis has paved the way for fascist doctrine to spread. Right-wing radical tactics are designed to mislead public evoke feelings through narrative themselves as targets and distorting the issues within reach. The upsurge of fascist-like ideologies in the 21st century poses a serious challenge to democratic leadership around the globe. Although the particular forms of these movements vary across states, they possess a mutual emphasis on nationalism, margenalisation and despotic rule. The international proliferation of these ideologies stress the immediate need to protect liberal institute and resist the rising movements toward authoritarianism, making certain that the tenets of democracy, human rights and pluralism stay key to the political landscape.

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