



The Age of Religious Fascism?

Kumar Ramakrishna



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By Kumar Ramakrishna

SYNOPSIS

We may be living in an age of religious fascism, which refers to fascist mutations of mainstream religions. Faith communities need to carefully distinguish between mainstream religion and religious fascism, which could threaten the social cohesion of secular, multicultural societies.

COMMENTARY

In September 2025, reports emerged of a self-radicalised Singaporean youth who not merely staunchly supported the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), he was “concurrently” influenced by inter alia, “far-right extremist ideologies”. He was the first case of “salad bar” radicalisation, drawing ideas haphazardly from differing ideologies, including violent Islamist and White Supremacist (or Far Right) [extremism](#).

This is, at first glance, counter-intuitive. Violent Islamist and Far Right extremism are usually regarded as dissimilar ideologies, and frequently contrasted in [policy discourse](#).

Nevertheless, rather than being ideologically firewalled from each other, the “ideologies and narratives perpetuated by Islamist and extreme right-wing groups have at times reinforced and even mutually benefitted each [other](#)”. Moreover, ideological convergence between Islamist and Far Right extremisms exists. Thus so-called “White jihad” occurs when “white supremacists derive inspiration from jihadists; incorporate jihadi terminology in their propaganda; support jihadi terrorism; and legitimise the collaboration between the two [movements](#)”. The seeming commonalities between Islamist and Far Right extremism have prompted observers to argue that “jihadists too are extreme right-wing actors even if they are rarely referred to in [such terms](#)”.

If Islamist extremists are *also* Far Right as some argue, then clearly, deeper analysis is called for.

One possible explanation? Perhaps Islamist and Far Right extremisms are both *fascist mutations* of Christianity and Islam.

The Protean Nature of Fascism

Fascism has re-emerged in global public discourse, associated with the political rise of Donald Trump in the US, with debate over the extent to which his administration displays fascist [characteristics](#). The basic puzzle explored here though is different: can the concept of fascism help us better grasp why Far Right, Islamist – and other faith-based extremisms – have underlying commonalities?

Since the defeat of Hitler and Mussolini in World War Two, scholars have tried to precisely define the term “fascism”. Robert Paxton famously defined fascism as a “form of political behaviour marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood”, by “compensatory cults of unity, energy and purity”, in which a “mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence, and without ethical or legal restraints, goals of internal cleansing and external [expansion](#)”.

The meaning of fascism however remains protean and contested. Thus philosopher Jason Stanley eschews overly precise definitions of fascism, arguing that it is essentially a “political method” that can “appear anytime, anywhere, if conditions are [right](#)”. Ian Dunt and Dorian Lynskey similarly argue that fascism was always “intellectually vacuous” and “constantly shifting”. They add that fascism is “more of an energy than an ideology”, that “does not communicate with the mind”, but is “pumped into the heart and enforced by the [fist](#)”.

Importantly, numerous scholars have argued that fascism can assume quasi-religious features. Beyond capturing power, fascism seeks access to [individual souls](#). Hans Maier argues that fascism represents a “political religion” which requires “quasi-religious submissions to a higher, even [absolute authority](#)”. Roger Eatwell likewise describes fascism as “characterised by a religious form” which assumes “many of the functions of religion for a [broad swathe of society](#)”. Thus scholars like David Redles consider Hitler’s National Socialist fascism as possessing the characteristics of a religious [fundamentalist movement](#).

As a “political religion”, fascism could subvert mainstream religions. Hence one could imagine *fascist mutations of mainstream religions*, or what we may term *religious fascism*. Analysts already grasp this possibility. Chris Hedges, for instance, has long warned of the rise of “Christian Fascism” in the [US](#). The German-Egyptian scholar Hamed Abdel-Samad has warned of “[Islamic Fascism](#)”. Amit Singh has explored how the fascist ideas of Hitler and Mussolini influenced the ideological founders of the Hindutva movement in [India](#); while Rollie Lal asserted that “the Buddhist nationalists are disturbingly similar to the racial fascists of [World War II](#)”.

Religious Fascism's Fundamentalist-Extremist Core

Religious fascism can arguably be understood as fundamentalist-extremist at its core.

Religious fascism is fundamentalist in its obsession with maintaining in-group purity at all costs by avoiding commingling with supposedly polluting out-groups across various social spheres – and requiring urgent and even apocalyptic, violent action to [address the threat](#).

Religious fascism is also extremist as it promotes an operational philosophy where the ends justify all means – including falsehoods and violence – so as to achieve a coercive political hegemony of the in-group over ostensibly threatening [out-groups](#). Religious fascism also encourages an extremist worldview characterised by [low integrative complexity](#). That is, followers see the world in simplistic good-evil, black-white, us-them ways, and are drawn to social media filter bubbles that [nourish such a worldview](#).

Three Core Features of Religious Fascism

Religious fascism manifests several core characteristics. Three of these include hypermasculinity and misogyny; “great replacement” conspiracy theories; and violence as a purifying force.

Fascist thinkers historically have argued for a “masculinity that was aggressive, active, and warrior-like” and that “fascist men ought to be respected, followed, and potentially [feared qua men \(patriarchs\)](#)”. These themes are certainly evident in religious fascist movements today. In the US, White Christian Nationalists or *Christofascists* regard the chastity of white women as a foundational principle to be upheld against the sexual advances of supposedly morally decrepit [non-whites](#). Christofascists hold that the [wombs of white women](#) belong to white men, and violence can rightly be used to ensure women “know their place” in the patriarchal order, so to [speak](#).

In India, *Hindofascists* similarly see “Hindu women” as being “especially vulnerable to exploitation at the hands of Muslim men by drawing on patriarchal and sexist notions about [women](#)”. In the case of *Buddhofascism in Myanmar*, Buddhist women, regarded as “inherently inferior” to Buddhist males, and “not intelligent enough to protect themselves”, are expected to be the “protectors of racial purity in a highly patriarchal system” and must “not convert or engage in an interfaith marriage” with Muslim men, or they would have “sullied the Buddhist [race](#)”.

In the *Islamofascist* interpretation, in a “patriarchal world”, the “role of the woman is tied to the man; his honor is between her legs, is in her blood; she is the carrier, the ‘reason’”. Her “physical purity” is all-important and “that’s why only her blood can cleanse the shame her actions bring on a [family](#)”.

Philosopher Jason Stanley has argued that fascism’s most powerful “political trope” is the “Great Replacement Theory”, which essentially alleges that “an internal enemy

tries to destroy the nation from within by importing people to “replace” the nation’s defining national [group](#)”. This theory fuelled Hitler’s rage against the Jews in [Nazi Germany](#) and has survived in various forms to this day. In its modern [form](#), the Christofascist view of the Great Replacement holds that white Christian nations are being overrun by masses of non-white out-groups such as East Asians, Hispanics and Muslims. Some Christofascists argue that the Great Replacement of the white Christian population needs thwarting [urgently](#), primarily through [“accelerating”](#) progress toward a violent race war to set up a [white Christian ethnostate](#).

Hindofascists in India warn that Muslims are “seducing vulnerable Hindu women into marriage and forcing them to accept Islam”, so as to “to turn Hindus into a [minority](#)”. Buddhofascists in Myanmar have likewise warned that the Muslim minority have long been “despicable and dangerous destroyers of our Buddhism and Buddhist symbols,” and allegedly possess a “100-year plan” to take over Myanmar’s “sovereignty through inter-faith marriages of [Buddhists](#).” In sum, “Muslims steal Buddhist women” and “outbreed the [Buddhist majority](#)”.

Some Islamofascists have also successfully mainstreamed their own version of the Great Replacement Theory. For instance, in Muslim-majority Tunisia, political leaders unleashed a “racist campaign targeting Black migrants”, influenced by “conspiracies that echo the ‘great replacement theory’” and encouraged police raids against migrant workers from Sub-Saharan Africa and Black Tunisians. Blacks were seen as inherently criminal and intent on transforming Tunisia from an Arab, Islamic country into a Black African one. Worryingly, an increase in acts of random violence and everyday discrimination against Blacks were [reported](#).

For fascists, violence is a “cleansing force” that is as Mussolini argued, “extremely moral, [sacrosanct and necessary](#)”. Fascists argue that modern, decaying societies need violence against “all manner of foes [within and without](#)” to experience “regeneration and [purification](#)”. In the US, Christofascist militias associated with the Christian Identity movement are driven by an “apocalyptic view of history” to engage in “valiant, militant efforts” to threaten the “evil system” of governance, secretly manipulated by a global “Jewish-Freemason conspiracy” to [control the world](#). Hindofascists meanwhile urge Hindus to see themselves as “heroes” grimly determined to “wipe out the [opposing forces](#)”.

Prior to World War Two, U Saw, the leader of the fascist movement in Myanmar (then called Burma), “built a private paramilitary from his diehard supporters” to mount attacks on an alleged existential enemy called *kala* – “an imaginary group” that collectively racialised Indian Muslims, Indian Hindus, and [Burmese Muslims](#). Moreover, rather than an inner spiritual struggle, Islamofascists frame the concept of *jihad* as warfare with redemptive significance. Hence the “sinning but repentant believer” can fight and “expiate his sins on the [field of battle](#)”. In religious fascism, violence is not aberrant, it is necessary.

Conclusion

Two main observations flow from the preceding analysis.

First, one should regard Far Right, Islamist, Buddhist and Hindu extremisms not as ideologically distinct phenomena, but rather, structurally similar: they arguably represent fascist mutations of these faiths. Hence, the emergence of the aforementioned salad bar radicalisation phenomenon should seem less counter-intuitive, because mixing various extremist tropes from content-divergent but structurally similar religious fascisms, is not difficult.

Finally, faith communities need to carefully distinguish between mainstream forms of religion, and fascist mutations that may threaten the overall social cohesion of secular, multicultural societies, perhaps even violently. If the fragmented global Christian response to the recent Charlie Kirk assassination is any indication, this seems [easier said than done](#).

Kumar Ramakrishna is Professor of National Security Studies, Provost's Chair in National Security Studies, and Dean of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore.

S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, NTU Singapore
Block S4, Level B3, 50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798

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