



# A Comparative Analysis of Social Democracy and Fascism

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## ABSTRACT

This paper provides a comparative analysis of social democracy and Fascism, examining their ideological foundations, similarities, and differences. It explores the compatibility of these ideologies and their respective strengths and weaknesses, assessing their contemporary relevance. Social democracy is characterized by its commitment to democratic stability, universal basic rights, and social inclusiveness, whereas Fascism is defined by authoritarian nationalism and centralized autocratic control. Despite some superficial similarities, such as their focus on economic development and political influence, the two ideologies are fundamentally opposed. Fascism's historical association with extreme nationalism and genocidal racism contrasts sharply with social democracy's focus on liberty, equality, and social welfare. The paper concludes that social democracy is more compelling than Fascism due to its adherence to democratic principles and human rights, while Fascism's legacy of totalitarianism and oppression renders it less persuasive in contemporary contexts.

**Keywords:** Fascism; Social democracy; Ideological comparison; Political ideologies; Totalitarianism

## INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to compare social democracy and Fascism. It begins by identifying the differences and similarities between the two ideologies. The paper then examines whether they are compatible or inherently opposed to each other. It also discusses their strengths and weaknesses and how they are perceived in the contemporary world. Furthermore, the paper argues that social democracy is more compelling than Fascism, which is viewed negatively due to its historical roots.

Social democracy describes social conditions that affirm the legitimacy of modern democracy, emphasizing universal basic rights and their importance for democratic stability. In contrast, Fascism is defined as "a radical form of authoritarian nationalism," characterized by anti-conservatism and a focus on ethnic or national restitution.

## Differences and Similarities between Fascism and Social Democracy

Social democracy protects autonomy, privacy, social, and political domains, safeguarded by fundamental rights and epitomized in social inclusiveness. Contrarily, Fascism elevates the nation or race above the human person and upholds a centralized autocratic regime led by a dictatorial leader [1]. It characterizes harsh economic and social control, including opposition control. For example, the Italian Fascist party led by Mussolini negates all forms of individualism by upholding the will to power and empire.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Goldberg claims that the term Fascism has no universally accepted definition and consensus as to its scope and

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ideological origination. Payne states that Fascism may be considered the most ambiguous of the major political terms. With all its vagueness, there are some views that Nazism was not Fascist, that Fascism has not existed, and that it is mainly a secular religion. One of the most interesting but confusing interpretations of Fascism is the common notion of the stages of economic development, which came to mature only in the post-war period. Such late maturity is difficult to explain, considering that Fascists had unrelentingly identified the problem of modernization and industrialization as the core of their social and political program even during the years between the war. For example, as early as 1919, Mussolini identified the problem of production as the common interest that terminates and restrains the class struggle. He likewise declared that a revolutionary movement must embody the reality of the production and the nation, a consistent theme in all ensuing Fascist justifications.

On the other hand, in social democracy, social services not delivered by the market are subsidized by the state. Social democrats oppose the commodifying power of markets and assert democratic control over them. As Swedish social democrats intended Sweden to be, it is a country where nobody looks down on another, and neither is there suppression of the strong over the weak. However, only the reciprocity between actual service provisions and legal entitlements is considered for assigning values for comparison. Empirical research shows the range in which governments practically uphold their legal obligations. Theoretically, the criterion is whether the entitlement to social inclusion is acknowledged. For instance, Ireland scores low in empirical comparisons, soliciting doubts as to whether the country is socially democratic at all [2].

In parallel, Fascists consistently epitomize themselves as modernizers and industrializers of a backward economic system. In 1924, Sergio Panunzio claimed that Fascism could enhance national production. In 1930, Aldo Barteletto decreed that the Fascist organization and strategy could create more intensive production to ensure national strength. Although different in many ways, Fascism and social democracy have important similarities. Both embrace the preeminence of politics and maintain the use of political power to mold society and the economy. Both appeal to common solidarity and the collective good. Both institute modern, mass political organizations and pose as 'people's parties'. Both also take a middle ground on the issue of capitalism—neither wants capitalism's downfall as Marxism did nor embraces it uncritically like many liberals. Instead, they maintain that markets should be controlled but not destroyed.

Even though there are similarities between social democracy and Fascism, specifically concerning the focus on economic development, the two ideologies are incompatible. Social democracy is positioned at the center-left of the political spectrum, while Fascism is at the far right of the spectrum. Whereas social democracy argues for attaining the vision of an egalitarian society through legislation and government policy, Fascism is against all forms of egalitarianism. Instead, it embraces radicalization, its main distinguishing factor from

traditional authoritarian dictatorships. Since Fascist leaders have historically come to power through democratic elections, this is perhaps its similarity with social democracy. However, the difference is while social democracy upholds the commitment to freedom till the end, Fascist leaders end their commitment to freedom after winning the elections. For example, Hitler assumed absolute rule after winning a democratic election and argued that the true Germanic Democracy—a dictatorship by a single individual—is a genuine democracy [3]. As Meyer and Hinchman argue, the foundations of democracy will weaken if status inequalities contradict formal political equality. Democracy will lose its ground if one takes it only as a set of institutions. Accountability and civic participation should thus be considered since mere delegative democracy and passive citizenship are flawed democracies.

While Fascism was viewed as evil after the war, social democracy, with its pursuit to take on non-Marxist socialism, was spared from being perceived as extreme left. It is important to note that social democracy has been historically characterized by a profound dialectical clash between relatively radical, anti-capitalist propensities and fairly moderate, reformist directions. This dialectical clash features the radicals generally advocating for state socialism, commonly of a Marxist orientation, sometimes accompanied by decentralized and radical democratic socialism. On the other hand, Fascism tried to change its face by modifying itself, such as by coining 'neo-Fascism', which emerged in the post-war period. It was termed as such to distinguish it from the classic Fascism of the two world war periods. However, it remains to be perceived as highly charged politically because of its historical legacy.

Conversely, Berman presents social democracy as a distinctive movement established on the preeminence of politics and communitarianism, adhering to non-Marxist socialism. It is important to note that Fascism also rejects Marxism. Just like social democracy, Fascism pulls away from market-directed wage settlements and replaces markets with politics. Like social democracy, Fascist governments leave economic orthodoxy to pursue stimulatory policies. Similar to the institutions and policies of social democracy, the institutions and policies of Fascism are a product of subtending alliances. However, once in power, Fascist movements, owing to their authoritarian character, are less compelled by their supporting interests. They renounce liberal politics and economics and adopt totalitarianism for democratic competition [4].

Alternatively, social democracy functions as democratic corporatism, organizing workers in centrally oriented, comprehensive labor organizations. Trade unions are bestowed semi-sovereign status in state policymaking. By contrast, Fascist regimes subjugate and utilize workers according to the ambitions of the party and the state, although initially, they appear to integrate them into the larger society. As an ideology, Fascism claims the form of a totalitarian state where a single leader exercises political power, bolstered by state-operated media and political

despotism. It rejects individualism, egalitarianism, Marxism, and parliamentary democracy based on absolute state predominance. From an ideological standpoint, social democracy links with the classical democratic ideals of liberals and republicans to new notions of social interdependence and protection of individuals through collective action from the impact of uncontrolled market forces. Because of these, we may claim that Fascism and social democracy are against each other.

## DISCUSSION

### Strengths and Weaknesses of the Two Ideologies

Social democracy's strength is its maintenance of adequate conditions for an individual to enjoy private, social, and political autonomy against potential social risks. Contrary to the view that social democracy brings capitalism and socialism into a pragmatic compromise, it embodies a characteristic body of political thought that extends the principles of liberty and equality prized by democrats through the prescription of democratic collective action. Another strength is that it opposes the inequality and oppression promoted by laissez-faire capitalism, which makes it perceived as a viable political ideology. It has been argued, particularly by American authors Lipset and Dahl, that social democratic policies boost the efficacy and stability of democratic states.

Conversely, one of the strengths of Fascism is the presence of the party and militants that serve as its source of a powerful force for sustained radicalization. No Fascist regime could have sustained itself without the popular movement that helped it achieve power, monopolizing political activities and playing a leading role in public affairs [5]. For example, Adolf Hitler pursued an ultimate foreign policy of Germanization, featuring starvation and mass murder, with the aid of an army. The prominent weakness of Fascism is that it is tied to Nazism. Prior to the war, Fascist ideas received wide acclaim, especially among the American left, who praised Mussolini and were sympathetic to Hitler. At first, people embraced Fascism as a progressive social movement, but the horrors of the Holocaust entirely altered this perception. It then became widely known as distinctively evil and was inexorably expressed through extreme nationalism and genocidal racism. Therefore, while it was initially perceived as Leftist, Fascism was redefined as right-wing by the leftist intellectuals. After 1945, it was no longer an option, and its social effects diminished the popularity of a Fascist regime.

### How Fascism and Social Democracy Fare in Today's World?

According to Peters, Fascism is rising again and never dying, like a dormant virus in the bloodstream of the body politic that grows and transfigures. It is growing in the United States, rebranded as "Alt-Right" (Alternative Right), and gaining cultural acceptance. Burley and Lyons point to racist street violence spearheaded by Donald Trump's hate-spiked populism as the initiating force of this kind of Fascism. However,

McGaughey negates this and claims that the United States is not experiencing Fascism under Trump but neo-conservatism. Conversely, Fascism is no longer congruent with the more important values of the global political arena, such as maintaining international peace and security, promoting friendly relations amongst nations, and worldwide cooperation. Instead, it will only exacerbate and disentangle the already chaotic world because Fascists primarily do not adhere to the possibility or usefulness of universal peace. They reject pacifism as they view it as a mask of surrender and cowardice. For Fascism, the expansion of nations is a demonstration of vitality, and war takes human capacities to their highest strain, putting a nobility seal on those who fight it.

By contrast, social democracy has significant contributions to the development of the welfare-capitalist blend, including the democratization and humanization of the political, social, and economic spheres; the growth of macroeconomic policy; the emergence of democratic corporatism in Northern European and Scandinavian countries; and the promotion of international integration. It also promotes the reconciliation between democratic principles and the market [6].

On the other hand, many social democratic political parties, especially in the 90's, had shifted to the new social democracy and are moving leftwards, which is different from the left in earlier decades. This change aims to tackle the changing policy outline of center-left political parties. On a similar note, globalization has undoubtedly changed how social democrats address the conflict between increasing economic competitiveness and maintaining high levels of social protection. A turn to authoritarianism is unlikely in the current globalized environment, although militarized accrual is now a necessary outlet for capital.

It is noteworthy that assessing how social democracy fares today considers the extent to which state-sponsored services uphold entitlements in practice. Unless empirical validation exists to show actual outcomes have met the necessary standards, a state cannot fully claim that it is socially democratic. On the other hand, social democracy's focus on reconciling democratic principles and the market together makes it relevant today.

### Fascism vs. Social Democracy: Which is more Persuasive?

There are many factors to consider when deciding which between social democracy or Fascism is more persuasive. Concerning the delivery of social services, social democratic governments use subsidies to deliver the services that the market failed to deliver. On the other hand, while Fascism adheres to modernity, industrialization, and national strength, the means to enable these is through totalitarianism, which can undermine the fundamental rights of a person. By contrast, social democracy maintains the ideals of liberalism, social interdependence, and collective action, making it a more persuasive ideology.

Moreover, social democracy has offered visions of social conditions that concretely develop into plausible alternatives to the given reality. Strategically, it brings into play the mobilizing stance of new social movements like trade unions and cooperatives, enhancing them further to focus on electoral politics and reconcile democratic principles and the market together. Contrarily, Fascist governments are described as totalitarian or characterizing a set of features that are generally common to totalitarian dictatorships [7]. The pattern of unified traits of totalitarianism includes an ideology, a single party commonly led by one man, an extremist policy, a defense monopoly, and a centrally oriented economy. Thus, between social democracy and Fascism, the latter is more persuasive both ideologically and practically.

## CONCLUSION

This paper provided a comparative analysis of social democracy and Fascism. Social democracy adheres to protecting the autonomy of an individual, while Fascism rejects individualism and egalitarianism. The differing ideals of the two make them incompatible. Fascism upholds totalitarianism, whereas social democracy upholds the private, social, and political autonomy of the individual.

While some people may still view Fascism positively because it adheres to modernity and national strength, the means to achieve these is the weakness of this ideology. Fascism is mutating itself into neo-Fascism and the Alt-Right in the current globalized environment. On the other hand, the emphasis of social democracy on reconciling democratic principles and the market makes it more suitable for the current world.

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