

FASCISM

Key Points

- Fascism is a far-right authoritarian political ideology that emerged in the early 20th century and rose to prominence after World War I in several nations, notably Italy, Germany, and Japan.
- Fascists believe that liberal democracy is obsolete and regard the complete mobilization of society under a totalitarian one-party state, led by a dictator, as necessary to prepare a nation for armed conflict and respond effectively to economic difficulties.
- Fascist regimes are often preoccupied "with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity," culminating in nationalistic and racist ideologies and practices, such as the Holocaust in Nazi Germany.
- The term originated in Italy and is derived from fascio, meaning a bundle of rods, and is used to symbolize strength through unity: a single rod is easily broken, while the bundle is difficult to break.
- After the end of the World War I, fascism rose out of relative obscurity into international prominence, with fascist regimes forming most notably in Italy, Germany, and Japan, the three of which would be allied in World War II.
- Fascist Benito Mussolini seized power in Italy in 1922 and Adolf Hitler had successfully consolidated his power in Germany by 1933.

Fascism is a form of radical authoritarian nationalism that came to prominence in early 20th-century Europe, characterized by one-party totalitarian regimes run by charismatic dictators, glorification of violence, and racist ideology.

Fascism is a form of radical authoritarian nationalism that came to prominence in early 20th-century Europe. The first fascist movements emerged in Italy during World War I, then spread to other European countries. Opposed to liberalism, Marxism, and anarchism, fascism is usually placed on the far-right within the traditional left-right spectrum.

Fascist Ideologies

Fascists saw World War I as a revolution that brought massive changes to the nature of war, society, the state, and technology. The advent of total war and the total mass mobilization of society had broken down the distinction between civilians and combatants. A "military citizenship" arose in which all citizens were involved with the military in some manner during the war. The war resulted in the rise of a powerful state capable of mobilizing millions of people to serve on the front lines and providing economic production and logistics to support them, as well as having unprecedented authority to intervene in the lives of citizens.

Fascists believe that liberal democracy is obsolete, and they regard the complete mobilization of society under a totalitarian one-party state as necessary to prepare a nation for armed conflict and respond effectively to economic difficulties. Such a state is led by a strong leader—such as a dictator and a martial government composed of the members of the governing fascist party—to forge national unity and maintain a stable and orderly society. Fascism rejects assertions that violence is automatically negative in nature, and views political violence, war, and imperialism as means that can achieve national rejuvenation. Fascists advocate a mixed economy with the principal goal of achieving autarky (self-sufficiency) through protectionist and interventionist economic policies.

Historian Robert Paxton says that fascism is "a form of political behavior marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and 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."

Since the end of World War II in 1945, few parties have openly described themselves as fascist, and the term is instead now usually used pejoratively by political opponents. The terms neo-fascist or post-fascist are sometimes applied more formally to describe parties of the far right with ideologies similar to or rooted in 20th century fascist movements.

The term fascist comes from the Italian word fascismo, derived from fascio meaning a bundle of rods, ultimately from the Latin word fasces. This was the name given to political organizations in

Italy known as fasci, groups similar to guilds or syndicates. At first, it was applied mainly to organizations on the political left. In 1919, Benito Mussolini founded the Fasci Italiani di Combattimento in Milan, which became the Partito Nazionale Fascista (National Fascist Party) two years later. The Fascists came to associate the term with the ancient Roman fasces or fascio littorio—a bundle of rods tied around an axe, an ancient Roman symbol of the authority of the civic magistrate carried by his lictors, which could be used for corporal and capital punishment at his command. The symbolism of the fasces suggested strength through unity: a single rod is easily broken, while the bundle is difficult to break.

Early History of Fascism (go through it briefly)

At the outbreak of World War I in August 1914, the Italian political left became severely split over its position on the war. The Italian Socialist Party (PSI) opposed the war but a number of Italian revolutionary syndicalists supported war against Germany and Austria-Hungary on the grounds that their reactionary regimes had to be defeated to ensure the success of socialism. Angelo Oliviero Olivetti formed a pro-interventionist fascio called the Fasci of International Action in October 1914. Benito Mussolini, upon expulsion from his position as chief editor of the PSI's newspaper *Avanti!* for his anti-German stance, joined the interventionist cause in a separate fascio. The term "Fascism" was first used in 1915 by members of Mussolini's movement, the Fasci of Revolutionary Action.

The first meeting of the Fasci of Revolutionary Action was held in January 1915 when Mussolini declared that it was necessary for Europe to resolve its national problems—including national borders—of Italy and elsewhere "for the ideals of justice and liberty for which oppressed peoples must acquire the right to belong to those national communities from which they descended." Attempts to hold mass meetings were ineffective, and the organization was regularly harassed by government authorities and socialists.

Similar political ideas arose in Germany after the outbreak of the war. German sociologist Johann Plenge spoke of the rise of a "National Socialism" in Germany within what he termed the "ideas of 1914" that were a declaration of war against the "ideas of 1789" (the French Revolution).

According to Plenge, the "ideas of 1789" that included rights of man, democracy, individualism and liberalism were being rejected in favor of "the ideas of 1914" that included "German values" of duty, discipline, law, and order. Plenge believed that racial solidarity (*Volksgemeinschaft*) would replace class division and that "racial comrades" would unite to create a socialist society in the struggle of "proletarian" Germany against "capitalist" Britain. He believed that the "Spirit of 1914" manifested itself in the concept of the "People's League of National Socialism."

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The Rise of Fascism in Italy (imp)

Key Points

- The rise of fascism in Italy began during World War I, when Benito Mussolini and other radicals formed a political group (called a fascio) supporting the war against Germany and Austria-Hungary.
- The first meeting of Mussolini's Fasci of Revolutionary Action was held on January 24, 1915.
- For the next several years, the small group of fascists took part in political actions, taking advantage of worker strikes to incite violence.
- Around 1921, the fascists began to align themselves with mainstream conservatives, increasing membership exponentially.
- Beginning in 1922, Fascist paramilitaries escalated their strategy from attacking socialist offices and homes of socialist leadership figures to violent occupation of cities, eventually setting their sites on Rome.
- During the so-called "March on Rome," Mussolini was appointed Prime Minister of Italy.
- From 1925 to 1929, Fascism steadily became entrenched in power. Opposition deputies were denied access to parliament, censorship was introduced, and a December 1925 decree made Mussolini solely responsible to the King.

Italian Fascism, also known simply as Fascism, is the original fascist ideology as developed in Italy. The ideology is associated with the Fascist Revolutionary Party (PFR), founded in 1915; the succeeding National Fascist Party (PNF) in 1921, which under Benito Mussolini ruled the Kingdom of Italy from 1922 until 1943; the Republican Fascist Party that ruled the Italian Social Republic from 1943 to 1945; and the post-war Italian Social Movement and subsequent Italian neo-fascist movements.

Italian Fascism was rooted in Italian nationalism and the desire to restore and expand Italian territories, deemed necessary for a nation to assert its superiority and strength and avoid succumbing to decay. Italian Fascists claimed that modern Italy is the heir to ancient Rome and its legacy, and historically supported the creation of an Italian Empire to provide spazio vitale ("living space") for colonization by Italian settlers and to establish control over the Mediterranean Sea.

Italian Fascism promoted a corporatist economic system whereby employer and employee syndicates were linked together in associations to collectively represent the nation's economic producers and work alongside the state to set national economic policy. This economic system intended to resolve class conflict through collaboration between the classes.

The mood of pretty big part of the ex-soldiers had common and specific features. In their minds intimately combined nationalist and revolutionary slogans of the era: "We were betrayed" by the Allies who had abused over the blood that had been shed by the Italians in the war! – This kind of sentiment, fueled by nationalistic propaganda was multiplied with the desire for social change, poured into a vague slogan of "saving the nation", "strengthening of its dignity. All this determines the transition of former soldiers to the position of fascism, with its nationalistic and social slogans.

The first meeting of the Fasci of Revolutionary Action was held on January 24, 1915, led by Benito Mussolini. In the next few years, the relatively small group was various political actions. In 1920, militant strike activity by industrial workers reached its peak in Italy. Mussolini and the Fascists took advantage of the situation by allying with industrial businesses and attacking workers and peasants in the name of preserving order and internal peace in Italy.

Fascists identified their primary opponents as the majority of socialists on the left who had opposed intervention in World War I. The Fascists and the Italian political right held common ground: both held Marxism in contempt, discounted class consciousness, and believed in the rule of elites. Fascism began to accommodate Italian conservatives by making major alterations to its political agenda—abandoning its previous populism, republicanism, and anticlericalism, adopting policies in support of free enterprise, and accepting the Roman Catholic Church and the monarchy as institutions in Italy.

To appeal to Italian conservatives, Fascism adopted policies such as promoting family values, including policies designed to reduce the number of women in the workforce by limiting the woman's role to that of a mother. The fascists banned literature on birth control and increased penalties for abortion in 1926, declaring both crimes against the state. Though Fascism adopted a number of positions designed to appeal to reactionaries, the Fascists sought to maintain Fascism's revolutionary character, with Angelo Oliviero Olivetti saying "Fascism would like to be conservative, but it will [be] by being revolutionary." The Fascists supported revolutionary action and committed to secure law and order to appeal to both conservatives and syndicalists.

Prior to Fascism's accommodation of the political right, Fascism was a small, urban, northern Italian movement that had about a thousand members. After Fascism's accommodation of the political right, the Fascist movement's membership soared to approximately 250,000 by 1921.

Fascists Seize Power

Beginning in 1922, Fascist paramilitaries escalated their strategy from attacking socialist offices and homes of socialist leadership figures to violent occupation of cities. The Fascists met little serious resistance from authorities and proceeded to take over several northern Italian cities. The Fascists attacked the headquarters of socialist and Catholic labor unions in Cremona and imposed forced Italianization upon the German-speaking population of Trent and Bolzano. After seizing these cities, the Fascists made plans to take Rome.

On October 24, 1922, the Fascist party held its annual congress in Naples, where Mussolini ordered Blackshirts to take control of public buildings and trains and converge on three points

around Rome. The Fascists managed to seize control of several post offices and trains in northern Italy while the Italian government, led by a left-wing coalition, was internally divided and unable to respond to the Fascist advances. King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy thought the risk of bloodshed in Rome to disperse the Fascists was too high. Victor Emmanuel III decided to appoint Mussolini as Prime Minister of Italy, and Mussolini arrived in Rome on October 30 to accept the appointment. Fascist propaganda aggrandized this event, known as "March on Rome," as a "seizure" of power because of Fascists' heroic exploits.

Although there was a pact and exacerbated divisions within the fascism between the supporters of strengthening terror – the extremists and so-called moderates in the general conclusion, it was a serious mistake of socialists. Fascism by its nature would not yield to any form was "pacification". For so-called moderate fascists, this pact was a maneuver by which they hoped to prevent a further increase in the resistance of workers and consolidate its position in the political circles of the bourgeoisie. As for the fascists and extremists, they have never for a moment stopped terror.

The conclusion was simple: all the interests of private (individual) and group (family, corporation, class, etc.) must obey the supreme interests of the nation. Hence, the fascist conception of the state is: "The state is the legal embodiment of the Nation. Political institutions are effective, only insofar as national values are there expressed and protection as well". In other words, if the State does not meet the "interests of the nation", then "in the name of these interests" it can and must be replaced.

Italy became the first country where there was a triumph of fascism. Fascist organization emerged in the spring of 1919, and in 1922 had already seized power. So fast, in a historical scale – almost instant growth in the influence of motion, there had to be something caused.

Also fascism attracted people by its nationalism. At first it had its effect on soldiers, and then the great mass of those who were afraid of "patriotism" of "red". In general, mistakes that had been made by socialists and communists, have greatly contributed to the strengthening of fascism. They underestimated the power of fascism.

The sharp rise of fascism began with the events of September 1920, when both large and small owners feared the actions of the proletariat. They saw that the government cannot protect them. And who can? And the eyes of the owners appealed to the Nazi Party, whose members destroyed by the terror their political rivals – the Socialists and Communists.

Additional reading available at:

[https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/gi-roundtable-series/pamphlets/em-18-what-is-the-future-of-italy-\(1945\)/the-rise-and-fall-of-fascism](https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/gi-roundtable-series/pamphlets/em-18-what-is-the-future-of-italy-(1945)/the-rise-and-fall-of-fascism)