Dictators and their Publics

Olympic Stadium
Berlin (1936)
Introduction

Historians of Europe often refer to the 1930s as a period of “democracy in crisis.”

“If there had been no march on Rome, there would be no march on Moscow” (Fascist poster: Italian blackshirt attacks the Russian bear)

• How useful is that description for understanding the popularity of the Italian Fascists and the German National Socialists (Nazis)?

• How do the dictatorships of the interwar period differ from absolutist monarchy?

• Why did people support regimes that were violent, misogynist, and racist?
Fascism and dictators

"Fascism is not a church. It is more like a training ground"—Mussolini, 1922

fasces = “bundle”; in ancient Rome, a bundle of sticks tied together with an axe and symbolic of the authority of the dictator (an elected office)

statue in Cincinnati, Ohio
Roman dictator Cincinnatus gives back the fasces, returns to his plow

### Italian election results, 1919

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>% vote</th>
<th>seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberal-Radical-Democrat</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian Social Democratic</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Party</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radical Party</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian Socialist Party</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian People’s Party (Christian democratic)</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party of Combatants (conservative)</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic-Agrarian Party</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian Reform Socialist</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian Republican Party</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Socialist Party</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dictators and Publics: What’s wrong with democracy?
Key features of Fascism

emphasis on the community, rather than the individual or the class

national *regeneration* as answer to global *degeneration*

central role for the state in all aspects of life

importance of “strength” (masculine and militaristic)

emphasis on law and order, rather than “rights”

external threats or crisis used to silence opposition

*Dictators and their Publics: Democracy in Crisis?*
Key early episodes in Italian Fascism

1919 Fascist League of Combat formed in Milan (anti-communist paramilitary organization)
1920-21 Fascist League violently breaks strikes and assassinates socialist leaders
Oct. 1922 “March on Rome”
1926 strikes and unions outlawed; “Law for the Defense of the State”—other political parties banned
1935-1936 invasion of Ethiopia

Key episodes in early history of Nazism

1918-1919 formation of the Freikorps (Free Corps)
Oct. 1923 Hitler attempts coup (“Beer Hall Putsch”); jailed for over a year
Sep. 1930 Reichstag (parliament) elections: many Communists and Nazis
Jan. 1933 Nazi takeover of government (coalition with conservatives)
Feb. 1933 Reichstag fire provides excuse for repression of opposition
Mar. 1933 “Enabling Act”—cabinet ministers can pass laws without Reichstag
Sep. 1935 Nuremberg Laws deprive Jewish Germans of citizenship
Elected Dictatorship?

Percentage of votes won by NSDAP (Nazis) in Reichstag (parliamentary) elections

- May 1924: 6.5%
- May 1928: 2.6
- Sept. 1930: 18.3
- Nov, 1932: 33.1
- March 1933: 43.9

Party membership

- 1929: 170,000
- 1933: 2,500,000
- 1944: 8,000,000

Membership of Italian National Fascist Party

- late 1920: 20,000
- April 1921: 100,000
- Nov. 1921: 320,000

1932 election poster

Workers Awaken! Vote Nazi!

How popular were Fascism and Nazism? Who was involved?
Political Party or Paramilitary Organization?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WWI Veterans</th>
<th>wounded</th>
<th>other vets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>4,247,000</td>
<td>5,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>953,000</td>
<td>4,600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>4,266,000</td>
<td>3,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Empire</td>
<td>2,090,000</td>
<td>5,900,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria-Hungary</td>
<td>3,620,000</td>
<td>3,300,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

members of Croix de Feu march in Paris, May 1935

Who supported Fascism and Nazism? Great War and militarization of society
Revolution, Civil War, and the Weimar Republic

Oct.-Nov. 1918  mutiny by German navy in Kiel; William II abdicates

Nov. 11  end of war; provisional government formed

Jan. 15, 1919  Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembourg murdered by Free Corps troops

April-May 1919  Bavarian Soviet Republic declared in Munich; brutally repressed by Free Corps

July 1919  constitution of German Republic written and ratified in provincial city of Weimar

George Grosz, *Republican Automatons* (1920)

Great War and Political Upheaval
The “Stab in the Back” (*Dolchstoss*)

“The armistice begins Germany’s humiliation. If the Republic had said, ‘Germans, stand together! Resist the foe! The Fatherland, the Republic expects you to fight to the last,’ then millions today would be fanatical republicans. But now they are foes of the Republic that so discredited the new flag…It was no Treaty of Peace that was signed, but a betrayal. Our movement has three demands: 1. set aside the Peace Treaty; 2. unify all Germans; 3. land and soil to feed our nation. … It desires to make the German once more National, that his Fatherland shall stand for him above everything else.”

Hitler, speech in Munich (April 17, 1923).

Key terms of Treaty of Versailles (between Allied Powers and Germany)

- Germany solely responsible for the war
- Germany lost over 10% of European territory and all overseas colonies
- German military very limited; no weapons manufacture allowed

1923 German poster—masked figure in red stabs German soldier in the back
Hyperinflation, the Great Depression, and the Nazis

Key episodes in early history of Nazism

Oct. 1923 Hitler attempts *coup* ("Beer Hall Putsch"); jailed for over a year

<table>
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<th>How many German Marks make one dollar?</th>
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<tr>
<td>July 1914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 1919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 1923</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Oct. 1929 Wall Street Crash; American firms call in loans to Germany
1930 German industrial production falls 20% from previous year

Sep. 1930 Reichstag (parliament) elections: many Communists and Nazis

late 1931-1932 German industrial production approx. half of pre-Depression
unemployment = 44% of workers

Aug. 1932 Hitler announces he will only stay in government as chancellor
Jan. 1933 Nazi takeover of government (coalition with conservatives)
June 1933 Reinhard Plan expands state spending; builds highways (*autobahn*)
Mar. 1935 Hitler begins open re-armament
To be continued . . .