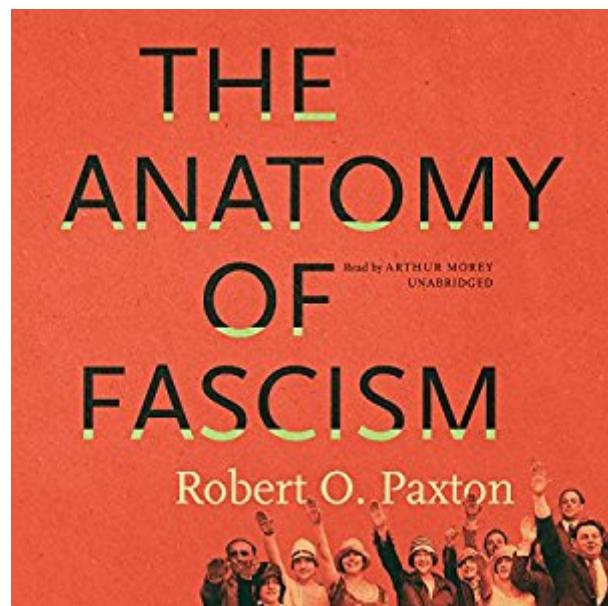


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# The Anatomy Of Fascism



## **Synopsis**

What is fascism? By focusing on the concrete, what the fascists did rather than what they said, the esteemed historian Robert O. Paxton answers this question for the first time. From the first violent uniformed bands beating up "enemies of the state", through Mussolini's rise to power, to Germany's fascist radicalization in World War II, Paxton shows clearly why fascists came to power in some countries and not others, and he explores whether fascism could exist outside the early-20th-century European setting in which it emerged. The Anatomy of Fascism will have a lasting impact on our understanding of modern European history, just as Paxton's classic Vichy France redefined our vision of World War II. Based on a lifetime of research, this compelling and important book transforms our knowledge of fascism.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Have not finished, but so far exceeding expectations. More detailed than other sources, Reading slowly to digest the material. Highly recommend!

DO NOT buy the Kindle Edition. The footnotes are missing and (of course) none of the links to the footnotes work. This is a deeply thoughtful book but a true expert in the field and to have the book stripped of the references is a major loss to people who want to read further.

As one of the few American scholars of the Vichy regime, it is perhaps fitting that at the end of his career, eminent historian Robert Paxton tackles the political-philosophical question of "what"

fascism "is." What he produces is a slim, eminently readable work about fascist movements in Europe and beyond, seeking those tropes and similitudes that herald a fascist movement in action. This builds to a chapter in the work that details what he thinks fascism "is" (even though the word, he freely admits, can be slippery and still hotly contested in academic circles). Paxton's conclusions are too detailed to present here, but the book is neatly organized around a set of key questions. They are, in brief, how fascist movements create themselves, how they take root, how they acquire some form of "power," how they deploy that power, and what the long term prospects of a fascist regime are (Paxton suggesting that fascism is, fundamentally, a "zero-sum game"). He then devotes a brief chapter to fascist and quasi-fascist movements outside of Europe by way of solid historical comparison, and concludes with his "definition" of what fascism is, ably summed up in other reviews in this thread. At the end is a superior bibliographic essay on the major works concerning fascism and the differences between them. Any college student writing a paper on fascism would do well to pick up the book for the bibliographic essay alone. Paxton eschews theoretical language and uses a writing style that is not "easy" given the weight of the topic, but accessible to academic and non-academic readers. While many have bemoaned what they see as omissions (and rightfully so), I do not see this as a fair criticism given Paxton's obvious desire to reach as broad an audience as possible with his cautionary analysis. He supports his arguments well with the most eminent and credible authorities, and the book's precise endnotes amply reflect the deadly seriousness of the work and his command of the subject. Some have criticized Paxton, I notice, for giving Stalin's Russia the short-shrift, or neglecting other fascist thought systems woven in to certain nations. I think the latter point is a function of editorial choice for the sake of clarity. I suppose my only response to the former point is that the book is "The Anatomy of Fascism," not "The Anatomy of Stalinism." Indeed, on pages 209-211 of his book, Paxton addresses this very point succinctly. Stalin qua Hitler (who are only two players on a much grander stage) is a distinction with a difference, and in rejecting the sometimes too-monolithic word "totalitarianism" as an analytical mode, Paxton is able to stay with his subject without veering off into comparing once-competing "totalitarian" systems, which would only confuse the reader and reduce his central hypotheses to hash. Or, as he puts it, avoiding the default debate of "Which monster was more monstrous?" a fundamentally meaningless question in the context of this book and what it seeks to achieve, namely "fascism parsed to its essence." I also notice that many seem to think that this book is somehow "far left," or something along those lines. For myself, I found it very apolitical, which was not only refreshing but allowed for a crisp clarity in presentation untroubled by a pre-determined set of assumptions. I suppose the most chilling conclusion Paxton reaches is that "fascism" is, at one of

its hearts, a "creeping" phenomenon, more organic than, to use one example, "Marxist-mechanical," a movement "from below" in many of its manifestations as opposed to "from above." While a proposition that culturally driven is difficult to prove, I think Paxton makes a compelling case. I do not wish to say more for fear of ruining the book for a prospective reader. A sober, accessible, readable work from a master historian performing at his absolute best. Highly recommend.

Paxton takes a unique approach in this book, which takes some getting used to, but in the end is very enlightening. Instead of trying to classify fascism by the expected trappings of the 20th century (i.e. brown uniforms, jackboots and armbands) Paxton instead tries to really analyze what the underlying social conditions are for fascism to take hold, and what the meta-characteristics of fascism are when it appears. Fascist ideology was widespread in Europe (and even in America) for the first half of the 20th century, but most movements did not develop past what Paxton calls phase 2. For those regimes that did, there is an interesting problem of whether the regime can continue to expand or if without continued expansion it falls into stagnation and "mere" dictatorship. Agree with it or not, the ultimate definition of fascism Paxton leaves us with is a good social lens through which we should continue to examine governments at home and abroad.

## VERY GOOD

This book must come close to being the most complete and authoritative portrait of Fascism. Mr. Paxton tackles the very difficult task of defining what Fascism is and what is not. The author regards the experiences with Fascism of both, Italy and Germany, as the classical examples of that political phenomenon. Nonetheless, Fascism has many faces and it takes multiple shapes depending on the prevailing cultural and socio-economic conditions of the host country. Mr. Paxton delineates and describes a series of stages that Fascism go through and supports his observations with examples from history. There is a great deal of analysis and scholarship in this book yet, it remains highly readable. If you want a good perspective on Fascism, this book is for you.

Like "Vichy France" this is a work based upon detailed research and prime sources. The conclusions drawn are all sound and supported.

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