

Can franco be described as a truly fascist dictator?

[History](#)



General Francisco Franco served as head of state of Spain from victory in the Spanish Civil in 1939 until his death in 1975. Since Franco's death there has been much debate as to whether the Generalissimo's dictatorship can be described as a truly fascist regime. The crux of this debate hinges on each individual historian's definition of a fascist dictator. Therefore first of all it is important to define what makes a truly fascist dictator. To do this it is essential to bear in mind the definitions of other historians.

Firstly as Payne states a fascist dictator must adhere to the concept of 'anti isms', this means a fascist's inherent ideology is antiliberalism, anticommunism and antidemocratic. [1] Secondly Paxton says a fascist dictator 'pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraint goals of internal cleansing and external expansion' which means a fascist dictator uses tactics of terror and violence and holds expansionist foreign policy aims. [2] Thirdly as Passmore states all aspects of a fascist dictator's policies are suffused with ultranationalism.

Fourthly as Griffin states a fascist dictator must implement an authoritarian and totalitarian form of government. [4] These are the four key components of what makes a truly fascist dictator. It is clear that Franco shared some of these key components for instance Franco applied an authoritarian style of rule. Franco also shared similar characteristics to other fascist dictators such as Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. Although simply sharing similar characteristics does not constitute a fascist dictator and Franco's regime lacked other key components such as expansionist foreign policy.

Furthermore it will become clear that in the later years of Francoism, Spain gradually moved away from the more extreme fascist elements and policy. It is fair to say that Franco's regime changed from a semi fascist state to a Catholic conservative authoritarian state. The main themes which will be assessed are Franco's rise to power, Franco's style of rule, Franco's social policy, Franco's economic policy and Franco's foreign policy. Firstly it is important to assess General Franco's rise to power.

Franco gained power through victory in the Spanish Civil War of 1936 to 1939. Bosworth states that Franco united Spain's two main right wing factions, the corporatist Falange and the monarchy supporting Carlists into one single Nationalist movement and defeated the Republicans who supported the Democratic Second Republic of Spain. [5] It is worthwhile to point out that Franco achieved power through violence which is in contrast to both Hitler and Mussolini, who gained power fairly peacefully and within the democratic apparatus.

Franco was supported by both Hitler and Mussolini and Nazi Germany provided extensive help to Franco's forces, the most prominent example being the bombing of the Basque town of Guernica by the Luftwaffe in 1937. It should be noted however that Franco failed to show the same level of support during World War II and instead opted to remain neutral. During and in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War Franco's forces committed various atrocities. A recent estimate by Beevor suggests that up two hundred thousand people were executed by Franco's forces between 1936 and 1945.

Preston argues that the atrocities committed by Franco's forces between 1936 and 1945 constitute a 'Spanish Holocaust'. [7] Preston is a renowned historian in this field of study and his works have created new debate on this subject. Preston's argument of a Spanish Holocaust remains a highly sensitive and controversial debate within Spain. Preston states that Franco's regime established concentration camps and executed anyone who opposed the new regime, including Republicans and Basque and Catalan separatists who wanted independence from Spain.

Although this was not on the same scale as the Nazi Holocaust committed during World War II, it is still a clear attempt of an annihilation of a group of people within society and led to the murder of a massive number of innocent civilians, so the use of the word 'holocaust' is justified in this instance.

However it should be pointed out that the use of mass violence and murder is not unique to fascism. For instance various communist regimes such as the Soviet Union under Stalin applied similar tactics. An example of this is 'The Great Purge' of the 1930s and 1940s.

Yet clearly no credible historian would describe Stalin as a fascist dictator. Therefore the use of violence and mass murder does not make Franco a truly fascist dictator. It is also important to examine Franco's style of rule. Roger Griffin describes Franco's form of government as authoritarian. [9] This is true to a large extent. As Franco served as head of state of Spain with all power and authority. Franco himself described Spain as a totalitarian state. [10] Franco ran an oppressive regime which implemented various authoritarian and totalitarian policies.

For instance Franco abolished all political parties except for his own, banned the trade unions and kept firm control over the media. Franco also fiercely suppressed the left and communism. In 1938 Franco stated that 'One thing that I am sure of, and which I can answer truthfully, is that whatever the contingencies that may arise here, wherever I am there will be no communism' this shows Franco's fierce opposition to communism. [11] This anti-democratic, anti-liberal and anti-communist rule imposed by Franco clearly fits in with Payne's 'anti isms' concept of a fascist dictator.

The authoritarian form of government applied by Franco can also be compared with the regimes imposed by both Hitler and Mussolini. In addition another key aspect of Franco's style of rule is the concept of a cult of personality. Bowen states that Franco created a cult of personality around himself as Spain's leader. [12] Franco created this cult of personality through a sophisticated propaganda campaign which portrayed himself as a supreme figure, a 'saviour' of the Spanish nation.

This again is similar to the cult of personality both Hitler and Mussolini created around themselves. It is also fair to say that to an extent Franco attempted to mimic Mussolini's style of rule. For instance Franco gave himself the title of 'Caudillo' which roughly translates to leader in Spanish, which is a clear attempt at copying Mussolini and his given title of 'Duce' . [13] Furthermore Franco adopted the Roman salute which again was borrowed from Mussolini. Mimicry is one of Paxton's difficulties in defining a fascist. 14] This is because various other people and organisations have also mimicked Mussolini which were not functionally fascist, an example of this is Oswald Mosley and the BUF in Britain. Overall it is clear to see that Franco <https://assignbuster.com/can-franco-be-described-as-a-truly-fascist-dictator/>

implemented an authoritarian form of government and adhered to the concept of 'anti isms' which are both key components of a fascist dictator as stated in the introduction. Franco also clearly mimicked elements of Mussolini's style of rule. Although this is still not enough to describe Franco as a truly fascist dictator.

It is essential to assess Franco's domestic and social policies. Historian De Meneses argues that Franco cannot be a fascist as 'There is an element of revolutionary politics in fascism, of wanting to provoke a dramatic change in society. That was not Franco's intention: on the contrary he wanted to preserve Spain from change'. [15] This is largely true. As Franco's social and domestic policies were conservative rather than revolutionary. Franco was highly motivated by religion and portrayed himself as a defender of the Catholic faith.

Thus the Catholic Church heavily influenced the character of Franco's laws. This can be seen in the Principles of the Spanish National Movement according to the Act of 1938, which states 'The Spanish nation regards it as a mark of honour to obey the law of God, according to the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church, the sole true church and the faith inseparable from the national consciousness which will inspire its legislation'. [16] Franco's early laws were socially conservative and traditionalist. For example divorce, contraceptives and abortion were forbidden.

Furthermore the role of women in Francoist society was primarily in the home, to serve her husband and to look after her children. [18] This was in line with the Church's view of the role of women and further emphasises

Franco's conservatism. This influence of the Catholic Church on Franco's policies is more comparable with Salazar's regime in Portugal rather than that of Hitler and Mussolini who both put nationalism and serving the state above serving religion. It is fair to say that Franco was more motivated by religion than nationalism.

This clearly contrasts with Passmore's definition of a fascist dictator in the introduction which states that ultranationalism dominates policy. [19] In addition another fascist element which is largely absent from Franco's social policies, is the lack of overly racist theory and laws. Racial theory such as social Darwinism is a significant theme in both fascism and Nazism. Both Hitler and Mussolini implemented various racist and discriminatory policies. However extreme racist theory was all about absent from Francoism.

Overall it is clear to see that Franco's social and domestic policies can be described as Catholic and socially conservative rather than ultranationalist and fascist. Another key theme which needs to be analysed is Franco's economic policy. Spain emerged from the Civil War with her economy in ruins. Spain remained in severe economic depression throughout the 1940s and 1950s and lagged behind their Western European counterparts. Initially Franco's regime implemented a corporatist system and adopted a policy of economic self sufficiency and autarky similar to that of Fascist Italy.

However as Payne states Franco's economic policies gradually modernised and moved away from the more extreme fascist elements and instead Francoist Spain embraced more liberal economic policies. [21] For instance in 1959 the Franco regime unveiled the Stabilisation Plan which encouraged

foreign trade and investment and brought Spain out of isolation. The regime also adopted a free market economy. These economic reforms further pushed Franco's regime away from a fascist model and encouraged the Spanish economic 'miracle' of the 1960s in which the Spanish economy prospered.

This move away from fascist policies over the course of Francoism has led Payne to describe Franco's regime as initially a semi fascist state which became a demobilized authoritarian regime. [22] Therefore in terms of economic policy it is clear that Franco's initial policies were in line with fascism and similar to Fascist Italy, however by the end of Franco's reign much of these fascist elements had been abandoned in favour of a more liberal economic model. So clearly it would be inaccurate to describe Franco as a truly fascist dictator.

Finally it is important to assess Franco's foreign policy. As stated in the introduction a key component of a fascist dictator as Paxton states is the pursuit of external expansion. [23] It is fair to say that expansionism was at the heart of Nazism and characterised Hitler's foreign policy. The concept of 'Lebensraum' (living space) led to Nazi Germany expanding into much of Europe during World War II. In addition expansionism was also integral to Fascist Italy's foreign policy and Mussolini's search for a 'place in the sun' led to the invasion of Abyssinia in 1935.

Both Hitler and Mussolini fostered a culture of militarism and built extensive war machines. Gentile states a truly fascist state is on an inevitable path to imperialist expansion. [24] However in contrast as Palacios states Franco

showed little enthusiasm or interest in imperial expansion. [25] This true to a large extent. As under Franco Spain never really came close to war and nor did Spain pursue any overly aggressive foreign policy aims. In fact Spain actually ceded some of its last colonial possessions, an example of this is Spain granted Equatorial Guinea independence in 1969.

It is fair to say that Franco did not have the same thirst for expansion as Hitler or Mussolini. Even during World War II Spain remained neutral. Furthermore Francoism lacked extreme expansionist concepts such as 'Lebensraum' and showed no ideological reasons to expand Spanish territory. Therefore in this instance it is clearly inaccurate to describe Franco as a fascist dictator as Spain was never on an inevitable path to war like Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany In conclusion it is clear to see that General Franco was not a truly fascist dictator.

From the key components of fascism stated in the introduction it is clear that Franco's regime undeniably shared some of these key fascist components. For instance Franco implemented an authoritarian form of government and Francoist ideology fitted Payne's 'anti isms' concept of anti-communism, anti-democracy and anti-liberalism. However Francoism lacked too many of the other key fascist components to be considered truly fascist. Franco did not hold expansionist foreign policy aims and Spain was never on an inevitable path to war like other fascist states such as Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

It is clear that expansionism and militarism were at the heart of both Nazism and fascism, however expansionism and militarism are barely prevalent themes in Francoism. Franco also lacked ultranationalist policies. Instead it is

fair to say that Franco was more motivated by religion and Catholicism influenced much of Franco's laws and policy rather than ultranationalism, which is not the characteristic of a fascist. A true fascist dictator puts ultranationalism and serving the state above anything else. In addition Francoist Spain also lacked the more extreme fascist social policies such as racist and discriminatory laws.

Franco also did not seek to revolutionary change Spanish society or to create a 'new man', instead Francoism was conservative and sought to preserve Spanish traditions. Furthermore Francoist economics actually liberalised to an extent, over the course of Franco's reign Spain moved away from the more semi fascist extremes such as autarky and embraced more liberal economics such as a free market economy. Overall it is much more accurate to describe Francoist Spain as an authoritarian, Catholic, conservative regime rather than a truly fascist dictatorship.