

1919-1940 Italy

- **Turn of the 20th Century:** Start of the "Southern Question."
- **1913:** Baseline value of the Lira before WWI.
- **1915:** Treaty of London.
- **1919:**
 - Treaty of St. Germain.
 - Start of the Biennio Rosso (until 1920).
 - Mussolini founds the Fasci Italiani di Combattimento.
 - 1919 elections.
- **1919-1920:** The "Red Two Years" (Biennio Rosso).
- **1920:** Lira worth one-sixth of its 1913 value; unemployment reaches 2 million.
- **1920:** Fascist membership grew tenfold in the last 7 months of the year.
- **1921:**
 - Mussolini drops certain earlier policies.
 - Pact of Pacification (failed).
 - 1921 elections.
 - Fascist movement becomes the National Fascist Party.
- **1922:**
 - Clashes between Fascists and anti-Fascists.
 - march on rome: Mussolini becomes Prime Minister.
 - Grand Council of Fascism established (December).
- **1922-1928:** Crushing of the Libyan Revolt.
- **1923:**
 - Corfu Crisis.
 - Acerbo Law passed.
- **1924:**
 - Fiume gained by Italy (Pact of Rome).
 - General Election.

- Mussolini backs Ahmed Zog in Albania.
 - Matteotti killing
- **1924-1926:** Italian influence in Albania.
- **1925:**
 - Locarno Treaty.
 - Mussolini declares he will take decisive action against the opposition.
- **1926:**
 - Rule by Decree II.
 - Opposition parties dissolved; trade unions abolished.
 - Fascist officials (podesta) replace mayors.
 - State defense law and special courts established.
 - Treaty of Friendship with Albania.
- **1928:**
 - Kellog-Briand Pact.
 - Universal suffrage terminated; King loses power to appoint PM.
 - Full scale war in Libya.
 - Treaty of Friendship with Abyssinia.
- **1896:** Battle of Adwa.
- **1929:** Lateran Pacts.
- **1932:** Unemployment reaches 1,000,000.
- **1934:** Walwal incident.
- **1934-1936:** Abyssinian Crisis.
- **1935:**
 - Franco-Italian agreement.
 - Stresa Pact.
 - Temporary Neutrality Act in the US.
 - Mussolini sends troops to Eritrea and Somaliland.
 - Second Italo-Ethiopian War begins (October).

- League of Nations imposes sanctions on Italy.
- Hoare-Laval Pact.
- **1936:**
 - Remilitarization of the Rhineland.
 - Start of the Spanish Civil War (until 1939).
 - Rome-Berlin Axis formed.
- **1937:** Italy withdraws from the League of Nations. Anti-Comintern pact.
- **1938:** Munich Agreement.
- **1939:**
 - Invasion of Albania.
 - Pact of Steel.
 - Start of World War II (September).
- **1940:** Italy enters World War II.

Statistics:

- **Turn of the 20th Century:** Illiteracy: 11% in the North, 90% in some areas of the South.
- **By 1920:** Lira worth one-sixth of its 1913 value; unemployment reaches 2 million.
- **Biennio Rosso:** 400,000 metal workers occupied factories; rural militants took 27,000 hectares of land.
- **1919 elections:** PSI obtains over 32% of the vote.
- **Last 7 months of 1920:** Fascist membership grew tenfold.
- **1921 elections:** Mussolini's movement gained 7% of seats.
- **1923:** Compensation of 50 million lire from Greece after the Corfu crisis.
- Industrial production had fallen by 25% by the great depression.
- Mussolini spent 1/3 of Italy's army stock on the Spanish Civil War.
- **1924 election:** The fascists increase parliamentary representation to 374 seats.

Conditions for Mussolini's Rise to Power

Economic & Social Factors

- Modern Italy was a constitutional monarchy but they still faced economic, social and political challenges.
- The Southern Question: By the turn of the 20th century, illiteracy in the north was only 11 per cent but soared to 90 per cent in some areas of the south. This social divide between north and south became known as the 'Southern Question'.
- Conflict Between Church & State, the Roman Question: Italian unification saw the annexation of the Papal States as well as the Pope losing his political power. The pope refused to recognize the legitimacy of the Italian state. Italian Catholics who formed the majority saw themselves torn between political citizenship and religious belief. This wasn't resolved until 1929. The church was influential, the PPI was one of the largest parties and it was led by Don Luigi Sturzo (a member of clergy).
- After the war, Italy was left in great debt and experienced high inflation rates. By 1920, the Lira was worth only one-sixth of its 1913 value. Ex-soldiers joined the unemployed which reached 2 million by 1920. These problems eroded the middle class's savings as well as the wages of the workers. Discontent and radicalization increased.
- The Red Two Years or Biennio Rosso (1919-20) saw protests against the post-war social and economic conditions inspired by the events of the Russian revolution. Industrial workers and peasants across Italy occupied factories and land. Specifically, 400,000 metal workers took part, affecting powerful companies like the Fiat automobile company, they occupied factories. Rural militants took 27,000 hectares of land. Violence and looting spread through the country and the government was unable to decide on a solution due to internal dissent surrounding how to respond but then pm Giolitti also refused to use force against the protestors in fear of revolution. Industrialists and landowners turned to paramilitary organizations. However, socialist parties like the PSI and CGL failed to see and maximize the revolutionary potential of the movement.

Impact of War

- The Treaty of London (1915) has promised Italy South Tyrol, Istria, Trentino, Trieste, part of Dalmatia, Adalia, some Aegean islands and a protectorate over Albania.
- The Treaty of St Germain (1919) did not grant Italy Dalmatia, neither did they grant Fiume (which was Italian speaking) or any former German colonies. Italians became resentful of the Treaty.
- After the war, Italy was left in great debt and experienced high inflation rates. Ex-soldiers joined the unemployed which reached 2 million by 1920. These

problems eroded the middle class's savings as well as the wages of the workers. Discontent and radicalization increased.

Weakness of Political System

- Italy was a parliamentary constitutional monarchy that, as a relatively young country in Europe, had limited democratic experience. The largest parties were the PSI, PPI and Christian Democrats. The system of proportional representation with multi-party system made it difficult for any party to obtain 50 percent of the vote and coalitions needed to be formed. Coalition forming was difficult (transformismo), promoting social and political agitation. The 1919 elections saw the PSI obtain over 32% of the vote yet they were not able to form a government of their own.

Methods used to establish an authoritarian state

Use of Force & Coercion

- In 1919, Mussolini founded the Italian Combat Group or Fasci Italiani di Combattimento. There were many regional fasci groups consisting of ex-soldiers who were outraged by the mutilated peace and wanted to defend against bolsheviks but Mussolini's charisma and political skills convinced people of his ability to contribute at a national level. During the biennio rosso, fascist squads rallied, fueled by the fear of landowners, businessmen and the middle class/petit bourgeoisie. The police ignored orders to suppress them and sometimes even contributed by granting weapons. The solution of fascist intervention was popular. Their membership grew tenfold during the last 7 months of 1920.
- Throughout 1922, clashes between Fascist and anti-Fascist forces spread across north and central Italy. One coalition government succeeded another but none were able to pacify the country or gain the support to rule. Having broken up a socialist strike in July, Mussolini was seen as the only one capable of restoring order. Fascist leaders announced a march on Rome, with or without Mussolini. Mussolini was uncertain and eager to avoid a clash with the army but he needed to appease the king and announced the march. Mussolini was able to join the coalition and the king Victor Emmanuel III refused to implement martial law, instead granting Mussolini prime ministership, making him the head of the coalition.

Ideology & Agenda (Persuasion)

- Mussolini said that Fascism was not a doctrine but a movement and it had to therefore change according to the circumstances.
- Roman empire aspirations

- Irredentism
- Mussolini's early fascism can be labelled reactionary. It reacted against the rise of radical leftism, it reacted against Italy's mutilated victory in World War 1, it reacted against the weakness of Italy's parliamentary democracy.
- This strategy did not work and in 1919, Mussolini's movement didn't gain a single seat in parliament.
- Over time, Fascist ideology changed. Mussolini was becoming concerned about the use of force, the regional leaders or ras were challenging him in terms of power. He also worried that the violence was eroding support for them.
- By 1921, Mussolini dropped his anti-catholic concerns (he dropped the idea of redistribution of land). He dropped calls for universal suffrage as he did in 1919, he embraced a more corporatist platform, he dropped calls for land reform and called for respect for private property and private enterprise. Yet, he still maintained calls for improvements in Italian working conditions despite maintaining an anti radical leftism stance (he tried to reconcile with socialists through the pact of pacification in 1921 but it didn't work). He also proposed a strong foreign policy for irredentism compared to the peaceful diplomatic stance he called for in 1919.
- This led to him getting 7% of seats in the 1921 elections, significantly more than in 1919 but still not enough.

Role of Leaders (Persuasion)

- As stated above, he helped mold ideology.
- As stated before that, his political ability and charisma allowed him to stand out from other local fascist leaders.
- He was able to manage the ras and prevent them from getting too powerful. The ras were very powerful and could've deposed him but recognized his worth. In 1921, the fascist movement became a national party called the national fascist party and Mussolini became the head of the executive committee being called il duce.
- Mussolini was a prominent writer, having written Avanti before.

Propaganda (Persuasion)

- Romanita, fascist party logo was a lictors axe, a symbol of Roman authority and Roman strength through unity.
- Mainly used traditional forms like posters and newspapers (radio, television and talking movies did not exist).

- Il Popolo d'Italia was a newspaper run by Mussolini and served as a way to unite fascist groups. This was the party's main political tool.
- PNF (national fascist party) party motto: 'order, discipline, hierarchy;'
- Fear based propaganda: castor oil.
- Their propaganda often consisted of attacks against the PSI, the biggest socialist party. They were accused of being a "Russian army" and soviet puppets.
- Their propaganda also used the term "mutilated victory" to describe Italian nationalists' dissatisfaction at the end of WW1.
- Cult of personality around Mussolini.

Mussolini's consolidation of power (1922-1927)

Legal Methods

Rule by decree (November 1922): Parliament gave Mussolini the rule to decree for one year, allowing him to pass laws without consulting congress. It was claimed to only be a temporary measure until Italy stabilized. He was supported by many conservatives and liberals like Giolitti.

Acerbo Law (1923)

Mussolini proposed that the political party that received the majority vote should win 2/3 of seats in the chamber of deputies. This made it practically impossible for the fascist party and its allies to be voted out of parliament.

He argued that it would prevent weak government coalitions like the ones of liberal Italy and that it would allow a more decisive government.

A majority in the parliament supported it. MPs were fond of a government that would continue to persecute the left while preventing weak coalitions.

In 1923, Mussolini also offered to help the church by helping the struggling Catholic bank, making religious education compulsory and banning contraception.

Rule by Decree II (1926)

Having a majority in parliament, Mussolini once again passed the rule by decree although this time he had the power to permanently pass laws without consulting parliament. This effectively gave him dictatorial power.

By November 1926, opposition political parties were dissolved. Mussolini abolished trade unions with all labor organizations being required to join fascist syndicates.

In 1926, Fascist officials (podesta) replaced Mayors in the local communities, another step in his centralization of power.

In 1926, Mussolini set up special kangaroo courts with the state defence law, for trying political crimes.

In 1928, universal suffrage was terminated and the king lost power to appoint the PM.

Lateran Pacts (1929): Lateran treaty recognized the vatican city as an independent sovereign state. In return, the vatican recognized the kingdom of italy, with rome as its capital. This treaty ended "the roman question". It also saw catholicism be established as the state religion of italy, this was known as the concordat. The italian government also agreed to pay the vatican a substantial sum as compensation for the loss of the papal states.

Use of Force

Armed fascists patrolled the chamber of deputies during the passing of the acerbo law.

It was suspected that a significant proportion of mussolinis votes in the 1924 election came from ballot rigging and blackshirt intimidation. Opposition was heavily suppressed, especially the communists and socialists who were against fascism.

In 1924, Mussolini ordered a hit squad to assassinate the socialist leader Giacomo matteotti. In 1925, Mussolini made a speech in the chamber of deputies declaring that he would increase his personal power and take decisive action against the opposition. He destroyed democracy in 1925 by enforcing press censorship and banning political opposition from meeting using the help of the king, parliament and blackshirts.

He also created a secret policy known as the OVRA.

Role of Leader

The Grand Council of Fascism (December 1922)

Mussolini created it to obtain control of the party. He awarded himself the power to make all appointments to the council, giving him the ability to better influence fascist policy.

He did this to centralise power and assert his position as he had conflicting interesr with the provincial fascist leaders in italy or the ras. They wanted a more decentralised fascist state where mussolini wanted a monolithis one.

He further diminished the power of the ras by merging individual fascist squads into a 30,000 men national militia. This was essentially his private army to be used to suppress opposition.

The General Election of 1924

It followed the acerbo law and saw the fascists increase parliamentary representation to 374, most of it being a result of mussolinis public popularity.

He was adored nationwide with his rallies seeing thousands. He propagated fascist ideology to increase party membership and his support base.

Use of propaganda

Foreign policy (explained in section below)

Foreign Policy under Mussolini

Mussolini was hostile to France because he wished to exert influence in French North Africa supporting opposition movements in Tunisia and Morocco.

Mussolini had claims over Corsica, Nice and Sardinia.

Mussolini wanted to replace French influence in the Balkans and around the Adriatic.

1923: Corfu Crisis

The aspiration of gaining influence in the Eastern Mediterranean was a goal of Italian nationalism. Mussolini invaded Corfu after the killing of General Tellini. Mussolini withdrew after receiving a compensation of 50 million lire from the Greeks along with Britain's threat of naval intervention. Mussolini learnt that he could only bully smaller states and went on to cultivate good relations with powerful states like Britain. He developed a good relationship with Austen Chamberlain.

1924: Fiume

Mussolini sent a commander to rule over Fiume and gained the disputed port. The Pact of Rome saw Yugoslavia give in and the port was ceded to Italy. This led Mussolini to believe that he could intimidate Yugoslavia and undermine French influence there. He tried to destabilize the country by funding ethnic separatist groups like the Croats.

1925: Locarno Treaty

Mussolini wanted to present himself as a force for moderation in Western Europe. He met with European leaders in Locarno to secure the post-war settlement and settle relations with Germany. Mussolini played a key role in the meetings despite being unable to get an Italian border with Austria.

1924-1926: Albania

Mussolini backed Ahmed Zog to take power in Albania in 1924. Mussolini invested in the regime leading to a treaty of friendship in 1926 through which Albania became an Italian protectorate.

1928: Kellogg-Briand Pact

Italy was a signatory to the pact which denounced the use of war as a means to resolve disputes. Mussolini said that the pact was “so sublime that it should be called transcendental”

Nevertheless in direct breach of the Treaty of Versailles, Mussolini funded right wing groups in Germany and secretly trained German pilots in Italy.

1922-1928: Crushing of the Libyan Revolt

Libya was an Italian colony but experienced large amounts of protest and unrest. Mussolini brutally crushed a revolt from 1922-28 and devolved into a full scale war in 1928. This war showcased Mussolini's use of mass force and mass execution.

1928: Treaty of Friendship with Abyssinia

Mussolini, rather cynically signed a treaty of “friendship” with Abyssinia despite later going to war with them. This saw Mussolini gaining economic influence in Ethiopia including infrastructure such as a road. Mussolini would later build upon this for his invasion. Italy initially planned the venture with Britain (since 1926) but Britain backed out due to popular pressure.

1934- 1936: Abyssinian Crisis

Causes: Italy was suffering from the great depression, Industrial production had fallen by 25% and unemployment was 1,000,000 by 1932. A successful colonial war could quell unrest at home, especially one which reversed the humiliation of Adwa (1896).

Abyssinia was unprepared for war in 1935 and Italy had a technological advantage. Haile Selassie just became a king and started modernization reforms.

Mussolini wanted to create/revive the Roman empire and believed that Abyssinia was uncivilized.

Italy did not make the territorial gains it believed were promised to them in the 1915 treaty of London.

Mussolini believed that France and Britain wouldnt interfere.

The Franco-Italian agreement(1935) offered Italy territorial concessions (parts of French Somaliland, Aouzou Strip, and status changes in Tunisia) and a free hand in Ethiopia in exchange for Italian support against German aggression, which ultimately was not provided.

The Stresa Pact (1935) between Britain, France, and Italy aimed to counter German rearmament but indirectly encouraged Mussolini's ambitions in Abyssinia by prioritizing European security over colonial disputes.

The League of Nations policy of collective security had been weakened by the Manchuria crisis.

Outbreak:

Walwal incident (1934): A force of 1000 Ethiopian militia requested that the Italian garrison at the fort in Walwal withdraw to Italian Somaliland. This dispute eventually broke out into a battle which saw the militia defeat the Italian garrison.

Mussolini then asked for an apology and compensation after which Ethiopia appealed to the League of Nations. The league's response was inconclusive and absolved both parties of culpability.

In 1935: Mussolini began sending troops to Eritrea and Somaliland, colonies on Ethiopia's borders. Ethiopia once again appealed to the league to no avail. France gave Italy a free hand in Ethiopia as mentioned in the Franco-Italian agreement while Britain allowed Italy unhindered access to eastern Africa by keeping the Suez Canal open and clearing its warships from the Mediterranean Sea. Britain embargoes arm sales to both Italy and Ethiopia, harming the latter more.

The 2nd Italo-Ethiopian war began in October 1935 after which the league voted to impose sanctions on Italy. The sanctions were limited (coal, oil and steel were exempt). It had little effect on Italian economic conditions, at least not enough to force a withdrawal. The sanctions were short and lasted less than a year. The Suez Canal still remained open.

Italy withdrew from the league in 1937.

The invasion allowed Italy to use the region for economic purposes and extract its raw materials.

It increased Mussolini's prestige, showing that he was expanding the empire and keeping his promise to restore Italy's glory.

1935: Hoare-Laval Pact

In 1935, France and Britain, bypassing the league, attempted to negotiate a secret alliance with Italy which proposed that Italy gets large areas of Ethiopia in exchange for ending the war and maintaining the anti-German alliance. When its details were revealed in public, Britain and France was forced to back out due to public pressure.

1936-1939: Spanish Civil War

Together with Germany, Italy supported Franco's nationalist group in a coup to overthrow the republic. Franco was victorious and Spain became fascist. Mussolini believed that having another fascist government in the Mediterranean would make it easier for Italy to pursue its goals in the region.

Italy did not benefit and was harmed by its involvement. Mussolini spent 1/3 of Italy's army stock on the war, showcasing Italy's military weakness.

Spain did not end up becoming a satellite state for Italy as Mussolini hoped and they remained neutral in WW2.

A positive is that it brought Italy closer to Germany, leading to the Rome-Berlin Axis.

During the war, Italian attacks on supply ships increased tensions with France and Britain but Britain didn't intervene as they believed that Spain was becoming a puppet of far-left socialists so Germany and Italy's intervention was somewhat desirable.

Rome-Berlin Axis (1936)

Italy and Germany formed a coalition agreeing to recognize Britain, France and Russia as common enemies. It wasn't a military alliance but laid the groundwork for the Pact of Steel in 1939 which formalised Italy's alliance with Germany.

It helped Mussolini strengthen ties with Germany and as a result strengthened Italy's position by moving closer to a strong ally in the likely emergence of war.

Britain and France continued the appeasement policy and didn't take immediate action, it was a predictable event that did not stun Britain and France despite being a point of concern.

Anti-Comintern Pact (1937):

The Anti-Comintern Pact was created to oppose the Soviet Organisation Communist International. Italy grew closer to Germany and laid the groundwork for the integration of Japan into the Axis powers. Mussolini benefitted as it fed into fascist opposition of communism which was well received by the nationalists and conservatives of Italy.

Munich Agreement (1938):

The Munich Agreement, in response to the Sudetenland crisis, allowed Hitler to quickly take over the region. Mussolini was believed to have acted as a moderator, bridging the interests of Britain, France and Germany. In hindsight, he was advocating for Hitler's interests. Still, he successfully portrayed himself as the saviour of peace in Europe, increasing his prestige. By then Mussolini believed he could win against France with Germany's help.

Invasion of Albania (1939):

Italy invaded Albania, it wasn't that important as Albania was already a satellite state. The goal was to intimidate Yugoslavia and control the Adriatic Sea. By taking over Albania, he continued to pursue his expansionary policy and it was successful domestically as Mussolini was stressing that Italians were superior through the show of

military strength. Britain condemned the action and guaranteed Greek borders, irritating Mussolini who believed in Italy's rights in Greece (Corfu).

Pact of Steel (1939)

Formalised the Rome-Berlin axis and formed the Axis powers between Germany, Italy and Japan. This was one of the last steps before the German invasion of Poland. Mussolini declared Italy non-belligerent until 1940 when Italy joined seeing the victorious German offensive against Britain and France. He then believed he had a chance to achieve complete control in the Mediterranean and increase Italy's status. Not joining the war would be seen as an embarrassment for Mussolini who wanted to be seen as the strong and decisive Duce.

WW2:

Mussolini did not immediately support Germany in 1939 as he believed that Italy was not ready for the conflict. This hurt his public opinion as he previously advocated for war and militarism.

Historiography:

Bluff Policy: He only wanted to acquire and maintain his use of power

Revisionist school: M sought to balance between Britain and Germany, European war was unexpected and unwelcome, He was not committed to democrats or fascists until later in career.

Recent thoughts: A man with objectives and policies, logical decisions were made and well thought out before acting. Sooner or later alliance was the inevitable course of history.