

**Political Ideologies Contexts, Ideas, and Practices**  
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**Ordinary people's part in fascism. A worked example**

We have completed quite a lot of the theory of fascism. We have looked at a historical background. We have looked at the main ideas and the main problems and we have tried to draw upon examples wherever possible. We need to go back to one particular set of issues which I mentioned earlier, and that is the scale and involvement and nature of ordinary people's engagement with fascism, whether we are under a fascist system or not.

What is often quite difficult to understand is that the people involved in fascistic systems or in climates which are fascistic are ordinary people just like ourselves, like you and me. This was a very difficult discovery for the winning powers and indeed all humanity to get used to after the Second World War, when the extermination camps and concentration camps of Nazi Germany were discovered.

It took some time for the realization to be made more public, that those involved in systematic mass extermination of a system, by a system which seemed to be devoted to very little else, was carried out by ordinary people living very ordinary lives. This was a great shock, but we need to see how this shock was brought to widespread public attention and to researchers and other followers of these kinds of issues.

Well the person we are going to look at is called Adolf Eichmann; you may have heard of his name, and we'll spend some time on Adolf Eichmann because he exemplifies many of the issues that running a fascist system, in this case the Nazi system, exemplifies, brings us to light very clearly.

Adolf Eichmann was one of the major organizers of the Holocaust, we can show you this Wikipedia image because it is not copyright, and we'll just talk through some of the issues involved. He came to be an administrator in a body, in an institution called IV B4, which was part of the administration of, as the Nazi regime called it, Jewish affairs. He rose to the rank of, if I am not mistaken *Obersturmbannführer* or I think colonel in the SS.

And he had the administrative task of organizing the Holocaust that is rounding up and making sure people were transported to concentration camps and to labor camps and to extermination camps, sometimes the camps had more than one function. But Eichmann had an unremarkable

time at school; he worked for his father's mining company in Austria, he worked as an oil salesman as it says here.

He then joined, as vast numbers of people did, joined the Nazi movement by joining the *Sicherheitsdienst* – the security services, and he was appointed head of the department responsible for Jewish affairs at that time before the war emigration. But in 1941 the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union, and the policy changed to extermination of the Jewish population of Europe.

Now, Reinhard Heydrich, who was Eichmann's superior, assembled the main administrative leaders at a, in a building on a lake just outside Berlin, just to the, I think west of Berlin, called the Wannsee, the lake and the policy of extermination was made public there, it was called as we have seen the Final Solution or *die Endlösung*.

Now Eichmann did this work thoroughly and efficiently. He made sure the Jewish population of Germany and other parts of Europe were identified, rounded up and transported often several hundred kilometres by rail, in cattle wagons very much at the time or freight wagons, no matter what the weather, no matter what the season, to concentration camps and extermination camps.

He was captured after the war by United States forces, but he escaped from a detention camp and moved around Germany. He used false information papers to move to Argentina; I should add here that a lot of high-ranking Nazis including Nazi scientists were given false papers by certainly the United States government and very probably the British government as well, the winning powers after the war because they wanted two things.

One was that they wanted high-ranking Nazi scientists to assist their own weapons and militarization programs and they also wanted Nazi administrators, who they thought would have information on communist movements from before the war because they wanted this information, the winning powers wanted this information after the war; they were very deeply worried about communist movements in Europe after the war.

Now, Eichmann was given false papers, he moved to Argentina. A search was conducted for him, I do not know for how long but in 1961, the Israeli secret service, the intelligence service Mossad located him and kidnapped him. The Argentine government made a protest but to no avail and Eichmann was taken to Israel for trial.

He was tried in Israel, I think from 1961 to 1962. He was found guilty, the evidence was thoroughly comprehensive and he was executed by hanging on the first of June 1962. The trial got attention throughout the world's media, particularly the Western media. But we must note that the Israeli government did all it could to ensure a fair trial; it paid for Eichmann's lawyers; the trial was conducted in German with translators if needed. And lawyers were presumably flown from Germany to participate; there was little doubt that Eichmann would be convicted, but he was convicted not of crimes against humanity, he was convicted of crimes against the Jewish people that was the specific charge brought. He was hanged.

The trial was covered by the philosopher Hannah Arendt, who was herself of Jewish extraction, and she covered this for the *New Yorker* magazine; it took several months. Her reports were later assembled into a book on the trial of Eichmann; it's called *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. The subtitle is 'The Banality of Evil', by which Arendt seems to mean - this is the philosopher Hannah Arendt a very famous figure in post-war European and other Western political philosophy - Arendt seems to mean that evil can look very ordinary; it can come in very ordinary seeming forms without ever diminishing the nature and extent of its character. Now, Arendt wrote this book and one of the things that she realized as she watched the trial, as she wrote her reports, was that Eichmann was really a very ordinary person, there was nothing unusual or special about him.

He seemed to think he was just doing his job. He was asked by lawyers, by prosecution lawyers, "What did you think when you went to the camps and saw piles of dead bodies in very hastily built trench graves, mass graves?" He said, "Well, it was not very (I paraphrase), "it was not very, it was not very pleasant for us either."

But as the trial proceeded further, Eichmann showed, and Arendt saw this, that he seemed to have no consciousness of the process in which he was centrally involved beyond thinking he was doing his job. At one point he was asked and we shall meet this phrase again later. "What you think you were doing and why were you doing it?" He said in German, "Befehl ist Befehl," : "Orders are orders."

Now, that has been quoted very widely around the world. But the point is that Eichmann exemplified the involvement of millions of ordinary people in Nazism; millions of ordinary people have been involved in Italian fascism and whenever fascistic climates prevail even if the states

involved are not actually fascist, millions, tens of millions no doubt perhaps even hundreds of millions in some countries are involved doing their jobs.

And furthering the aims of fascism possibly because they just happen to meet the governmental aims at the time, even if the government involved is not fascistic. This was a great shock. Arendt, Hannah Arendt, brought out the ways in which in a sense we can all end up participating in fascistic systems; and in explicitly fascist systems that indicated or perhaps helps us to see how it is that all societies seem to have fascistic tendencies and seem to have fascistic periods; that does not mean we should not prevent them or resist them but that is another matter.

Well, that concludes my exposition of the main themes and main issues arising from fascism. We are now going to move towards an exercise of the kind that we'll undertake for the generally short essays we'll do on this course, there will be two, perhaps three. And this will involve us in practice which we'll do as an exercise here, in practice examining a current or recent issue in the light of the theory. We'll start by looking at an influential document, all the papers we'll read will be quite short, we'll look at this influential document and we'll then look at some of the responses to it and we'll see if the responses enable us to reach a decisive conclusion or perhaps open further issues, issues and questions for us to think about.

Okay, well, I'm not allowed, we are not allowed under copyright law to show you the items on screen, so I have prepared notes on them and we'll start with one in particular. This was written by an American commentator and I think journalist or former journalist called Naomi Wolf, and she wrote a book on whether the United States in its responses to the attacks on the 9th of September 9-11-2001 was becoming or had become a fascist state.

So, as part of the promotion of the book and so on, of course she raised the arguments more publicly. Naomi Wolf had an article published in the British newspaper the *Guardian* on the 24th of April, 2007. Now, the article is something I am not allowed to broadcast on screen but I'll talk through it and I'll put the main headings up as we proceed.

There were 10 points that Wolf addressed in the article; we do not need to worry about the fact that this was written 12 years ago - the issues repeatedly arise in many parts of the world and they are still current with us, not just in the United States but elsewhere. Right, what are these 10 headings?

Naomi Wolf suggests that we consider 10 features of a political system to decide whether or not it is fascist or has become fascist. She calls the article - the heading is 'Fascist America in 10 easy steps'. What are these 10 steps? I'll put the headings here for you, so you know what they are, and then we'll talk through them turn by turn.

The first thing to do is 'To invoke a terrifying internal and external enemy'. So, that is the first thing to do. The second, is to 'Create a gulag' - don't worry if the terms are unfamiliar, we'll go through them when we take these one by one. The third heading Wolf gives us is 'Develop a Thug Caste'; she actually uses that precise wording.

The fourth point Wolf says we should look for is this, 'An internal surveillance system', secret electronic surveillance. There are more points, we'll go through them as we proceed. Okay, the fifth thing is that to create a fascist state the state must harass citizens' groups. The sixth is this, that 'Arbitrary detention, arrest, and release must become part of the way the state proceeds'.

The seventh heading Wolf gives us is that 'Key individuals must be targeted'. The eighth is that 'The press must be controlled'. The ninth is that 'Dissent, disagreement must be equated with treason', that is betrayal of the state. And the tenth is that 'The rule of law must be suspended'. Okay, so those are the 10 points that Naomi Wolf says - according to her - that she says are already present in the United States; let us have a look.

Well, let us look at these points specifically. The first one - 'Invoke a terrifying internal and external enemy'. What does it mean? Well, on the 26th of October 2001, just a few weeks after 9/11, the United States Congress, the Legislative Assembly, in great haste passed the Patriot Act. This was 400 pages long and a great many legislators in the Congress said they simply had no time to read it; they did not even see what they were passing. It was passed very quickly.

The public discourse, Naomi Wolf points out, very quickly started to involve phrases like, global war, a global Caliphate - Khilafat in South Asian languages, in Arabic and in Persian perhaps. A global Caliphate, global war - claims that Western civilization was about to be wiped out or would be wiped out.

Now, claims were also made that an open-ended war would be required and that this would be unspecifiable in nature in extent and in duration. These were, as Wolf points out, very different kinds of phrases. This was a very different kind of, very different kind of, language from that

used in Spain - which also suffered very violent terrorist attacks, but the language used in Spain was very different and much less extreme.

What about the second point, 'Create a Gulag'? A gulag is a term derived from the Soviet Union from its history of at the time under Joseph Stalin of creating labour camps, basically camps for forced exile, for the permanent detention of anyone the state deemed an enemy or a threat. You may be aware of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's book *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, which is set in one of these camps, I think in the 1950s.

But according to Wolf, the United States gulag is the detention camp at Guantánamo Bay, to which perhaps over a thousand people were sent very quickly after 9-11 - most of them on no charges at all. The point about Guantánamo Bay was that it was outside United States territory and therefore the people there could be held without the protections of due process of United States law.

Some eventually did face charges in the United States federal Courts under habeas corpus principles and the federal courts actually required that if charges were to be brought they had to be brought in US courts under US law. But the gulag was Guantánamo Bay, and according to Wolf this is another feature of a fascist system.

The third thing to do is to develop a 'Thug Caste'. The United States created in effect parallel armies of, for example, of armed subcontractors, security contractors. They also created an immunity from prosecution for such contractors. And some such organizations are already at work.

For example, in United States elections, particularly the 2000 presidential election in Florida, identically dressed groups of Republican Party supporters would go to the polling booths and challenge any voter they suspected of not having authentic voter identity or not being on the register.

Inevitably this meant predominantly people of African-American origin. And this was frank voter intimidation, Wolf says such groups who challenge voters ID, voter registration records were in effect a thug caste.

The next point - an 'Internal Surveillance System'; secret electronic surveillance was systemically introduced by the federal government and journalists, academics, civilian groups, ordinary people were targeted for surveillance without their knowledge. Electronic surveillance

is very easy to do technically, but the point is this was done secretly without approval by the judiciary or by the legislative assemblies.

The fifth point 'Harassing Citizens Groups' - this was done by infiltration; it has been done by a lot of governments. The Indian independence movement suffered infiltration by the British authorities, some of it very successful infiltration done by people whom the movement did not suspect, but this was done by infiltration of citizens' groups even if they had nothing to do with protests against the war.

Peaceful anti-war groups were certainly targets for infiltration. Even animal rights groups whose ostensible purpose was not about the invasion of Iraq or any such thing were infiltrated. Dissent was equated with terrorism. What about targeting key individuals? This was done by - well, in combination with - arbitrary detention and release.

For example, people were simply put on list without their knowledge; Senator Edward M Kennedy, Senator for Massachusetts, the younger brother of John F Kennedy, the Former President, and Robert F Kennedy, the former Attorney General, tried to take a flight and was told his name was on the list. He was never given a reason. This happened to dozens of other people.

So, harassment of citizens groups and targeting key individuals were parts of the strategy that Naomi Wolf says amounts to the transformation of the U S into a fascist state. What about arbitrary detention and release for no apparent reason? A professor who criticized President George W. Bush in a lecture, almost anyone who went on a peace march; the professor if I am not mistaken was sacked, their names were never deleted from the list created by surveillance systems.

The eight, 'Controlling the Press': civil servants - well the United States has got a thing called the First Amendment which guarantees virtually complete freedom of speech. Now, civil servants, [and] the instruments of the state were used in order to control the press. This and the specific actions included arresting journalists for protecting sources or protecting film recordings; this was particularly done in United States occupied Iraq after the invasion in 2003. It was done in other ways to United States journalists, as we shall come to in a moment.

Let us look at the ninth point, 'Dissent Equals Treason'; this was done by a systematic campaign which was, which can only be called a propaganda campaign. What did it involve? It

meant attacking any critics of the American response after 9/11, any critics of the Iraq invasion, as anti-national, as subverting the United States. This is of course a central element in fascism; Wolf says that this indicates progress towards fascism.

'Suspending the Rule of Law' - now, this according to Wolf was done by the defense Authorization Act 2007; what did that mean? Well, [resume here,] suspends the rule of law. The Defense Authorization Act 2007 enables the President to use troops as a domestic police force. This violates legislation made by the founders of the United States, who were very troubled that the central, the federal, executive would use any militias it had, its federal militias against the citizens.

Now, Wolf is clear that this was not an overnight fascist takeover. There were no tanks on the streets or any such thing. She calls it fascism by steady erosion. We should also note that the climate of intimidation or fear and intimidation was steadily advanced. Even the editor of the *New York Times* was investigated for publishing material by reporters which exposed some of what was going on in particular illegal unauthorized electronic surveillance, such as telephone wiretaps.

Well, the article was very influential; Wolf is well known. The book came out around then; it received a lot of attention and of course a lot of responses and we need to look at some of these responses, which we shall do. We'll talk through those, again I am not allowed to put the texts themselves on screen because they're copyright, but we'll talk through the responses, we are allowed to summarize them here.

[Oh yes, of course double-arrow yeah, okay good, I just yeah. Okay, yes that saves time, I will get used to this. ]

So, we'll take a look at the first response, this is by somebody - a journalist - called Roy Peter Clark, we'll be able to send you the links to these, the links are not copyright. So, this is our first response to Wolf. It was published in 2007 shortly after the Wolf book and the Wolf article. Now, he criticizes Wolf, there are three main points he makes. He criticizes Wolf in particular for the sloppy use of language, particularly words like fascism and Holocaust. Clark by the way has also criticized the George W Bush administration for its use of terms like crusade. We will take his criticisms, his responses to Wolf one by one.



The first is that Clark says, Wolf uses the term fascism far too loosely. Fascism involves a dictator with centralized political authority and centralized powers. It also involves tight socio-economic control over the economy because everything must be directed by the will of the dictator, by the leader.

It involves the suppression of the opposition by terror and censorship. It involves belligerent, aggressive nationalism and racism. So, Clark is reminding us that Wolf can be sloppy in her use of the term fascism. Wolf also uses the term Holocaust, which was the term used for the Nazi extermination of the Jews of Europe and eventually as they planned the World as well as other races.

The Holocaust originally means, or Holocaust originally means, 'burning something completely as in a ritual sacrifice or ritual burning'. It, in the 1950s it came to mean the process of mass extermination of the Jewish people of Europe. It has been used more loosely, for example, by anti-abortion campaigners in the United States, who have referred to the deaths of as they say millions of aborted babies or fetuses as a Holocaust.

Clark says that he is certain Wolf would object to that use of the term. Wolf herself lost members of her family in the Holocaust. So, that is one response to Wolf. Roy Peter Clark says that Wolf's use of language is at times too loose to make her argument really convincing.

What about the second response? Now, this is more detailed and it is by, yes, the second response, the second response is more detailed. It is by somebody called Mark Nuckols – N U C K O L S, Mark Nuckols writing in a noted journal of current affairs called *The Atlantic Monthly*.

Now, this was written in 2013, in January 2013. We do not need to worry about the dates - he is responding to very significant issues in Wolf's writings, particularly to Wolf's book. What are the points he makes? First of all that the United States Congress remains in place and has all its powers.

So, the first point that Nuckols makes is that the Nazi Parliament in 1933 was forced to pass something called the enabling act and the enabling act enabled Hitler to rule by decree, right? So, Nuckols' first point is there was no enabling act in the US, all its laws remained in place, all its institutions remained in place.

By the time the Nazi Parliament – the *Reichstag* passed its enabling act, the Communist Party had been banned, the centre-right had been terrified, and only the Social Democratic Party -

one member of which had already been murdered - voted against in the Reichstag when the enabling act was put to them.

The second thing is a gulag. Wolf says the United States has created a gulag, a place where people could be in effect disappeared even if they were not immediately killed by the state. They could be disappeared, they could be sent there and lost from sight. The point is that the Soviet Union's transportations, forced transportations, were extremely brutal and carried out on a colossal scale; we may never know the full scale. Guantánamo Bay was simply not that kind of thing.

And we should note further that very quickly after Guantanamo Bay was started, protests and activity against Guantanamo Bay deepened, demanding better treatment for the prisoners held, demanding that they be charged in open court and tried, started to have effect. The Obama administration, I am adding this to Nuckols's article, the Obama administration quietly sought to release those whom it relatively easily established were innocent of any crime and simply should not have been held like that without charge.

Okay, the third point Nuckols makes is that Wolf's book, Wolf's article both are both guilty of significant omissions and inaccuracies. Now, what are these? In particular, the academic who according to Wolf was sacked for criticizing the Bush administration was in fact dismissed for plagiarism and fabrication of evidence; I do not know over which issue, Nuckols does not specify. But he was dismissed for plagiarism and fabrication by his own university, which presumably carried out its own internal procedures; he was not dismissed for criticizing the Bush administration.

Now, Nuckols's point here is not that he is rejecting Wolf's argument out of hand. What he is doing is to show that the errors and failures of attention in Wolf's argument weakened the very significant issue of whether or not a weakened the discussion around the very signal significant issue of whether or not the United States has become or is becoming a fascist state.

Well, what about the third response? I will sum the next two up fairly quickly, I will see what we are left with at the end. The third response, these you know, these are strong criticisms of Wolf, but at least one question still stands – could the United States still become a fascist state if it is not one already?

And this point was made recently in the British newspaper the *Guardian* by Andrew Gawthorpe, as I said we'll send you the links. This was on the 31st of July, 2019, just a short time ago, a few weeks ago. Gawthorpe raises three points for us, what are these? First of all, he reminds us that the term 'fascist' is overused, he says, by the political right and the political left, it is used too loosely in general.

Secondly, he reminds us that future fascism will, I quote, 'still show ultra-nationalism, illiberalism' and - again I quote - 'a strong impulse to regiment society and the forcible suppression of opposition'. Now, the question for us is: has that actually happened in the United States? Gawthorpe concludes that the United States is not fascist and that President Trump has, he reminds us that 'President Trump has failed to dismantle much of the United States' institutions, procedures, and liberal democratic values, I repeat that - liberal democratic values.

Trump, President Trump has failed to make much impression on those, even if the political climate might be something large numbers of US citizens fear and distrust. So, that is one set of responses. First of all, that the term fascism is overused and used too loosely. Secondly, in the future fascism will have to show the same things that we saw about fascism in the lecture. And thirdly, he concludes, Gawthorpe concludes that the US is not yet fascist. And that President Trump's attempts to dismantle the state and its institutions have largely failed.

He does say, Gawthorpe does say there is cause for concern and in particular that Trump appeals to two groups of voters, evangelical Christians and a sort of stratum of white voters, a particular layer or broad grouping of white voters. The evangelical Christians seem to fear that American liberals will crush Christianity and 'will probably support anyone who even pretends' to think as they do, that is about abortion, Jerusalem, religious freedom.

Now, what does that mean? Gawthorpe is suggesting that there is, that according to American evangelical Christians, American liberals that is who disagree with them on major moral issues will crush Christianity that is there, that seems to be their virtue. A second point is that the white voters that Gawthorpe seems to be referring to deeply fear, in particular, demographic change - which they equate with social and racial change, with the application of equal entitlements throughout the United States, possibly also with the increasing Hispanic population or Latino population as they are known in the United States.

Spanish is rapidly spreading across United States as a language it is quite likely to become the most widely spoken language in the United States. According to Gawthorpe, yes, particular strata of white voters are very frightened of this - in effect, of cultural annihilation.

What about the fourth response? The fourth response is by Geoffrey Cane and he is writing in a highly respected journal called *The New Republic* and he is writing on the 4th of June, 2009, 2019, I beg your pardon. What is his argument? First of all, according to him Nazism or as the Nazis themselves called it National Socialism is far more, was far more openly racist than Italian fascism. There are some disagreements about this but broadly speaking that is true, Nazism had a very explicit doctrine of racial hierarchies, as we have seen.

Secondly, according to Geoffrey Cane fascism is marked by a series of processes; here he cites the British political thinker Robert Paxton writing at, the political thinker Robert Paxton writing in 1968. What does this mean? The processes are, one, the creation of fascist movements. Two, the rooting of such movements as political parties in the official political system. Three, the acquisition of power, often through elections. Four, the exercise of power itself and five, progressive radicalization, which means that such parties which embody fascist, fascist or movements in power become more and more extreme.

Now, the specific factors of the 1930s no longer exist and even very extreme Islamist movements, which were a factor in Western thinking or Western politicians' thinking at the time Wolf was writing, seemed not to have had the effect or success that a lot of people feared around the world at the time.

But according to Geoffrey Cane, one danger of fascism still obtains, and that is its capacity to co-opt legitimate grievances and resentments into a focused directed hatred of other societies in effect of outsiders. And this then means that - I quote - 'at its heart fascism is an alliance of hardline and moderate conservatives seeking to repress left-wing sentiment by converting working classes to angry nationalism'.

That is a quotation - what Geoffrey Cane is doing, is reminding us of something that was true of both Italian fascism and Nazism, industrialization. Mussolini, as we have seen, thought fascism would unify Italy through industrialization. The Nazis needed very substantial industrialization to get workers back to work in very large numbers - and to, as they saw it prepare for permanent mobilization for war, possibly to start war themselves.

Now, historically, yes, Cane has a strong argument. The point for us is - we have done the following, we have looked at an influential set of writings by Wolf, we have looked at the responses, one of the tasks for us as scholars - something we'll be doing on this course - is, can we reach a decisive conclusion taking account of the criticisms and evaluations of Wolf?

We may or may not be able to do that but certainly the first two items I had, I went through, sharply criticized Wolff. The third and fourth raised wider questions, one is of course that the United States could still become a fascist system, the other is that fascism is not just an event, it is a series of processes.

Now, one implication is that Wolf may not have been sufficiently mindful of these processes but that is a separate issue, it is one of the issues arising from our consideration of these documents. The reason I have considered them is, so to speak, as a worked example using contemporary issues and recent or contemporary writings to show that the theory of fascism is something we still need to learn about for today and that the issues fascism raises are still very much with us today.