

### The Rise of Fascism

Between the First and Second World Wars, fascist parties emerged across Europe. The main idea of fascism was to destroy the will of the individual in favor of the “people.” Fascists wanted a unified society, but they were not concerned with eliminating private property or class distinctions. Instead, fascists pushed for another identity, one rooted in extreme nationalism, which often relied on racial identity.

Fascism is a division of totalitarianism. A totalitarian ruler rules absolutely, attempting to control every aspect of citizens’ lives. Fascists are a little different because they rely heavily on nationalism. Their particular brand of nationalism is racism. This means that all the power was in the hands of one militaristic leader. There are a few countries in which fascism rose, in Russia under Stalin, Italy under Mussolini and Germany under Hitler.

1. Define fascism.
2. Define totalitarianism.

### Italy: The First Fascist State

Italy was going through many problems after World War I. Italy had 600,000 deaths and received nothing in the Versailles Treaty. The lack of acknowledgement by the Allies, coupled with Post-war problems like national debt, high unemployment, poverty, anger, strikes, riots, and demands for land reform caused Italy to need a change.

Italy was the first state to have a fascist government. The founder of this government was Benito Mussolini, who created the Nationalist Fascist Party in 1919. Mussolini recalled the glories of the ancient Roman Empire, in contrast to the defeat and poverty of the new 20th century. The members of the party, known as **Blackshirts**, fought against the violent movements of Socialists and Communists on the Left. This won them wide support among all of whom feared disorder. By 1921, the party seated its first members in the Italian parliament.

Although the fascists were just starting out and had limited representation, Mussolini demanded that King Victor Emanuel III give him and several other fascists some positions in government. To rally support, Mussolini organized his parliamentary thugs to march to Rome and seize power. Rather than cause a fight between the army and the fascists, the king named Mussolini Prime Minister.

Mussolini faced very little opposition to his consolidation of political power. He took over parliament in 1922. When he did take over Mussolini limited the power of parliament, banned labor unions, abolished rival political parties, set up a secret police, and used the Black Shirts to intimidate opponents. He also used propaganda. He was called "Il Duce" (the Leader), and propaganda photos and documentary films, music, education, television, and parades to help his image. In addition he rejected Democracy, Capitalism, Liberalism, Free Trade, Marxism, and just about everything else, “only the Duce can solve your problems.”

1. What were some problems in post-war Italy?
2. What did Mussolini do when he received all political power?

### Italian Foreign Policy

By 1926 Italy was transformed into a fascist totalitarian regime. To rally the people in a nationalistic cause, Italy started to focus on expansion, mainly in North Africa. Mussolini shifted to a form of aggressive nationalism. An example of this was Corfu, an island he conquered in 1923. He soon set up a puppet regime in Albania and reconquered Libya. It was his dream to make the Mediterranean "mare nostrum" (our sea).

Italy controlled countries in Africa but had failed several times to colonize Ethiopia. In October 1935 Mussolini sent the Italian Army into Ethiopia. The League of Nations condemned Italy's aggression. They made an attempt to ban countries from selling arms, rubber and some metals to Italy.

Over 400,000 Italian troops fought in Ethiopia. The poorly armed Ethiopians were no match for Italy's modern tanks and airplanes. The Italians even used mustard gas on the home forces and were able to capture the capital of the country, in May 1936, forcing Emperor Haile Selassie to flee to England. Adolf Hitler had been inspired by Mussolini's achievements and once he gained power in Germany he sought a close relationship with Italy. In October 1936 the two men signed a non-military alliance.

1. Why did Mussolini turn to an imperialist?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How did Mussolini influence Adolf Hitler?