

SECTION 3

An image from a magazine of Benito Mussolini leading his nation to war ▶



◀ Italian national flag during Mussolini's rule

WITNESS HISTORY AUDIO

A New Leader: Mussolini

In the early 1920s, a new leader named Benito Mussolini arose in Italy. The Italian people were inspired by Mussolini's promises to bring stability and glory to Italy.

“[Only joy at finding such a leader] can explain the enthusiasm [Mussolini] evoked at gathering after gathering, where his mere presence drew the people from all sides to greet him with frenzied acclamations. Even the men who at first came out of mere curiosity and with indifferent or even hostile feelings gradually felt themselves fired by his personal magnetic influence. . . .”

—Margherita G. Sarfatti, *The Life of Benito Mussolini* (tr. Frederic Whyte)

Focus Question How and why did fascism rise in Italy?

Fascism in Italy

Objectives

- Describe how conditions in Italy favored the rise of Mussolini.
- Summarize how Mussolini changed Italy.
- Understand the values and goals of fascist ideology.
- Compare and contrast fascism and communism.

Terms, People, and Places

Benito Mussolini	totalitarian state
Black Shirts	fascism
March on Rome	

Note Taking

Reading Skill: Identify Main Ideas Find the main points of the text under the first two headings and record them in a flowchart like the one below.



“I hated politics and politicians,” said Italo Balbo. Like many Italian veterans of World War I, he had come home to a land of economic chaos and political corruption. Italy’s constitutional government, he felt, “had betrayed the hopes of soldiers, reducing Italy to a shameful peace.” Disgusted and angry, Balbo rallied behind a fiercely nationalist leader, Benito Mussolini. Mussolini’s rise to power in the 1920s served as a model for ambitious strongmen elsewhere in Europe.

Mussolini’s Rise to Power

When Italy agreed to join the Allies in 1915, France and Britain secretly promised to give Italy certain Austro-Hungarian territories. When the Allies won, Italy received some of the promised territories, but others became part of the new Yugoslavia. The broken promises outraged Italian nationalists.

Disorders within Italy multiplied. Inspired in part by the revolution in Russia, peasants seized land, and workers went on strike or seized factories. Amid the chaos, returning veterans faced unemployment. Trade declined and taxes rose. The government, split into feuding factions, seemed powerless to end the crisis.

A Leader Emerges Into this turmoil stepped **Benito Mussolini**. The son of a socialist blacksmith and a teacher, Mussolini had been a socialist in his youth. During the war, however, he rejected socialism



for intense nationalism. In 1919, he organized veterans and other discontented Italians into the Fascist party. They took the name from the Latin *fasces*, a bundle of sticks wrapped around an ax. In ancient Rome, the fasces symbolized unity and authority.

Mussolini was a fiery and charismatic speaker. He promised to end corruption and replace turmoil with order. He also spoke of reviving Roman greatness, pledging to turn the Mediterranean into a “Roman lake” once again.

Mussolini Gains Control Mussolini organized his supporters into “combat squads.” The squads wore black shirts to emulate an earlier nationalist revolt. These **Black Shirts**, or party militants, rejected the democratic process in favor of violent action. They broke up socialist rallies, smashed leftist presses, and attacked farmers’ cooperatives. Fascist gangs used intimidation and terror to oust elected officials in northern Italy. Many Italians accepted these actions because they, too, had lost faith in constitutional government.

In 1922, the Fascists made a bid for power. At a rally in Naples, they announced their intention to go to Rome to demand that the government make changes. In the **March on Rome**, tens of thousands of Fascists swarmed towards the capital. Fearing civil war, King Victor Emmanuel III asked Mussolini to form a government as prime minister. Mussolini entered the city triumphantly on October 30, 1922. He thus obtained a nominally legal, constitutional appointment from the king to lead Italy.

 **Checkpoint** How did postwar disillusionment contribute to Mussolini’s rise?

Mussolini’s Rule

At first, Fascists held only a few cabinet posts in the new government. By 1925, though, Mussolini had assumed more power and taken the title *Il Duce* (eel DOO chay), “The Leader.” He suppressed rival parties, muzzled the press, rigged elections, and replaced elected officials with Fascist supporters. In 1929, Mussolini received support from Pope Pius XI in return for recognizing Vatican City as an independent state, although the pope continued to disagree with some of Mussolini’s goals. In theory, Italy remained a parliamentary monarchy. In fact, it was a dictatorship upheld by terror. Critics were thrown into prison, forced into exile, or murdered. Secret police and propaganda bolstered the regime.

State Control of the Economy To spur economic growth and end conflicts between owners and workers, Mussolini brought the economy under state control. However, he preserved capitalism. Under Mussolini’s corporate state, representatives of business, labor, government, and the Fascist

Mussolini and the People

An excited crowd of women and children greets the Italian leader in 1940.



Vocabulary Builder


proclaimed—(proh KLAYMD) *vt.*
announced officially

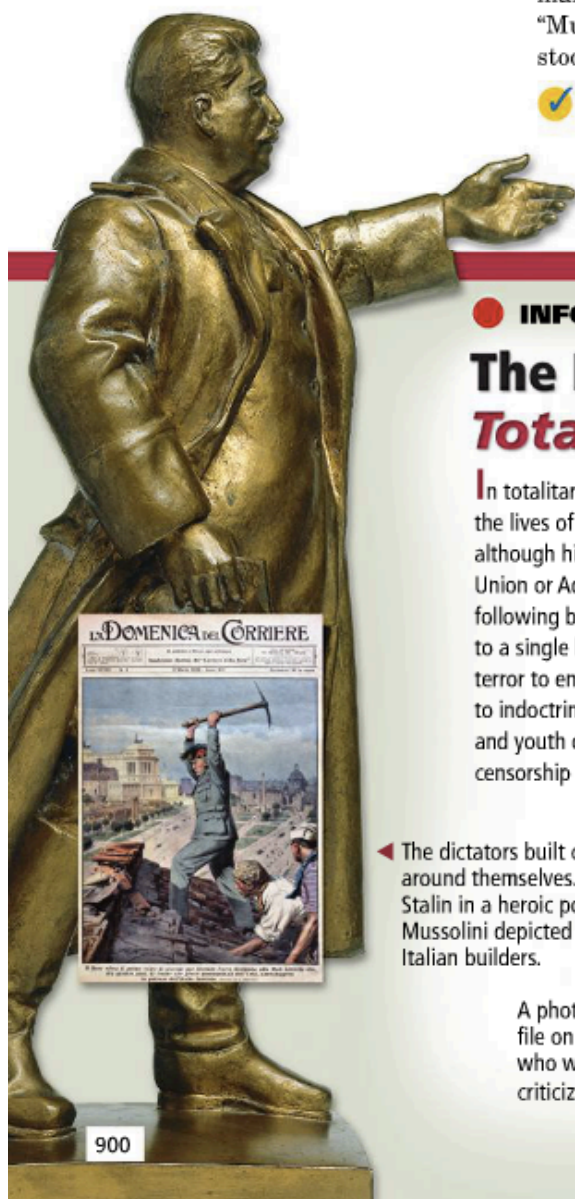


party controlled industry, agriculture, and trade. Mussolini's system favored the upper classes and industrial leaders. Although production increased, success came at the expense of workers. They were forbidden to strike, and their wages were kept low.

The Individual and the State In Mussolini's new system, loyalty to the state replaced conflicting individual goals. To Fascists, the glorious state was all-important, and the individual was unimportant except as a member of the state. Men, women, and children were bombarded with slogans glorifying the state and Mussolini. "Believe! Obey! Fight!" loudspeakers blared and posters **proclaimed**. Men were urged to be ruthless, selfless warriors fighting for the glory of Italy. Women were pushed out of paying jobs. Instead, Mussolini called on women to "win the battle of motherhood." Those who bore more than 14 children were given a medal by Il Duce himself.

Shaping the young was a major Fascist goal. Fascist youth groups toughened children and taught them to obey strict military discipline. Boys and girls learned about the glories of ancient Rome. Young Fascists marched in torchlight parades, singing patriotic hymns and chanting, "Mussolini is always right." By the 1930s, a generation of young soldiers stood ready to back Il Duce's drive to expand Italian power.

 **Checkpoint** How did the Fascist party transform Italy's government and economy?



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● INFOGRAPHIC

The Makings of a *Totalitarian State*

As part of a propaganda drive, German mothers received medals for bearing several children. ▶

In totalitarian Italy, Mussolini's government tried to dominate every part of the lives of Italians. Mussolini's totalitarian state became a model for others, although his rule in Italy was not as absolute as that of Stalin in the Soviet Union or Adolf Hitler in Germany. Still, all three governments shared the following basic features: (1) a single-party dictatorship with blind obedience to a single leader, (2) state control of the economy, (3) use of police spies and terror to enforce the will of the state, (4) government control of the media to indoctrinate and mobilize citizens through propaganda, (5) use of schools and youth organizations to spread ideology to children, and (6) strict censorship of artists and intellectuals with dissenting opinions.

◀ The dictators built cults of personality around themselves. At left, a statue of Stalin in a heroic pose, and (inset) Mussolini depicted working alongside Italian builders.

A photo from the Soviet secret police file on author Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who was sent to the Gulag for criticizing Stalin. ▶





The Nature of Fascism

Mussolini built the first **totalitarian state**. In this form of government, a one-party dictatorship attempts to regulate every aspect of the lives of its citizens. Other dictators, notably Stalin and Hitler, followed Mussolini's lead. Mussolini's rule was fascist in nature, as was Hitler's, but totalitarian governments rise under other kinds of ideology as well, such as communism in Stalin's Soviet Union.

What Is Fascism? Historians still debate the real nature of Mussolini's fascist **ideology**. Mussolini coined the term, but fascists had no unifying theory as Marxists did. Today, we generally use the term **fascism** to describe any centralized, authoritarian government that is not communist whose policies glorify the state over the individual and are destructive to basic human rights. In the 1920s and 1930s, though, fascism meant different things in different countries.

All forms of fascism, however, shared some basic features. They were rooted in extreme nationalism. Fascists glorified action, violence, discipline, and, above all, blind loyalty to the state. Fascists also pursued aggressive foreign expansion. Echoing the idea of "survival of the fittest," Fascist leaders glorified warfare as a noble struggle for survival.

Fascists were also antidemocratic. They rejected faith in reason and the concepts of equality and liberty. To them, democracy led to corruption and weakness and put individual or class interests above national goals. Instead, fascists emphasized emotion and the supremacy of the state.

Note Taking

Reading Skill: Identify Main Ideas Use a table like the one below to record information about fascism.

What Is Fascism?	
Values	
Characteristics	
Differences From Communism	
Similarities to Communism	

Vocabulary Builder

ideology—(ih dee AHL uh jee) *n.* a system of ideas that guides an individual, movement, or political program

▼ Huge numbers of people turned out for Nazi Party rallies.

▼ Mussolini spread his ideal of Italian military supremacy to Italian children through the Young Fascists.



Thinking Critically

- 1. Draw Inferences** Why did totalitarian governments try to win the loyalty of their nations' young people?
- 2. Recognize Ideologies** Why did leaders honor women for having many children?



A Fascist Childhood

Children were required to use notebooks that featured fascist drawings and quotes from Mussolini.




The Appeal of Fascism Given its restrictions on individual freedom, why did fascism appeal to many Italians? First, it promised a strong, stable government and an end to the political feuding that had paralyzed democracy in Italy. Mussolini projected a sense of power and confidence at a time of disorder and despair. Mussolini's intense nationalism also revived national pride.

At first, newspapers in Britain, France, and North America applauded the discipline and order of Mussolini's government. "He got the trains running on time," admirers said. Only later, when Mussolini embarked on a course of foreign conquest, did Western democracies protest.

Fascism Compared to Communism Fascists were the sworn enemies of socialists and communists. While communists worked for international change, fascists pursued nationalist goals. Fascists supported a society with defined classes. They found allies among business leaders, wealthy landowners, and the lower middle class. Communists touted a classless society. They won support among both urban and agricultural workers.

Despite such differences, the products of these two ideologies had much in common. Both drew their power by inspiring a blind devotion to the state, or a charismatic leader as the embodiment of the state. Both used terror to guard their power. Both flourished during economic hard times by promoting extreme programs of social change. In both, a party elite claimed to rule in the name of the national interest.

 **Checkpoint** Describe the similarities between fascism and communism.

Looking Ahead

Three systems of government competed for influence in postwar Europe. Democracy endured in Britain and France but faced an uphill struggle in hard times. Communism emerged in Russia and won support elsewhere. In Italy, fascism offered a different option. As the Great Depression spread, other nations—most notably Germany—looked to fascist leaders.

SECTION 3 Assessment

Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-quiz with vocabulary practice
Web Code: naa-2831

Terms, People, and Places

1. For each term listed at the beginning of the section, write a sentence explaining its significance.

Note Taking

2. **Reading Skill: Identify Main Ideas** Use your completed flowchart and table to answer the section Focus Question: How and why did fascism rise in Italy?

Comprehension and Critical Thinking

3. **Recognize Cause and Effect** What problems did Italy face after World War I? How did these problems help Mussolini win power?

4. **Summarize** Describe one of Mussolini's economic or social goals, and explain the actions he took to achieve it.
5. **Compare and Contrast** List two similarities and two differences between fascism and communism.
6. **Identify Point of View** Mussolini said, "Machines and women are the two main causes of unemployment."
(a) What do you think he meant?
(b) How did Mussolini's policies reflect his attitude toward women?

Writing About History

Quick Write: Write a Thesis Statement

A compare-and-contrast thesis statement should introduce the items you are comparing and the point you intend to make. Which of the following thesis statements would work best for a compare-and-contrast essay?

- Fascism and communism are very different ideologies, but they both led to the imposition of totalitarian governments.
- Fascism led to a totalitarian government in Italy.