

The Wannabe Fascists: A Guide to Understanding the Greatest Threat to Democracy

Federico Finchelstein

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Federico Finchelstein's contemporary political science book *The Wannabe Fascists* explores movements that combine components of historical fascism with right-wing populism, resulting in a new type of dangerous leader.

Decentering European fascism, this expansive analysis of global fascism articulates the similarities between fascist movements in differing contexts, showing how the movements tend to work together across borders. Its discussions of fascism, populism, and aspiring fascism involve four core political elements: violence, propaganda and misinformation, xenophobia, and dictatorship. How these elements show themselves within fascist movements is focal; the book includes examples from around the world.

At the same time, the book discusses how populist movements do and do not use the four core elements, articulating a clear difference between traditional fascist regimes and populist ones. And it also points to those who pull from both traditions, including contemporary leaders like Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, and Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines. It notes that leaders like these have tendencies that reflect the four core elements of fascism; they seek their own individual short-term gain as well, but stop short of fully undermining democracy.

Finchelstein personalizes this work of comparative politics by discussing his own experience growing up in fascist Argentina. And while the book explores worrying challenges within the current global political landscape, it ends on a hopeful note, saying "authoritarianism is not mechanical, unstoppable, or unaffected by processes of resistance and the empowerment of democracy." Thus, while the emergence of near fascism is concerning, the success of such movements is not treated as inevitable—as long as people fight against them.

Exploring the histories and ideologies of fascism and populism, *The Wannabe Fascists* exposes a new political force on the rise that blends the two—a danger to democracy everywhere.

CAMILLE TINNIN (May / June 2024)

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