

Anti-Democratic

Paxton agrees: "I don't think it helps very much to use this inflammatory term [fascism] about Trump. 'Populist demagogue' works fine." So does Payne: "The Sweden Democrats and Le Pen movement in France really are just right-wing movements, in the sense of being conservative movements. There's nothing categorically fascist about them. They are outside the general consensus of center-left politics in these countries, and people want to find special pejoratives to apply to them."

Griffin notes that you don't even have to look to Europe for examples of this brand of right-wing, ethnocentric populism in action. Just look at the long, distinguished history of populist white politicians in America exploiting anti-black prejudice and white ethnic grievances. Those figures weren't fascists; they were small-l liberal democrats who "wanted liberal democracy to be for a very small group of Americans," in Griffin's words.

Again, fascism requires stepping outside the system and attacking the democratic structure. As long as that structure itself is handling illiberal attitudes on race, those attitudes don't themselves constitute a fascist trend.

"Democratic liberties" here means not just individual civil liberties — which Trump is clearly interested in tampering with — but the democratic process itself. When the original fascist regimes emerged, "the existing governments seemed to be incapable of providing leadership, providing what was needed for this wounded country," Paxton tells me, "and so fascists were in favor of totally overthrowing the existing constitution, which was usually democratic and perceived as weak. This was wildly popular. We are not in that position today."

I asked 5 fascism experts whether Donald Trump is a fascist. Here's what they said. By Dylan Matthews, Dylan@vox.com May19, 2016

(2) The fascist choice for managing a capitalist society in crisis is always based—by definition even—on the categorical rejection of “democracy.” Fascism always replaces the general principles on which the theories and practices of modern democracies are based—recognition of a diversity of opinions, recourse to electoral procedures to determine a majority, guarantee of the rights of the minority, etc.—with the opposed values of submission to the requirements of collective discipline and the authority of the supreme leader and his main agents. This reversal of values is then always accompanied by a return of backward-looking ideas, which are able to provide an apparent legitimacy to the procedures of submission that are implemented. The proclamation of the supposed necessity of returning to the (“medieval”) past, of submitting to the state religion or to some supposed characteristic of the “race” or the (ethnic) “nation” make up the panoply of ideological discourses deployed by the fascist powers.

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