

AQA A Level History 2L  
Italy and Fascism c.1900 – 1945

Part One: The Crisis of Liberal Italy and the Rise of Mussolini, c.1900-1926

Unit 3: Mussolini and the establishment of Fascist Italy, 1922-1926

- The appointment of Mussolini as prime minister: Mussolini's tactics and the March on Rome; the role of the King; compromises by the ruling elites
- The Fascist movement: the ideology of the Fascist revolution; the different political factions within the Fascist Party; Fascist propaganda; Mussolini as leader
- Mussolini's consolidation of power: compromises with the elites; the use of terror and violence; constitutional change and moves towards a one-party state; exploitation of the popularity of Fascist economic and foreign policy successes
- The Fascist state by 1926: the extent of Mussolini's political control; the extent of popular support for Mussolini's regime; the extent of opposition and dissent

How will you be assessed?

One exam that will take 2 hours 30 minutes.

You are advised to spend around:

- **60 minutes** on the first section (question one based on 3 sources)
- **1 hour 30 minutes** on the second section (answer 2 essay questions)

**7 key questions underpin this course:**

- How stable, secure and united was Italy by 1900?
- How stable, secure and united was Italy by 1915?
- How did the First World War make the problems of Liberal Italy worse?
- Why was Mussolini appointed Prime Minister of Italy in 1922?
- How did Mussolini consolidate his power in the years 1922 to 1926?
- To what extent did Mussolini create 'a nation of fascists'?
- Why did Mussolini fall from power?

## KEY PEOPLE

**Leandro Arpinati (1892-1945)** – He was a friend of Mussolini's before 1914. In 1920, Arpinati was one of the leaders of the squadristi and a vice-secretary in the PNF and a Podesta in Bologna from 1926-29. In 1930, he was accused of being involved in an assassination attempt on Mussolini in 1926, he spent several years under house arrest and in prison. In 1943 he was invited by Mussolini to join the government of the Salo Republic but he refused. He was killed by partisans in 1945.

**Emilio De Bono** – He was an army general who became committed to Fascism after World War One. He was one of the Quadrumvirs who organised and led the March on Rome and later became commander of the fascist militia. In 1935 de Bono was Supreme Commander of the invasion of Ethiopia and promoted to Marshal of the army but was later sacked for being too cautious. In July 1943, he was one of the 17 members of the fascist Grand Council who voted against Mussolini. He was executed for treason by the Salo Republic in 1944.

**Amerigo Dumini** – leader of the Cheka, the secret police department of the Fascist Militia, the MVSN. He was believed to have had direct involvement in the murder of the socialist politician Matteotti in June 1924

**Cesare Mori** – possibly the only provincial prefect (of Bologna) who tried to resist the Fascists before Mussolini became Prime Minister in October 1922.

**Alberto De Stefani** – Initially a Liberal politician, De Stefani later became a Fascist and gained a seat on the Grand Council of Fascism. He served as Finance Minister from 1922 to 1925. His credibility with business and with the old liberal elite made him useful to Mussolini in the early stages of his consolidation of power. Although his policies led to improvements in the Italian economy, he was replaced once the economic momentum began to decrease and Mussolini moved towards more state intervention in the economy.

**Giacomo Matteotti** – Opposed the Fascist party and movement after the First World War. He spoke out in the Chamber of Deputies against the violence used by the fascists during the 1924 elections. Matteotti was subsequently kidnapped and murdered, his body was found in a shallow grave, 23 kilometres from Rome. His murder led to increased criticism of fascism and of Mussolini.

**Achille Starace (1889-1945)** – he was a fanatical nationalist who led Fascist squads during the March on Rome and was the leader of the volunteer Blackshirt militia, the MVSN. He became Party Secretary in 1931 and was seen as a war hero because of his actions in the Abyssinian War. He was replaced as party secretary in 1939 and was sacked as leader of the MVSN for military incompetence. He was arrested in 1943 after the fall of Mussolini and in 1945 was executed in Milan by partisans.

**Tito Zaniboni** – a socialist deputy who tried to assassinate Mussolini in November 1925.

## Example Question 1:

This will always be based on 3 sources and will be worth 30 marks. You should spend about 60 minutes on this type of question. You have to answer question 1!

Source Based Question:

With reference to this source and your understanding of the historical context, assess the value of this source to a historian in explaining Mussolini's response to the murder of Matteotti.

### Source A

**From the official record of the Italian Parliament reporting Mussolini's speech and the reactions to it, 3 January 1925. This followed evidence that Fascists had murdered the Socialist leader Matteotti.**

I declare before this assembly and before the entire Italian people that I assume full political, moral and historical responsibility for all that has happened. (Vigorous applause. Shouts of 'we are with you'.)

Right now, I declare that the problem will be resolved. Fascism, the Government and the Party are completely ready. (Applause.)

Gentlemen, Italy wants peace, tranquillity and calm, by means of love if possible but by force if necessary. (Lively applause.) Within forty-eight hours the situation will be clarified in all areas.

(Prolonged applause.) Everyone must realise that what I am planning to do is not a lust for power, but solely an expression of my unlimited and mighty love for the Fatherland. (Shouts of 'Long Live Mussolini'.)

## KEY WORDS

Acerbo Law – Mussolini's July 1923 reform of elections to guarantee a Fascist victory.

Authoritarian State – A state with a strong government that is able and willing to ignore parliament and suppress dissent.

Aventine Succession – Anti-fascist MPs walked out of Parliament in protest against Fascist violence, hoping that this would encourage the King to sack Mussolini.

Ballot-rigging – Fixing the result of an election by such illegal measures as destroying votes cast for opposition parties or adding fraudulent voting papers.

Cheka – the secret police department of the fascist militia, the MVSN. The leader of the Cheka was Amerigo Dumini. The Cheka took its name from the secret police of the Bolshevik regime in Russia set up by Lenin in 1921.

Civil service – Civil servants advise government ministers on policy and ensure that government policies are carried out.

Coup d'état – the violent overthrow of a government.

Cult of personality – when an individual or state uses propaganda to create a heroic or idealized image of a leader, encouraging unconditional obedience and praise.

Duce – Italian for 'leader'. The term, unlike the term 'Prime Minister', was not a constitutional term and therefore implied that there was no constitutional limits on Mussolini's power.

Grand Council of Fascism – The supreme body within the Fascist movement, which discussed policy proposals and made all the key appointments within the Fascist Party.

Leggi Fascistissime – Fascist laws which banned all opposition parties and organisations.

Mare Nostrum – literally 'our sea' and refers to the foreign policy ambitions of Italy in the Mediterranean.

National Militia (MVSN) – Fascist Squads were converted into a national militia, giving them legal status. The blackshirted militia was under Fascist Party control.

Personal Dictatorship – a regime where a single person, rather than a team of ministers or a political party, holds power. This individual is able to make their own laws and arrest opponents at will.

Podesta – Government appointed officials who were very powerful in Fascist Italy. In northern and central Italy, these posts went to reliable fascists but, in the south where fascists were few, they were usually awarded to members of the existing landlord elite and so this helped to preserve the traditional power structures of the region.

Press Censorship – Newspapers are no longer allowed to criticise the government.

Revisionist State – A state that wanted to change the peace treaties signed after the First World War.

## Example essay question:

The next 2 questions are essays and you choose 2 from 3 possible questions. They are worth 25 marks each. You should spend around 45 minutes on each question. Here is an example:

### Example Essay Question:

'Mussolini was able to consolidate his dictatorship in the years 1922-26 because of the mistakes of the Liberals.' Explain why you agree or disagree with this view. (25marks)

## KEY EVENTS

- 1922** Oct. Mussolini appointed Prime Minister in a coalition government  
Nov. Parliament gave Mussolini the right to rule by decree for a twelve month period  
Dec. Creation of the Grand Council of Fascism strengthened Mussolini's control of the Fascist movement  
Election of Pope Pius XI
- 1923** Jan. Fascist squads converted into a national militia (MVSN)  
July Acerbo law changed the electoral system: the most popular party would always win a majority of members of parliament  
Aug. Corfu Crisis, used by Mussolini to promote Italian power and prestige
- 1924** Jan. Annexation of Fiume – the Pact of Rome sees Yugoslavia cede Fiume to Italy  
Apr. First general election under the Acerbo Law gave Fascists a majority in parliament  
Jun. Murder of Matteotti, a leading Socialist, by Fascists caused a crisis for Mussolini and led to his dictatorship  
July Press censorship introduced
- 1925** Jan. Mussolini announced intention of creating a dictatorship  
Dec. Opposition political parties banned. The Vidoni Palace Pact banned independent trade unions. Mussolini became head of government and Duce  
Locarno Treaties signed, Mussolini able to pose as a major European statesman in the negotiations of these treaties
- 1926** Jan. Mussolini gained the right to make laws without needing the approval of parliament  
Apr. Strikes banned  
Nov. Special Tribunal for the Defence of the State introduced  
Treaty of Friendship increased Italian influence over Albania