

Essay and Discussion Questions from [Democracy & Government](#) and [Contemporary History](#)
Essay and Discussion Questions

Fascism Higher Education Questions

Help students understand fascism by exploring [this collection of resources](#) in connection with the essay and discussion questions below.

Question 1

In your own words, define “populism,” “fascism,” and “democratic backsliding.” What common features do these terms share? What features differentiate these terms from one another?

Question 2

The term fascism is used broadly today, but it has very specific origins rooted in a history of highly divisive and highly destructive European political movements. Explain this history in your own words, using specific examples from the reading to support your answer.

Question 3

Why might fascist regimes be described as both revolutionary and highly conservative? In what other ways do fascist regimes contradict themselves?

Question 4

Fascist movements are typically characterized by extreme nationalism, a cult of personality, and popular mobilization. How did these features present themselves in Adolf Hitler’s Germany, Benito Mussolini’s Italy, or another of the fascist regimes depicted in the text?

Question 5

In your own words, explain the “five stages of fascism” framework that scholar Robert Paxton coined to explain how and why fascist leaders come to power. Which of these stages do you think would be most important for a fascist movement’s emergence? Why?

Question 6

Select a country that is experiencing democratic backsliding today. Have the “five stages of fascism” presented themselves in your selected country? If so, how? If not, what other events have occurred to erode democracy in your selected country?

- Imagine you are a U.S. foreign policy advisor. Choose a country that is currently experiencing democratic backsliding and write a 1-2-page memorandum to the U.S. president that explores the likelihood of fascism emerging in your chosen country.

Question 7

What are some common features of a healthy democracy? Which of these features do you believe is most important, and why? Which of these features do you believe to be least important, and why? How or why might a fascist movement attempt to undermine these features?