IS DONALD TRUMP *REALLY* A FASCIST?

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RESUMO

O texto apresenta uma comparação entre Donald Trump e os elementos centrais da ideologia nazista, tomando a Alemanha de Hitler como referência para definir características do fascismo. O autor destaca seis pilares do nazismo: racismo, nacionalismo, oposição à democracia, autoritarismo, totalitarismo e propagação de realidades fictícias ou mentiras.

Na comparação proposta, o texto afirma que Trump não apresenta evidências suficientes para ser caracterizado como totalitário e diferencia seu nacionalismo daquele associado ao nazismo. Por outro lado, o autor identifica em sua trajetória elementos que considera relacionados ao racismo, à oposição à democracia, ao autoritarismo e ao uso sistemático de mentiras. Entre os exemplos apresentados estão declarações sobre imigrantes e minorias, além das tentativas de contestar e reverter o resultado das eleições presidenciais de 2020.

Por fim, o autor sustenta que esses quatro elementos seriam suficientes para caracterizar o fascismo, mesmo sem a presença dos outros dois pilares — totalitarismo e nacionalismo étnico extremo. O texto conclui estabelecendo uma aproximação entre Trump e o nazismo principalmente no que diz respeito à rejeição da igualdade em favor do racismo, da democracia em favor do autoritarismo e da verdade em favor da mentira. Ao mesmo tempo, reconhece que Trump

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não seria uma reprodução de Hitler, mas apresentaria, segundo o autor, uma forma própria de fascismo no contexto político norte-americano.

Palavras-chave
Fascismo; Nazismo; Donald Trump; Adolf Hitler; Racismo; Nacionalismo; Democracia; Autoritarismo; Totalitarismo; Propaganda; Desinformação; Eleições; Estados Unidos.

RESUMEN

El texto presenta una comparación entre Donald Trump y los elementos centrales de la ideología nazi, tomando como referencia la Alemania de Hitler para definir las características del fascismo. El autor destaca seis pilares del nazismo: **racismo, nacionalismo, oposición a la democracia, autoritarismo, totalitarismo y propagación de realidades ficticias o mentiras.**

En la comparación propuesta, el texto afirma que no existen evidencias suficientes para caracterizar a Trump como totalitario y diferencia su nacionalismo del nacionalismo asociado al nazismo. Por otro lado, el autor identifica en su trayectoria elementos que considera relacionados **con el racismo, la oposición a la democracia, el autoritarismo y el uso sistemático de mentiras.** Entre los ejemplos presentados se encuentran declaraciones sobre inmigrantes y minorías, además de los intentos de cuestionar y revertir el resultado de las elecciones presidenciales de 2020.

Finalmente, el autor sostiene que estos cuatro elementos serían suficientes para caracterizar el fascismo, incluso sin la presencia de los otros dos pilares: el totalitarismo y el nacionalismo étnico extremo. El texto concluye estableciendo una aproximación entre Trump y el nazismo, principalmente en lo que se refiere al rechazo de la igualdad en favor del racismo, de la democracia en favor del autoritarismo y de la verdad en favor de la mentira. Al mismo tiempo, reconoce que Trump no sería una reproducción de Hitler, sino que presentaría, según el autor, una forma propia de fascismo en el contexto político estadounidense.

Palabras clave
Fascismo; Nazismo; Donald Trump; Adolf Hitler; Racismo; Nacionalismo; Democracia; Autoritarismo; Totalitarismo; Propaganda; Desinformación; Elecciones; Estados Unidos.

In November 2020, the American people roundly rejected Donald Trump as the next president of the United States. Eighty-one million people voted against him, and he lost the Electoral College by 306 to 232 votes. Of the record number who said no to Trump in the popular election, many did so because they believed he was a serious threat to our democracy. Basing their belief on his deeds and his words, they feared that if he won again he could either destroy or at the very least badly weaken the basic freedoms, rule of law, and norms upon which American democracy rests.

This fear did not arise suddenly. It grew steadily during Trump's term in office as his antidemocratic actions—attacks on the press, racial slurs, chronic lying, and so on—increased. By his third year in office, the cumulative effect of his behavior was that it had become fairly commonplace to hear opponents call him a fascist—mostly in private, but occasionally in public.

And when he tried to overturn the results of the presidential election and instigated a violent attack on the Capitol Building on January 6, 2021, the number of people who felt this way grew enormously.

PARTE SUPERIOR DO FORMULÁRIO

Given Trump's hard-right politics, criminal behavior, and hateful rhetoric, it is understandable that many people today consider him a fascist. But is this assessment really accurate? Is he a fascist, objectively speaking, or are his accusers letting their emotions run away with them?

This question demands a clear and decisive answer because Trump is once more a candidate, with a bettor's chance of winning the White House. With so much at stake, and the election only fourteen months away, we need to know whether he is *really* a fascist.

The only way to determine this is first to define fascism and then to measure Trump against that definition. But we at once encounter a problem. Though we can point to numerous examples of countries and movements that were or are unmistakably fascist, we lack an umbrella definition that most experts would support. Rather, we have an array of definitions that frequently conflict with one another. So we are forced to take a different approach.

The solution is to choose one significant example of fascism without this problem. Nazi Germany is such a case. Though scholars disagree on many issues concerning Nazism, its essential defining characteristics are not in question. What, if anything, does Trump have in common with classical Nazism?

Many people would instantly say he has nothing in common with it. After all, Hitler and the Nazi leadership were maniacal fanatics, and nothing that Trump has done or said, however outrageous, compares to their barbarism. Unlike them, he did not overturn a democracy, invade even a single country, or cause millions of people to be killed. As far as they go, these objections are valid; whatever one might think of Trump, he is no Hitler.

But Nazism was much more than its monstrous deeds. It was also an ideology, a set of ideas about history, nature, genetics, and diverse groups of human beings and how they should be treated. Its worldview served as the foundation for its policies and a vehicle to galvanize the masses. Without it, the Nazi party would never have grown into a mass movement, eventually engulfing the whole country. In short, Nazism was as much thought as action, and any comparison needs to take this into account.

In its complete expression, Nazi ideology was, as William Shirer put it, a hodgepodge of ideas. But the essential defining characteristics are only six in number: racism, nationalism, opposition to democracy, authoritarianism, totalitarianism, and the propagation of fictional realities or lies. Since each of these is well known and has been written about extensively, I will provide only very brief summaries.

The Nazis are so well known for their racism that it hardly needs description. Most succinctly put, they believed in a hierarchy of races based on biological differences. In their view, some races are genetically superior while others are inferior. The German people, who belong to the Aryan or Nordic race, were the "most superior" of all. Jews, Slavs, Blacks, Roma, and mixed races were all inferior. The Nazis' racism didn't stop there. Hitler was obsessed with the purification of German blood, which meant that so-called undesirables, such as homosexuals and the disabled, had to be purged from the race. While the Slavs were viewed as subhuman slaves, the Jews were worse; they were considered parasites and the personification of the devil. Hitler believed that the Aryan race was locked in mortal combat with the Jews, which led to his decision to exterminate them.

Hitler was a fanatical ethnic nationalist. His nationalism derived from his beliefs about race. Because he believed that Germans were the master race, he

felt that all pure Germans needed to be united and that it was the purpose of the state to safeguard the race against internal and external threats. This also entitled Germans to Lebensraum, or living space, which led to the invasion of nine countries to the east that were inhabited by peoples considered inferior. Hitler was not satisfied with his eastern conquests. Believing that "permanent struggle is the law of life," he invaded a roughly equal number of western and northern European countries. In short, Hitler's nationalism was so extreme that it took the form of ultra-imperialism. His ultimate goal was the master race's domination of the world.

Hitler hated democracy. A fundamental reason was that it held that all men were equal, which clashed head-on with his racial theories. Another significant reason for him was the ineffectiveness and failings of the democratic Weimar Republic. Hitler blamed it for Germany's loss in World War I, the onerous terms of the Treaty of Versailles, and the inability to alleviate the suffering of the German people during the Great Depression. There were other reasons too: Democracy represented mob rule; the freedom it granted to political opponents showed weakness; its frequent ultimatums and compromises stifled the potential of the individual; moreover, it was too slow. Despite his loathing of democracy, Hitler used it to attain power. In 1932 the Nazis became the largest party in the Reichstag, and one year later Hitler was appointed chancellor. But these successes didn't change his view. His goal from 1924 on, when he was released from jail following a failed insurrection he had led, was always to "destroy democracy with the weapons of democracy." That's precisely what he did upon assuming power ten years later.

Hitler's belief in authoritarianism was the corollary of his contempt for democracy. In 1934, he consolidated his power by becoming both chancellor and president, at which point Germany stopped being a democracy and became an outright dictatorship. Hitler believed in the leadership principle, according to which authority takes the shape of a pyramid, with leadership flowing from the top down. Hitler was, of course, the supreme leader who embodied all that Nazism stood for. While the Nazi leadership might have disagreements among themselves, his word was final on all matters that concerned him directly. And further, he brooked no opposition. When Ernst Röhm—a Nazi ally and close friend—threatened to become a rival for power, he had him executed.

Hitler's staunch belief in authoritarianism was also reflected in the type of dictatorship he imposed between 1934 and 1945. It wasn't a mere garden-variety

dictatorship but the most extreme kind imaginable: a totalitarian state. Its aim was nothing less than the total domination of society. Hitler was blunt about this, declaring, "The NSDAP [Nazi] Party must not serve the masses, but rather dominate them." In her iconic study *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt points out that tyrants and despots throughout history controlled their opponents while disregarding large segments of the rest of society. This situation changed when Hitler smashed all organizations and institutions, leaving in their wake an atomized mass of isolated and lonely individuals. Added to this pulverization was ubiquitous terror, which made the domination complete. With Hitler (and Stalin) a completely new type of dictatorship made its appearance in history: totalitarianism.

As is well known, the Nazis were masters in the use of propaganda based on fictional realities they themselves created. Frequently, these lies were utterly insane—for example, that the Jews were the devil and were responsible for all of Germany's ills. The truth was of no importance to Hitler, as he made plain in this statement in 1924: the "task is not to make an objective study of the truth, in so far as it favors the enemy, and then set it before the masses with academic fairness; its task is to serve our own right, always unflinchingly." And so it was with the Nazis: a deluge of lies repeated over and over again. Arendt has brilliantly analyzed how these lies work and gain acceptance: "Before they seize power and establish a world according to their doctrines, totalitarian movements conjure up a lying world of consistency which is more adequate to the needs of the human mind than reality itself; in which, through their sheer imagination, uprooted masses can feel at home and be spared the never-ending shocks which real life and real experiences deal to human beings and their expectations." Nobody was better at conjuring up "a lying world of consistency" than the Nazis.

We have now summarized the six pillars of Nazi ideology: racism, nationalism, opposition to democracy, authoritarianism, totalitarianism, and the propagation of fictional realities. These elements worked together to create and then maintain one of the most ruthless regimes in all of history.

Now let's look to see whether Donald Trump has anything in common with the Nazis' beliefs.

We can immediately eliminate two areas, one because there is no evidence for it and the other because it is too weak.

During Trump's four years as president, nothing he did suggested he believes in totalitarianism as distinct from authoritarianism. While he did on several

occasions praise Vladimir Putin and other leaders of totalitarian regimes, this doesn't rise to the level of evidence. Simply put, we can't make a case, at this point, that Trump is a totalitarian.

Trump is a nationalist. His repeated message to the American people was that the United States was being exploited by other countries and that he would put a stop to it. To this end, he pulled out of international agreements and even threatened to withdraw the United States from NATO. But his brand of nationalism is for the most part far different from Hitler's ethnic, imperialistic type, which was based on his belief in the genetic superiority of the German people. There is certainly a dose of ethnic nationalism in Trump's brand of nationalism, as evidenced by his vicious slanders against certain immigrants. And the same might hold true for his obsession to build a wall along the entire U.S. border with Mexico. But as ugly and distasteful as all this was, there is still too great a gap between Trump's nationalism and that of the Nazis to say that they were similar or of the same class.

Having eliminated two areas of comparison, we can now examine the other four.

His many denials notwithstanding, Trump *is* a racist. His record of racist acts and speech is simply too great to reach any other conclusion. The history of his racism goes back at least to the 1970s, when the U.S. Justice Department filed two lawsuits against the Trump Organization, Donald Trump, and his father, Fred Trump. The Trumps owned thousands of apartments in New York City and were accused of discriminating against African Americans in one of their developments. The first suit was brought when New York City's Human Rights Division discovered a pattern in which Blacks who sought to rent an apartment were told there were none available, while whites were granted leases at the same time. That suit was settled in 1975, but a second one had to be filed in 1978 due to lack of compliance. During the first trial, Trump was deposed by Elyse Godlweker, a Department of Justice attorney, who has stated that in a private chat with her he said, "You know that you don't want to live with them either."

In the ensuing decades, Trump would make many similar racist comments. Most of them would not be as overt, and many were "coded," that is, they were filtered to make them sound more acceptable. But they were stated in a way that would still appeal to Trump's base of white working-class voters, many of whom feared that the country was being taken over by minorities. Here is a small sampling of Trump's many racist remarks and actions.

Trump was a leading proponent of the blatant lie that President Obama was not born in the United States.

In 2016, Trump launched his presidential campaign with these words about Mexicans seeking to migrate to the United States: "They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists."

Following the white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017, in which one counterprotester was run over by a car and killed, Trump described some of the white supremacists as "very fine people."

In 2018, during an Oval Office meeting about immigration reform, Trump was heard by several people to describe El Salvador, Haiti, and African countries as "shitholes."

The five Black and Hispanic teenagers sent to prison for beating and raping a white woman in the notorious Central Park jogger case were officially exonerated in 2002. As late as 2019, Trump continued to maintain they were guilty.

Trump asserted that Justice Gonzalo P. Curiel, who was born in Indiana, should be disqualified from deciding cases involving him because "this judge is of Mexican heritage."

He retweeted false statistics that claimed African Americans were responsible for the majority of murders of white Americans.

A complete list of examples would fill pages. Only a racist is capable of thinking and acting as Trump has done over decades.

When democracy serves him, Trump accepts it. But when it doesn't, he can turn fiercely antidemocratic. There is no clearer example of Trump's contempt for democracy than his reaction to his defeat in the 2020 presidential election. He was beaten hands-down in a scrupulously fair contest and should have accepted the will of the American people without a word of protest. Instead, he did just the opposite, trying almost everything he could to overturn the result.

The first thing he did was to disseminate the lie that the election had been stolen from him by way of massive voter fraud. There was absolutely no proof of this, but Trump kept repeating it in what was a slap in the face to voters and the election process. His next step, born of desperation and fury, was to try to gain support for his lie by filing dozens of lawsuits challenging the election results. From the outset, the suits were frivolous and proved to be just that, as they were all rejected. At this point, Trump should have realized that his attempts to overturn the election were futile. But he was just getting started. Desperate to win at any cost, he turned to authoritarianism to accomplish what he couldn't do

through the law. Throughout his public and private life, Trump had resorted to strong-arm tactics and bullying on many occasions but they paled by comparison with what he did in the three months following the election. Here is a partial list of his actions.

He called the Canvassing Board in Wayne County, Michigan, and pressured them not to certify Biden's victory in Detroit.

Ditto the Board of Supervisors in Maricopa County, Arizona.

He pressured Georgia Governor Brian Kemp, Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, and Arizona Governor Doug Ducey to reject or revoke statewide certifications of the votes in their states.

After creating alternate electors, he pressured Republican state legislatures in key swing states to vote for them in place of Biden's electors.

He pressured Attorney General William Barr into opening a formal investigation into the election. When Barr refused, and a short time later resigned, Trump pressured his successor, Jeffrey Rosen, to do the same. He told him in the boldest language, "Just say the election was corrupt [and] leave the rest to me." He also pressured Rosen into filing an appeal to the Supreme Court whose purpose was to invalidate Biden's win in six states. When Rosen would not agree, he tried to replace him with Jeffrey Clark, but he was forced to back off when faced with the threat of top-level resignations at the Justice Department and among his own White House lawyers.

Trump tried to pressure Vice President Mike Pence into blocking Biden's victory before Congress on January 6. He told him either to recognize his informal slate of electors or to declare the election in dispute. Pence rejected both options, stating that he lacked legal authority under the laws of the United States.

When all of the above failed to reverse the election, Trump took his final step, which was to whip up a large crowd of his supporters who violently attacked the Capitol on the afternoon of January 6 in an attempt to prevent Congress from certifying the election. The insurrection showed that Trump's authoritarianism had almost no limits, including the use of violence.

Like Hitler, Trump is a fanatical liar. According to the *Washington Post*, he made false or misleading claims a total of 30,573 times during his four years in office. The staggering amount of lying and conscious distortion led the renowned presidential historian Michael Beschloss to declare, "I have never seen a president in American history who has lied so continuously and so outstandingly as Donald Trump, period." However, it was not only the mind-boggling number

of lies that characterized Trump's four years in office but their equally shocking nature. So often they turned reality upside down. The leading one, which Trump continues to repeat to this day, is that he won the 2020 election. Others of a similar nature are that Russia didn't interfere in the 2016 presidential election, that the press is an "enemy of the people," that the Democrats are "radical socialists," and that the coronavirus was no worse than the common flu. Just as in Hitler's case, the purpose of all of Trump's lying was to create a world of fictional realities that served his purpose and then to lure people into that world by repeating the lies over and over again.

Now that we have completed our comparison of Trump and classical Nazism, we can answer the question we posed at the beginning: Is Trump *really* a fascist? Because the areas we covered are so well known, we limited our accounts to brief summaries. But the evidence we used is clear and compelling.

We have shown that Trump embodies only four of the six pillars of Nazi ideology. Does this mean he is not a fascist? The answer is no, it does not. If Hitler had not imposed totalitarianism on Germany (that is, if he had limited himself to the role of traditional dictator) and had not carried out a policy of the most extreme ethnic nationalism, his regime would *still* have been fascist. The other four pillars alone were sufficient; the core of Nazism was racism, opposition to democracy, authoritarianism, and instrumental lying. To these, Hitler added two defining characteristics, giving his brand of Nazism its distinctive stamp. But they were add-ons to a fascist base that already existed without them.

Trump has been called many things, including racist, bully, con man, opportunist, and pathological liar. While these labels are all accurate, they are incomplete; each leaves out the defining elements of Trump's mentality. Only the designation *fascist* will do. If a human being is a racist, contemptuous of democracy, authoritarian, and an instrumental liar, he is a fascist. This is who Trump is and what he should be called.

Many people hearing or reading the word *Nazis* think only of the Holocaust and the many other atrocities committed by the Third Reich. This is understandable, because they were so monstrous. But if we are to understand Trump's similarities to the Nazis, we can't let ourselves be blinded by the horrors that are stamped in our minds; we have to look beyond them. Unless we do this, we will be fooled into thinking that Trump is merely a strongman or a bully rather than a fascist. It's only when we compare Trump's core beliefs to those of the Nazis that the parallels come into view. What we see is that they share an underlying men-

tality that rejects equality for racism, democracy for authoritarianism, and truth for lies. Trump is not a rubber stamp of Hitler; he's an American fascist with his own personality, style, goals, and ways of doing things. But his mentality, the way he views the world and the people in it, are very much in line with classical Nazism.

On November 5, 2024, the American people will go to the polls to elect their next president. Barring some unforeseen development, the choice will be between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. There are ample reasons not to want to vote for Harris; he is far from an ideal candidate. But the race won't be a normal one, a choice between two people who believe in democracy and are committed to upholding the Constitution of the United States. Rather, it will be between a democrat and a fascist. Fascism is barbarism masquerading as love of country. More than seventy-five years ago, the United States helped defeat fascism abroad. Now the American people must do the same at home. Trump is a *proven* fascist, an enemy of democracy, who must never again see the inside of the White House.

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