

Italian and german fascism comparison essay sample



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Introduction

20th century Europe saw the rise and fall of many political factions and styles of government. With the onset of two 'world' wars, that presented the opportunity for multiple changes in power. The desire for change is always there among at least a few people, but war and post-war conditions greatly elevates those desires and helps to initiate revolution and reform, as it did in Europe in the 20th century. World War I gave way to three different styles of rule that have made their own individual stamp upon history and society: Communism, Fascism, and Nazism.

Fascism and Nazism were both formed off the bases of socialism and nationalism, and were in direct opposition to the forces of Communism. But, the two styles of rule usually receive their critiques and analyses separate from one another. The term Fascism, in its most widely known sense, is used in reference to the style of government that had its rise and period of domination in Italy from shortly after the end of World War I through World War II.

And Nazism, of course, is synonymous with the man who might be even bigger than Nazism itself, Adolf Hitler. Considering both the staying power, accomplishments, and everlasting impacts that both Communism and Nazism had and have had not only upon the regions and people that they directly affected, but also throughout the world, through history, and through generations of countless people, it might be easy to understand why Fascism may be the odd man out in the discussion of various iron-fist ruling styles of the 20th century and throughout time.

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But, before that thought is pondered any deeper, one important question must be asked. What is Fascism? Is it just that style of government that was in place in Italy, under the oversight of its dictator Benito Mussolini? Or is it much broader than that? The latter is the correct answer. Fascism comes from a number of influences, and includes more than just elements of nationalism, socialism, and anti-Communism. But, past that, it becomes a little difficult to get a good grasp on just what Fascism is, because one mark of it from its beginning is that it's evolved, time and again. And, in doing so, it has influenced a great many sources, just as it was influenced. One of those happens to be Nazism.

Because of the due that Nazism has received, mostly in part to its appalling inhumanity, strong racist and ethnic ideologies that it employed, and the deep wounds and imprints that it left on history and society, the study of Fascism and the comparison of the two has not received as much of an interest until recent times. And, through a deeper investigation of the two, side by side, reveals a great deal. Fascism and Nazism were certainly different in a number of ways, and not just in their names and the scope of their respective accomplishments and impacts, but they are quite alike in their backgrounds, ideologies, and the way that both were formed and run, and even more so, who was behind them. This paper will go in-depth to explain the rise and fall of both Fascism and Nazism, and analyze the similarities and differences between the two movements.

Body

Well before Benito Mussolini was a thought, much less before his 1922 March on Rome, Italy was a country in constant desire for change. That desire and almost equal need would be one of the main reasons why Il Duce would be able to make his stamp on Italian history. But before he came to 'save the day,' the country was, at best, like an infant not yet able to fully walk on its own. It knew it wanted to do something, and it knew it wanted to get somewhere, but there were just a number of internal factors holding it back.

In the late 19th century, the world was steadily changing. The railroad, the telephone, electricity, industrialization, and, before the end of the 19th century, automobiles, were becoming integrated into a more new, modern world. All of those things we take for granted now, and industrialization is a thing of the past along with the railroad, for the most part, while technology has made the telephone a lot smaller and less bulky than the original. Italy wanted to follow the crowd and turn itself into a modern society, but it was a step behind. A change to a more industrial society for a country deeply rooted in agriculture meant slow growth, at least in comparison with other countries around Europe. A change to a more modern society on the economic and technological side also translated into changes on the social and political fronts. Pre-fascist Italy was a country deeply divided at its social and political core.

The last decade of the 19th century marked the formation of a couple of new political movements in Italy, one of which would become a key piece of the country's immediate future: the Italian Socialist Party, which was formed in 1892 [1]. The violent way that the established political order dealt with

these newcomers and suppressed their attempts at rebellion would be a common theme regarding political movements during the next few decades. That was another one of the country's flaws that held it back. The elite seemed as if they knew that change needed to happen, and was for all intents and purposes, inevitable, but they didn't know how to handle it without feeling a threat to their status and power.

Finally, at the turn of the century, came a leader, in the form of Giovanni Giolitti, who was willing to do what he could to repair the divide, handle the changes, and do whatever it took to bring Italy the success that it was capable of. And, early in his tenure, which spread out over three terms (1903-1905, 1906-1909, and 1911-1914)[2], he helped to bring Italy to unprecedented economic heights and maintained a tolerant attitude of revolutionary groups that other leaders before him had not. However, that success would be short-lived. A depression swept through the country in 1907 and 1908[3], and the results of that would severely stunt the economic progress that had been made.

Throw in an ill-timed war in 1911, directly across the Mediterranean Sea, with the Ottoman Empire over the North African country of Libya in an attempt to make a foray into imperialism and to supposedly defend some of Italy's interests within the country, which was absolutely the last thing that a country who couldn't even get its affairs straight at home needed to do, and that itch for change was back again in full force. And, it did not help the establishment that the Socialists had in fact not only not gone away, but were rising quickly among those most itching for change, and had a new role and new mindset, which involved bitter opposition to the conflict involving <https://assignbuster.com/italian-and-german-fascism-comparison-essay-sample/>

Libya. And, as the Socialists rose higher in the Italian political conscience, so did a young intellectual whose name would soon be known all over the world.

Benito Mussolini was born in the Predappio, in the rebellious region of Romagna, in 1883[4]. He had socialist roots from childhood. His father was one of the new breed of revolutionary socialists, and that was the path that son would eventually follow. His father not only instilled his political background into young Benito, but he also instilled a violent temper that resulted in a number of physical confrontations throughout his time in school.

Despite these confrontations that interrupted and adversely affected his schooling, the young Mussolini was still qualified as a teacher in 1901. The next several years would be marked by a couple of periods of teaching elementary school and working as a laborer, including some time in Switzerland, and it would also be during that time that he would begin to formalize his Socialist future, using the influences of A. O. Olivetti and Sergio Panunzio to formulate his ideas for an direct, active revolution[5].

He made his name first as a socialist journalist in the town of Trent, and then became the editor of a socialist newspaper closer to home, in Forli. It was there in Forli where he would also become the secretary of the local socialist organization[6], and he was on his way. His brains and ambition enabled him to quickly become one of the faces of the party.

He was young, and his way with words and drive endeared him to the youth who were desperate for something worthwhile to rally behind, and that same <https://assignbuster.com/italian-and-german-fascism-comparison-essay-sample/>

intellectual ability, demeanor, and family ties to socialism endeared him to the party leadership. And while that 'drive' had its obvious flaws and bordered on insanity, he was the guy who was best equipped to give the party a boost to the masses. With that in mind, he was promoted to the editorship of the party's newspaper, *Avanti!*. That was where he'd get the most attention, and party leaders knew that they needed it and that he needed it just as much, for his personal gains.

While Mussolini was rising, Giolitti was falling. The economic crisis had resurrected ill feelings among the lower classes, and the masses were once again aching for more. For some time, the country's elite had been hesitant to allow the real majority to have more of a voice in political matters, but with tensions steadily rising, they had to make some concessions to stem the rising tide. The electorate was increased to over 9 million for the 1912 elections, which meant nearly all Italian males had the right to vote[7].

But, as it would happen, allowing more of the 'lesser' classes to vote would do more to work against the liberal government, as opposed to benefit it. The depression and the war with the Ottoman Empire had only served to create problems among the masses, and giving them a voice only magnified the problem for the governmental majority. And soon began the conflict that would turn the European continent completely upside down, and bring forth both a new Italy and a new Mussolini.

World War I proved to be a great turning point for Italy. That was a bad thing for the crumbling established order, whose set place within the hierarchy of the country's social and political climate was weaker than it had been only a

few years prior. But, it was a good thing for the masses, because it presented the opportunity for changes to occur. The onset of the war also brought about a change in power, as Giolitti's time had run out, and he was replaced by a new man with a new agenda, Antonio Salandra. Giolitti's government still commanded a great deal of the majority in parliament, but Salandra wanted to squash them, along with their former leader, who was far from invisible.

And, if that meant dragging Italy into another needless war, well, selfishness sometimes trumps rationality, and this would be one of those cases.

Salandra's decision to enter into secret negotiations to enter the war on the side of the French and British-led Entente were motivated just as much by desires to strengthen his new government while pushing Giolitti and his colleagues completely out of the picture, and to help Italy's desires for expansion as it was for the purpose of actually helping defeat their former allies[8].

The decision to enter the war in 1915 was contingent on the hopes that their involvement would be short, and as a result, an overwhelming amount of resources and troops were put forth. Considering the fact that the war ended up lasting another three years, this turned out to be a disastrous decision. Italy had been in a precarious state economically, socially, and politically before the war, and the prolonged conflict only served to worsen those issues. An already struggling economy took a severe hit because of the war, but more important than any monetary issues was the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives.

Italy had a number of victories during the war, but also suffered some crushing defeats, including one especially demoralizing one to the Austrians at Caporetto in October and November 1917[9]. The problems on the war front were enough, but at home, things had developed into a full-fledged crisis, and the desire for change was back and in as full-force as ever. Strikes among workers were prevalent during the latter period of the war, and food shortages combined with rising prices made life difficult for the masses of Italian society. Salandra had been removed from power nearly as quickly as he had entered, but the repercussions of his overzealousness and selfishness were being felt long after his term was over, and the prime minister's office had turned into a revolving door.

The war was a great turning point for not only the country, but for Mussolini as well. Before the war, he was a strict anti-militarist. He was imprisoned in 1911 for speaking out against the Libyan war. Despite his affinity for violence, and his feeling that a successful revolution would need to be undertaken through the use of violent force, he was opposed to conflict that was seemingly needless. At the beginning of the war, he was a part of the group who felt that the German/Austrian-Hungarian side was definitively the enemy in the conflict, but were decidedly neutral in their stand due to the feeling that the war could be won without Italy becoming involved. But, he soon realized that, if there was going to be a revolution that the war would provide the boost for the people to move.

In changing his position, he turned his back on those who had given him a name, and forced himself to start over. He knew that, but he couldn't turn back once he had put the pen to the paper. In an October 18, 1914 *Avanti!*
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article, titled “ From Passive to Active Neutrality,” he voiced his newfound opinion that he urged his comrades to take[10]. The result was not his desired one, as he was quickly not only removed as editor of the paper, but also from the party.

However, within a month after his break from the Socialists, he had found a new outlet for his opinions. With financial help from the French and from some of his new interventionist colleagues, he began to publish *Il Popolo D'Italia (The Italian People)*[11]. Even though he had technically broken away from his old party, his new paper was still referred to as a ‘ socialist daily.’ This would remain the case until August 1, 1918, when the paper’s masthead was changed to ‘ a daily of combatants and producers,’ which exemplified Mussolini’s shift from his roots.[12]

Italy was a country in shambles after the end of World War I. It there had been a crack in the boot before, it was well on its way to being a full-fledged rupture. The over-extensiveness of the war effort had crippled the economy completely. The national debt skyrocketed, and so did inflation. With a multitude of soldiers returning from war, that created a demand for employment that exceeded actual availability.

Events outside of the country also contributed to the unrest. The Bolshevik Revolution in the Soviet Union in 1917 awakened an all-new desire in many discontent peoples, including many in Italy. Communism made its way into the country after the war was over, and along with the Socialist Party, had become the main opposition to the long-standing liberal government. The Italian people did not know it, but change was about to come, in the form of

a not-so-new face using not-so-new thoughts and ways, and who would rise above even the new forces in the country.

Mussolini had taken a great gamble by breaking away from the Socialists and was about to take another one. After a period of war service that ended when he was injured in an accident, it was back to trying to rebuild his political reputation and restart the move towards revolution. The post-war period had given way to a great number of people who he felt needed to be lifted up and represented, including soldiers who deserved their due for the service they had given their country. However, he knew that his time to make a move was running short, and with the country in turmoil, that presented the best timing for him to do so. But it would involve starting his own movement, instead of latching on with another one, and while it seemed to be a possible recipe for disaster, it was his only hope in leading a great revolution.

So, on March 23, 1919, the original Fascio di Combattimento was formed in Milan, with 118 people present at the first meeting[13]. There had been other groups with the name 'Fasci,' but this group would set themselves apart. The original platform of the small group that would become known as the Fascist Party included a mix of both social and political reforms, but it was for the most part unoriginal.

Some of the social reforms it called for were a universal vote for men and women at the age of 21, an eight-hour work day, and worker participation in industrial management[14]. Some more radical policies were added to the platform during the party's first year, such as calling for so-called '

unproductive' land to be redistributed to peasants, which pulled something from Mussolini's new focus of productivism, which benefited those who worked the hardest and made the most difference throughout the country, as opposed to the politicians and the elite members of society.

Italy may have been in bad shape, but Germany was much worse. The Germans had appeared to be on course for victory until late in the conflict, when the entry of the United States into the fray helped to put a wall up against German success. That sent the military, the economy, and the country as a whole into a tailspin. Implosions within the military itself occurred as the war got down to its final stages, when it had become plainly obvious to many, except some Germans who were in deep denial, that the war was a lost cause. Those problems were the beginning of the end for the government that had been in place, and marked the beginning of a tumultuous period for the country.

When the dust settled, the new, Socialist-led government that had made its way into the unsteady seat of power had quite a task ahead of it. Not only did it have to watch out for constant outbreaks of rebellion and revolution attempts from left and right, and even an attempt to stamp the new seal of Communism upon Germany, but in the efforts to bring democracy and stability to the country, had to deal with a nation that had been shaken to the core by the failures of the war.

A once-mighty empire had surrender all of its holdings, and as per the Treaty of Versailles, which Germany reluctantly signed, there were millions in reparations payments which served to further cripple an economy that had

already taken a severe hit. There was a general feeling of anger, dissatisfaction, and unhappiness among many about the state of the country. A great deal of it was among the soldiers, who felt betrayed by the war's outcome. One of those affected soldiers would eventually do his part to pick Germany up, and in doing so, would make an unforgettable mark upon history.

Any momentum the fledgling Fascist party had gathered during its first months was knocked down with the 1919 elections. All but one of their election candidates lost, and in Milan, the party's home base, party candidates received only 5, 000 of 275, 000 votes[15]. Those results would test the strength of the party, and many, especially his former Socialist colleagues, felt that Mussolini's movement was a failure and career finished. Considering the success the Socialists were now having, with the elections resulting in Socialists owning nearly a third of the seats in Parliament, it would have seemed that Mussolini might have been better off just staying where he was, instead of trying to go on his own.

But, 1920 was a turning point for the party. Changes were made to shift the focus towards a different group of people, and by May, membership, which had dropped to less than 900 after the disastrous election results, was back up to nearly 2, 400. A key point in the history of the Fascist movement occurred during that time. Though it did not directly involve the movement itself, it would be an event that would help it find its identity. In September of 1919, Gabrielle D'Ammunzio, a nationalist comrade of Mussolini's and Italy's most famous writer at the time, took control of the city of Fiume,

which was on the Adriatic coast of Yugoslavia, but was primarily Italian in inhabitation[16].

The eccentric D'Annunzio would hold Fiume until December 1920, when Italian forces finally drove him out. But, the takeover had an indelible impact upon the Fascist movement. D'Annunzio would eventually join up with Mussolini, and Mussolini integrated many of the traits of the poet's movement into his own, from the Fascist right-arm salute, to the 'blackshirts' of the special assault forces of the Arditi, whose uniforms symbolized death's color[17], and other symbols that would become a mark of the Fascist movement. It wouldn't be the last time that Mussolini would be one-upped by an equal, and it also wouldn't be the last time that he would be a copycat, either.

As 1920 wore on, the Socialists were quickly taking over the country, influencing the masses who were unhappy about post-war conditions. They rallied farmworkers and laborers, and strikes and riots became a regular problem for the government. Something had to be done, and that is where the Fascists came to the rescue. The initial Fascist group, despite its leader and its makeup that consisted of many ex-soldiers, wasn't particularly interested in violence. But, once the Socialists were on their way to becoming an unstoppable force, the Fascists had to step in and quiet them forcefully. The summer of 1920 began a period of Fascist-Socialist violence that would only escalate in the next year. The violence went without much reaction from the government, partly because they wanted to see Socialism stopped before it and Communism took over, and partly because they just did not want to become involved.

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Mussolini was not particularly in favor of the violence, but there was little he could do. When it got out of hand, he tried to work with the Socialists in order to find a way to stop the fighting[18]. But when he did that, it was assumed that he was betraying his party. He went as far as offering up his resignation, but it was rejected[19]. He was powerless to stopping the violence, and even the pact that the Fascists and Socialists signed did nothing. But, despite the obvious increasingly violent nature of the Fascists, they were rapidly gaining support throughout the country, because it appeared that they were the only force capable of stopping Socialism and Communism.

That reflected in the 1921 elections, when new, old Prime Minister Giolitti put the Fascists on his party slate, albeit in more of an attempt to neutralize them instead of actually help them. It resulted in Fascists making a relatively significant dent in Parliament, gaining 36 seats, and helped reaffirm Mussolini's return to the political big-time[20]. And while Mussolini and his new party were on the rise, in Germany, a new party was just getting its legs, and one of history's biggest villains was still just an ex-soldier with an eye on making something happen for his people, and for himself.

Adolf Hitler was born in 1889, in Braunau, Austria, a town near the German border[21]. He lost both of his parents by the time he was 18. He quit school after his father died, but because of his interest in the arts, he moved to Vienna with the intention of getting into the Austrian Academy of Fine Arts, but was denied. Not too long after, his mother died, and the young Hitler was an orphan without an identity. But, he found a bit of himself in Vienna, where he divided his time between the arts and politics. At that <https://assignbuster.com/italian-and-german-fascism-comparison-essay-sample/>

time, Vienna was considered a center of anti-Semitic feelings, and that was where the young artist picked up his deep, well-known hatred of the Jews. The mayor of Vienna at the time, Karl Lueger, made his deep anti-Semitism part of his platform.

Two other anti-Semite influences for Hitler were Georg von Schonerer and Jorg Linz von Liebenfels[22]. In 1913, Hitler fled Vienna to avoid having to fulfill military commitments, and went across the border to Munich. Ironically, shortly after the war broke out in the summer of 1914, Hitler volunteered for the Bavarian army, and he was a capable soldier. He moved up as high as corporal, which wasn't a particularly eye-catching achievement, but he was awarded the Iron Cross, one of Germany's top military honors. The honor was actually awarded to Hitler by a Jew, which is a fact that was covered up after his rise to power[23].

After the war ended and revolution swamped the country, Hitler remained loyal to the army, deciding against following many of his comrades. When the new blood of Communism leaked its way into Germany in early 1919, he was named a member of a committee that investigated which members of his battalion had strayed to join the Soviet Republic. As it turned out, that would be just the beginning for Hitler.

To stop the tide of revolution and instill a new sense of loyalty in the divided army, German military leaders set about trying to find a way to 'educate' soldiers into having the right mindset, and to do so, entrusted the task to a number of seemingly qualified officers. Hitler, who had gained a reputation for his undying loyalty and service to the army, was given a position as a '

political educator.' His impressive skills as a speaker and strict anti-Semitism caught the attention of a former army commander named Karl Mayr. Mayr gave the ex-corporal the responsibility of investigating the activities of several political groups around the country. One of those groups that Mayr sent Hitler to get a closer look at was a new party called the German Workers' Party. He sent Hitler to a meeting of the party in September 1919, and the rest is history.

Many people might feel that because the name Adolf Hitler is synonymous with the Nazi party, that he must have been the founder of the party. That is an easy assumption, but it is not truth. Hitler transformed the party and molded it into what it is infamously known as, but he simply joined a party that was already in existence, instead of starting a movement from scratch as Mussolini did. The forgotten man who founded the initial German Workers' Party in 1919 was a locksmith named Anton Drexler[24]. The 'Workers' part was not just nominal in nature, as it would be for the most part once Hitler had taken the reins. One trait of the initial party that stuck was its anti-Semitic background that influenced both its initial aims under Drexler and Hitler's attraction to the party and its reciprocated attraction towards him.

Hitler made an immediate impact. With his excellent oratory skills, he quickly became one of the most popular members of the party. And with his rise and skills generating new memberships on a regular basis, it was time for the party to establish a foundation for legitimacy within the country. So, in February 1920, the National Socialist German Workers' Party, or what is more commonly known as the Nazi Party, came to be[25]. The new party <https://assignbuster.com/italian-and-german-fascism-comparison-essay-sample/>

adopted a 25-point program that transformed it from its original simple, working-class roots, and set it on the way to being what it would ultimately be. The evolved party still held its distaste for big business, but more so than anything, it stressed the elements of nationalism and racism. The anti-Semitic and extreme pro-German element of the party was elevated a hundredfold in the new party, and it was emphasized in a number of points on the platform. A couple of the points included advocating the end of immigration, and that any immigrants who had come into the country since 1914 should have to leave the country[26].

Also, it advocated severe limits on who could be considered citizens, saying that only people who were of German origin should have the right of citizenship, and stated specifically that Jews should be excluded from having status as German citizens[27]. There was a slight bit of irony in this part of the program, considering that Hitler was neither of German origin nor from Germany, and there has been a great deal of speculation, although unproven, that Hitler actually had some Jewish background.

Other nationalistically-swayed provisions were made for education, saying that anything taught in schools must be pro-German, and also for religion, in that religion could be tolerated, but only if it spoke favorably of the country and of its morals. As the party gained an official status, it also began to fully establish many of the parts of its eventual identity. The swastika was established as the party's official symbol, 'Heil' greetings were introduced, and so was the party's militia, known as the Storm Division, or SA[28].

Once the party became an entirely new animal, so did Hitler. His desire for power began to manifest itself, and he soon yearned for the top spot in the party. He went as far as threatening to quit the party unless he was given the sole leadership of it. Because of his importance to the efforts of the party, he was an asset that it was imperative to hold on to, regardless of if it meant giving into his ultimatum and demands.

Giving him the leadership of the party was just as much of a move to appease Hitler's own selfish interests as it was to keep the party not only afloat, but rising. The party was steadily gaining members, and money was pouring in to keep it running, but Hitler was the man responsible for it all. He was the one who drew the people in with his words, feeding off of their emotions, emptying their pockets, bringing them to the meetings, and getting their signatures.

While Hitler was busy solidifying his role as the #1 for the Nazi Party, Mussolini was on his way to becoming #1 in Italy. Once he was on his way to the top again, he would not be deterred, and if that meant stepping on some toes and turning on some people, then it just had to be done. The Fascist Party membership had soared to well over 220, 000 by the end of 1921, and to 250, 000 during 1922[29]. And their popularity was not limited to the people. The people tolerated and virtually ignored Fascist violence, and the army, the police, the monarchy, and many members of the government threw their support to the Fascists.

It was time for Mussolini to try to take control. With so many behind him, his assumption of power seemed almost inevitable. However, there was

hesitation on the part of allowing him sole responsibility. But, that didn't matter, because he and his party would soon take matters into their own hands. The Fascist takeover began on October 27, 1922[30]. Groups gradually began to take control of various outposts through the country, surprisingly with a lack of violence. The only real violence occurred in the subsequent victory celebrations in Rome, when thirteen people were killed[31]. The push picked up more and more people as it made its way toward Rome, and when it reached Rome, the assembled crowd was well over 20, 000.

While his followers were busy marching, discussions were taking place not as to if Mussolini would assume power, but how much of a role he would assume. The current government, which had thrown its support on the Mussolini wagon but now powerless, resigned, paving the way for a new leader. Discussions first involved having a coalition that involved former Prime Minister Antonio Salandra and a group of his colleagues and supporters and Mussolini and several Fascists. However, Mussolini wanted power solely to himself, and once that was plainly obvious, Salandra backed down, and the king turned over power to Mussolini on October 29. After climbing towards the top, and then having to start at the bottom, Mussolini's gambles had finally paid off, and he was Italy's leader.

Though Mussolini was now in power, it did not translate into immediate dominance for the Fascist Party. But, just as was the case with their leader's rise to the top, it would not be long before the party was right there with him. In 1923, a law called the Acerbo Law, was passed that effectively paved the way for a Fascist takeover in Parliament, stating that the leading <https://assignbuster.com/italian-and-german-fascism-comparison-essay-sample/>

party in an election would get two-thirds of the seats in Parliament[32]. And, in 1924, after elections that were not-so-quietly disputed, and for good reason, considering discrepancies in results, Fascists, at least nominally, held 374 of Parliament's 535 seats[33].

Despite possible treacheries within the party, the country was experiencing some positive changes under the new regime. The economy improved in the early part of Mussolini's term, and the strikes that had been a great problem before he came to power severely decreased quickly. Mussolini's rise to power had not only an affect on those within his own country, but it had a great impact elsewhere.

Despite his obvious thirst for power and leadership, that did not directly translate into Hitler wanting to be the one who would lead Germany's revolution. He was simply viewed and viewed himself as a voice, a catalyst for others to rise up and do the work. But, Mussolini's March on Rome changed Hitler's outlook. He wanted to emulate Mussolini, and instead of just pushing the people to move, he wanted to take the reins and pull them along as well.

1923 presented Hitler and his group with the opportunity to make a move. Tensions weren't improving in Germany; in fact, they were only worsening. The Weimar government had their hands full not only with the masses of dissatisfied, angry people, but also with the separatist Bavarian government based in Munich. At the same time, Nazi party membership had skyrocketed to over 50, 000. With that head of steam building, plus the turmoil that seemingly had no end in sight, the timing seemed to be right. Unfortunately

for Hitler, the government stabilized at the wrong time, for his plans, yet he decided to push on with them.

So, on November 8, 1923, Hitler and a number of supporters stormed a Munich beer hall in an attempt to get the Bavarian government to join him in taking over the country[34]. To say that the timing was off by a little would be a complete understatement. Armed forces stamped out the small coup attempt, and Hitler and his band of followers were defeated and arrested. On top of the humiliation, Hitler was injured in the aftermath[35]. His physical wounds quickly healed, but he was sentenced to a five year prison term.

He ended up serving only nine months of that sentence, and was released in December 1924. But, when he got out, he was much like Mussolini after his break from the Socialists. During his imprisonment, many of his party members either went to other organizations or tried to form new groups of their own. So, it was time to start building from the bottom, and if he was to try to reform Germany, it was going to take a lot more than a few followers with a few guns the next time around.

While Hitler was imprisoned, Mussolini was on his way to establishing he and his party as the ultimate authorities in Italy. A couple of events helped push Mussolini to the point of assuming complete power. In June 1924, one of his main opposition, Unitary Socialist secretary Giacomo Matteotti, was kidnapped and murdered, shortly after speaking out against Fascist indiscretions[36]. It was not proven, but the responsibility for those actions was quickly placed upon Mussolini and his constituents, and it would be

found out after a time that two Mussolini aides had participated in the killing[37]. Mussolini was pressed to take a stand on the matter, but he hesitated, despite the mounting speculation that he or his party was somehow involved in Matteotti's murder.

Violence erupted on several occasions as a result of the furor over what was known as the Matteotti affair. Pressure was mounting on both Mussolini and the party, and he put serious thought into resigning. Those thoughts were strengthened when a number of high-ranking members of the party came to him at the end of 1924 and demanded that he take some sort of action to quell the problems and establish the rule of Fascism, once and for all. It is said that he went as far as offering up his resignation once again, but when it was rejected, due to the fact that the party or the country would likely be on the verge of collapse if he removed himself from office, he decided to act, which was the only option he had left.

Shortly after the turn of 1925, the Fascist dictatorship officially came to be. On January 3, 1925, Mussolini stood before Parliament and took responsibility for all of the events that had happened before and those that would henceforth take place, and in doing so, made himself solely responsible for the running of the country. Throughout the year, Mussolini took a number of steps to further his and his party's hold on political superiority. Any members of parliament who were directly opposed to the leader and his party were kicked out of their positions, and replaced by those who were favorable to the new dictator.

Another step Mussolini took was eliminating trade unions, which, at one time, had been a benefit to Mussolini's interests. Finally, at the end of 1925, a decree was put into place by King Victor Emmanuel that solidified Mussolini's position as Italy's #1. He was on the threshold of having the country completely in his hands, but he was still only just getting started. And his swift ascension from prime minister to dictator didn't sit too well with everyone, and for some, that meant doing more than just sitting idly by and letting him do as he wished.

It was apparent that since Mussolini didn't want to have someone's blood on his hands, someone wanted to take the initiative and get his on theirs.

Numerous assassination attempts were made on the leader. Four attempts were made on Mussolini's life between 1925 and 1926, and after the fourth, late in 1926, Mussolini banned all political parties outside of Fascism[38].

That did nothing but tighten the leader's grip around his power and his people. In 1926, he officially banned all political parties outside of Fascism.

That served to weaken an already demobilized Parliament, and it would only be furthered weakened in the next couple of years. In 1928, Parliament was effectively replaced by a chamber of representatives who would be elected by various groups, agencies, and professions. That was in line with the push towards a corporate state that had begun to be made. Specific sectors of the economy were divided up, and a ministry of corporations was set up to properly handle their structure and operation.

The ultimate step in establishing the Fascist dictatorship was getting religious support. Tensions between the political and religious sectors had

been a part of Italian society for the previous several decades, but Mussolini changed that. He'd worked on creating a positive relationship between church and state since early in his tenure, and the Lateran Pacts, signed between he and Catholic leaders in 1929 solidified his efforts. The pacts established what is now known as Vatican City, and recognized Catholicism as the official religion. The pacts also provided for Catholicism to be taught in all schools. It was good for the Catholics, and it was also good for Mussolini as well, because there's little better affirmation of your power than having the holy on your side.

At the same time, Hitler was just beginning anew. The Nazi party officially came back into existence on February 17, 1925[39], but it was a far cry from what it had been right before the failed coup. But, through hard work and by pulling back in a number of the old party's members, the party gradually began a steady climb uphill. The SA was reintroduced in 1926, along with a number of other organizations that focused on other groups, such as the Hitler Youth and the National Socialist Women's League.

Party membership steadily rose in the final few years of the 1920s, but there was more of a problem in trying to make the party a political success. In the 1928 elections, the party gained less than three percent of the vote, and as a result, Hitler saw the need for a change in focus. The efforts to encompass more groups of society into the party's membership paid off, and by the end of the decade, the Nazi party was definitely on the map in Germany.

Membership rose from 75, 000 in 1927 to 178, 000 by the end of 1929[40].

But, Hitler still had a few hills to climb before he could reach the summit.

The onset of the Great Depression at the turn of the 1930s sent Germany back into the conditions it had faced immediately after the end of World War I, and reawakened the desire for change. Unemployment soared, rising from 1.3 million at the end of 1929, to a high of 6 million at the end of 1932[41], and as unemployment rose, so did displeasure with the government. With the Nazis trying to assume the position of economic saviors for the country, their support reached an all-time high in the 1930 elections.

Only two years after receiving less than three percent of the vote, the party received over 18 percent, and as a result, their representation in the Reichstag grew to 107 votes. Over the next couple of years, Nazi support continued to build, on the strength of maintaining the promise of pulling the country's economy from its abyss. The other thing that helped to gather mass support was the fervent nationalism, minus the extreme anti-Semitism, which was downplayed for the sake of its radicalism. It stayed cleverly hidden under the nationalism and anti-capitalism.

In 1932, Hitler made his first bid to take over sole leadership of the German government. Since there was little chance of him being appointed chancellor, he decided to challenge President Paul von Hindenburg when Hindenburg's term ran up. Considering how far he'd come back from the failures of a decade earlier, getting nearly 40 percent of the vote in the run-off election was a good achievement. It was not, however, good enough to get him into office. But, the support for he and his party was undoubtedly increasing, and it wouldn't be much longer before he'd have his way.

Hindenburg's appointed chancellor, Franz von Papen, wanted to cut off the momentum of the Nazis, especially after the July 1932 elections that saw the party become the most represented in the Reichstag. Over the course of the next several months, numerous efforts would be made to squash the party, and those efforts would culminate in Hitler finally ascending to the chancellorship. Papen was coerced by military advisor Kurt von Schleicher to allow him to assume the role of chancellor, in order for him to try to split the Nazis up, with the appointment of Hitler's #2 man, George Strasser as vice chancellor[42]. This move backfired, when Hitler opposed the move. However, a period of economic recovery did serve to suck some life out of Hitler and his party, but it was only temporary.

The economic recovery was blighted by the fact that Germany's political leaders were far too preoccupied with trying to get rid of Hitler and his cohorts to worry about running the country. While Schleicher was busy trying to bring down the Nazis and Communists at the same time, Papen was plotting to bring down Schleicher. In a move that seemed reasonable in theory, Papen manipulated Hindenburg into naming Hitler chancellor, with him as vice chancellor, with the idea that Hitler's lack of support inside the cabinet would be his undoing. So, on January 30, 1933, Hitler finally assumed the role that he'd long been working towards. Unfortunately for Papen, the new chancellor was much smarter than he, and once in power, Hitler wasn't about to play games, with Papen, the government, or the people.

In Italy, however, Fascism was already definitively on top. The 1930s saw Mussolini work to extend Fascism's impact through every sector of the

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country and to bring about the 'new' Italy that he sought. Fascism was made to be taught in all sectors of education, on down to elementary schools, and a Fascist art, of sorts, was developed. The country as a whole did not change very much, however. Political dissidents weren't being tortured or executed. And, there were not any overwhelming social and economic changes. There was a nationalization of the bank, and the lira was revalued, but that was mostly the extent of his economic policies. And socially, the Fascist influence mostly just extended to religion, where Mussolini encouraged more freedom of religion than previous leaders had, but even that had its limits. Mussolini and Fascism's influence was mostly by name, but his role as the country's leader was definitely unquestioned.

From there, Mussolini sought to extend the right arm of Fascist beyond Italy's borders. This proved to be one of his chief failings, because considering the hold that he had on his own country, he was, for the most part, unable to do more on the foreign front than make a continent full of enemies. It wasn't for a lack of ambition. If anything, it was over-ambition and stubbornness that did him in.

Mussolini's dream was not world or continental domination. Instead, he made the focus of his foreign efforts in the Mediterranean area, the Balkans, and Africa. His attempts were to restore the country to their previous glories, with Rome as the center of it all, but he likely caught himself looking too much at the accomplishments of the Caesars and Constantines of the past to know what he was really getting himself and his country into.

First up was what would be multiple attempts at diving into the Balkans, in the latter part of the 1920s. The result of this was the Yugoslavians running to France for help, which served to put a dent into the solid relationship Italy had with France since their alliance in World War I. He wouldn't be done eschewing alliances, by any means, but before he did that, he had to take care of some business.

That involved making forays into Africa and beating up on comparatively weaker people, if the mass forces that Mussolini sent forth are to be taken into account. Italy violently asserted themselves in Libya and Somalia between 1923 and 1928[43], in the process torturing and killing thousands of civilians in both areas. The bloody invasion of Libya was, in a sense, ironic, because only two decades prior, Mussolini had been firmly opposed to Italy's 'unnecessary' conflict with that very country.

Mussolini summarily cut off ties with Italy's former allies and isolated the country from its neighbors by the mid 1930s. One of the roots of this was a 1935 invasion of Ethiopia that ended up doing far more harm than good. Ethiopia was taken over, and the benefit of war was increased industrial production that helped resurrect the country's economy after the first years of the Great Depression. But it was much to the displeasure of former Entente ally Britain, who did their part to have economic sanctions imposed upon Italy by the League of Nations. All the while, Mussolini was drawing ever tighter with the true rising force in Europe and the world at the time, and that also served to isolate him from the rest of the continent, and set him up for a fall that would be anything but glorious.

Hitler's assertion of power in Germany had been swift. The Nazi party gained a majority in the Reichstag legally through elections shortly after Hitler's appointment, but the leader also took steps to further his and their power. Within the first few months of his term as chancellor, he had banned all of the opposition political parties, including Communism and Socialism, and installed Nazi deputies throughout the local and regional governments. And, to cement his position, a decree was put into place that gave him ruling ability for the next four years, referred to as the ' Law to Relieve the Distress of the People and Reich[44].' There wasn't any blood on anyone's hands yet, but he was just getting started.

But, the Nazi chokehold was lessened by the fact that not only were millions steadily joining the party's ranks, but also because the party's policies produced good results for the country. A focus was made on giving the people better lives, with housing construction and creation of many new jobs. Unemployment dropped drastically, and those who had jobs were happy workers, with increased vacation benefits and better working conditions making the work experience a lot more pleasant. But, the positive changes that Hitler was making upon the country served as a smokescreen for the fact that his search to make Germany wholly Nazi, wholly pure, and reestablish it as a European force was steadily getting out of hand.

The blood started flowing in 1934, when Hitler, motivated by possible threats from an unruly SA, ordered the murders of all of those within his ranks, and opposition, who seemingly posed a threat to his power. During that time, the purifying of Germany intensified. Concentration camps were established, <https://assignbuster.com/italian-and-german-fascism-comparison-essay-sample/>

first in order to punish and imprison those who were in opposition of the Nazi regime. But they would eventually turn into torture centers for Jews, the physically and mentally inferior, unfavorable religious groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, and others, like homosexuals, who did not fit into Hitler's 'plans.' Many would be tortured and murdered as a result of those camps, and those who survived were scarred just as much mentally as they were physically.

Initially, those 'harmless' concentration camps were almost invisible, but by the end of Hitler's reign, they'd be one of the lasting marks of his ruthlessness. Along with the camps, he established the Nuremburg Laws to prohibit Jewish citizenship in Germany. Still, the Nazi leader and his party were mostly loved throughout Germany, and the Nazi stamp was gradually placed on everything from art, to sports, to the youth, and even the military. Once Germany was almost completely Nazified, it was time for the rest of Europe to make room for the pure, Nazi-led Germany. Countries with a German interest such as Austria and Czechoslovakia were held hostage to Hitler's demands, and he would be held at bay by Europe's leading powers for a while, but Hitler had plans, and they did not involve listening to what anyone else said.

Nazi Germany drove towards war, ignoring and manipulating Europe's political leaders just as carelessly as it had done with its people. And while Mussolini walked arm in arm with Hitler, Fascist Italy was not an ally in the truest sense of the word, unless being a bystander qualifies as being an ally. Mussolini was indirectly partially responsible for the monster that was Hitler,

but the German leader now had no hesitation in leaving him and everyone else behind.

But, Mussolini, isolated as he was, had no choice but to follow along, and the seed of anti-Semitism that had become the calling card of the Nazis became a part of the Fascist platform. The enactment of anti-Semitic laws in Italy seemed unnecessary, considering Jews were a relatively insignificant part of the Italian population, and many Italian Jews were actually favorable to Fascism. This only served to put Italy further into bad company with the rest of Europe, and it put Mussolini in an unfavorable position with his people.

There was no stopping Hitler. He was determined to start war, and not even binding agreements would get in his way. First came the breaking of the Munich Agreement, made to deter Hitler from invading Czechoslovakia, and for which Hitler had been named Time Magazine's 1938 'Man of the Year' for apparently 'keeping the peace' within Europe. And then came the pressuring of Austria and Poland to not-so-willingly agree to land terms with the Germany.

Any warnings were not heeded, and Hitler had no intentions of doing so. He knew what he wanted, and on September 1, 1939, he started going after it, by invading Poland. Within the next couple of days, France and Britain had declared war on Germany, and World War II was on. Within the first year of the war, Germany completely dominated their foes, gaining a surrender from the French in the summer of 1940 and seemed set to put the British down as well, but their failure to do so would turn out to be key. But, Hitler

commanded his forces push on, and they seemed unstoppable. But that had also been the case in World War I.

Once it became obvious that Hitler had his own agenda, one that Mussolini's Italy was in no position to keep up with, it was time to give the Mediterranean another try, in an attempt to give Italy enough momentum to join up with its 'ally' and give Mussolini some sense of personal satisfaction.

So, while Germany was busy running through Europe, seemingly on an unstoppable course, Mussolini readied to go in another direction, with one eye still on linking up with Hitler. Declaration of war against France and Britain was made in June 1940[45], when the two countries had been weakened enough by German exploits for Italy to be able to go toe to toe with them. But, trying to handle their own expansionist desires had its price.

In a span of a few months between late 1940 and early 1941, the Fascist regime was effectively put down. An invasion of Greece proved to be disastrous, because the Greeks were a lot more prepared to fight than Mussolini had planned, and they not only stood their ground, but pushed the Italian forces back. The humiliation was topped off by a British assault in Libya that blew the Italian forces away and all but shattered Mussolini's hopes for foreign conquests. But, for some reason, he ignorantly soldiered on.

Italy didn't really need to put the resources forth, and Germany was too powerful to particularly need them, but Mussolini volunteered his country's 'support' in the German invasion of the Soviet Union late in 1942. Over 60 percent of the 229, 000 troops that had been sent forth to 'help' the
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German effort were immobilized, lost, or killed[46]. By the spring of 1943, Italian interests had been completely driven out of Africa, and it would be only a few more months before the bully was completely subdued.

But, Mussolini's time had come, and his party was finished. The king, who had been behind him for years, even when Mussolini consciously subverted the monarch's authority, had him removed and arrested at the end of July 1943. One of the men who helped to vote Mussolini out of power was his Foreign Minister, Galeazzo Ciano, who was also his son-in-law[47]. Only then did Germany come to his aid, freeing him and helping to revive the Fascist Party, which had been broken up as a result of Mussolini's removal. The Italian Socialist Republic, as the former Fascist Party was now known, was made up mostly of those from the north[48].

But, the ISR was a shell of its once-mighty self, and with much of the country having had its fill of Fascism, was relegated to fighting what amounted to a civil war with anti-Fascists from the south, while the rest of Europe was embroiled in the latter stages of World War II. Mussolini was not the mighty leader any longer; he was just as much of a shell of his former self as his makeshift group was. They sputtered along until April 1945, when the end officially came for the Fascist regime and for Mussolini, who was captured and killed. After being the nation's 'savior' two decades prior, he had met his end as its biggest villain, and the display of his lifeless, bullet-riddled body hanging by his feet in Milan was a fitting end for a man who, with a party that he ended up leaving behind, had turned his country upside down.

Meanwhile, the mighty Hitler would soon fall as well. He'd bullied his country, and he'd bullied Europe for several years, but just as with Mussolini and the Fascist regime, the end was inevitable for the Nazi regime. France, Britain, and the Soviet Union had been battered by the German forces early on in World War II, but the tide had turned by 1943. Failure to subdue both the British and Soviets instilled confidence in the Allied forces, especially with the entry of the United States into the war in December 1941.

As with Mussolini, that Soviet surge in late 1942 was a negative turning point for the Germans, and it would only get worse from there. 1944 saw the German forces pushed closer and closer to defeat, and defeat seemed all but a certainty well before the year was over. With that in mind, an attempt was made in July of that year to overthrow Hitler, by way of a bomb planted at his military headquarters. The attempt failed, and Hitler showed that he was still not beyond punishing those who sought to defy him, but that was, for all intents and purposes, a last breath for a falling leader.

By spring of 1945, Soviet and Allied troops had almost completely broken German hopes. And, as the Soviet army occupied Berlin, Hitler took his life, and the end was all but a formality then. Surrender was swift, and finally, it was over. Unfortunately, the end had not come soon enough. Millions had died as a result of Hitler and Nazi-led atrocities, from the millions who were murdered as a result of Hitler's attempts at genocide, to the opposition that was harshly done away with, to those millions who died as civilian and military casualties of a greedy, needless, bloody war.

Conclusion

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So, as has been pointed out, there were and are a great many similarities between Fascism and Nazism, starting with their respective leaders. Both Mussolini and Hitler were excellent speakers who knew and played upon the importance of drawing upon people's emotions for the purpose of pushing them towards revolution, because the people needed some sort of catalyst to move, as opposed to being able to mobilize themselves. That sort of superiority complex meant not necessarily gearing their efforts toward those that might have actually believed were in the most desirous of reform and revolution, but calling upon those who could make the most noise and generate the most support, emotionally and economically.

In adopting this mindset, both Fascism and Nazism went away from their original simple and comparatively more charitable and noble roots and going towards where they knew there was the most opportunity. Reason and rationality flew out of the window, and they were placed by self-interest. It could be true that at one time, Hitler and Mussolini genuinely wanted to improve conditions for the masses and for the country as a whole out of sheer caring for the people and their best interests, but once the thirst for power manifested itself, whether or not they or their party's aims genuinely cared and worked for the people didn't matter as long as they gave off the appearance to.

While nationalism was a key element in the ideologies of both Fascism and Nazism, the element had a deeper, more racially motivated overtone when it came to the Nazis. Mussolini was all for strengthening Italy, making it a force to be reckoned with, and being proud of its history and its

achievements, and while there was a shred of racism and anti-Semitism
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involved, there was a limit to his nationalist pride. Anti-Semitism was part of the initial German Workers' Party, but as it transformed into what became the Nazi Party, Hitler took anti-Semitism to an entirely new, sick level, personifying Jews as seemingly what was wrong with the world, from business, to religion, to morals and values, to everyday life.

This unbridled, unabashed, and unreasonable hatred was founded upon irrationality and the search for a scapegoat as opposed to anything actually truthful or logical, but it fueled the Nazi leader, and it helped to draw in the discontent, disillusioned people who needed someone to blame for their troubles. The hatred was focused on the Jews, but it extended to other racial, ethnic, and religious groups, and the appalling attempts that the Nazis made to drive out, torture, and exterminate the Jews and other groups throughout the latter part of Hitler's rule has been all too well documented throughout books, films, and other forms since, and will forever be considered as one of the darkest and most unforgettable periods of the world's history.

One of the more glaring differences between Fascism and Nazism is the course that each took after their respective rises to power. The Fascist takeover was violent and unstoppable, and it bulldozed its way towards power. And, once the Fascists were firmly in power, there was a period of strict repression, that is, until Fascism's stamp was firmly on just about every aspect of the country. By law, by name, and by rule, Fascism was the undisputed king in Italy, and that fact was not lost upon the people.

But, that seemed to be the very premise of Fascism. Take by force, and once power is assured, well, it just is. There was the changed structure to the government, and the economy as well, and there were many laws in place that solidified Mussolini and his party as the authority of authorities. But, a lot of the Fascist power was simply nominal. Not much changed in the way that people were able to go about their daily lives. This is not to say that Mussolini sat idly by after he assumed power, but if he was on one end of the spectrum, Hitler and the Nazis were on another level all their own.

The Nazi 'revolution' was the complete antithesis of the Fascist one. Save for the failed beer hall putsch in 1923, there was very little violent about the Nazi rise. And, even in that unsuccessful coup, whatever violence there was mostly received, not handed out. Nazism was fueled by the work of the word. Manipulations, propaganda, emotional speeches all swayed support in the direction of the Nazis. And then, only after they'd completed their ascent to the top, authority was stamped by action.

From violently stamping out opposition, to the establishment of the inhuman concentration camps, where those imprisoned were harshly treated, tortured, and executed, to the appalling attempts to 'purify' the country and the continent, the Nazi regime was the epitome of rule by action. It does merit pondering, that, had either movement been able to find a balance in stamping their authority just right, if either would have fared better in the long run. However, it's probably much better for history and the world that there isn't a solid answer for that question.

Fascism and Nazism applied many of the same ideas and had a lot of the same ambitions, but execution is what set the two apart. Two things played a vital part in getting Nazism the spotlight and relegating its cousin to the metaphorical shadows: identity, and resources. Hitler-led Nazi Germany had plenty of both, and Mussolini-led Fascist Italy was far, far lacking in comparison. And as found out, Mussolini's efforts to keep up, especially once Hitler had gone full steam ahead in both his country and abroad, were nothing short of futile.

Ambition is a noble quality, but direction is the bulb that makes the light switch work, and without it, you're left grasping blindly. And, in those cases, you end up either bumping your toe, or in Mussolini's unfortunate case, hanging by your feet in front of thousands with bullet holes through you. And on the same token, even if you know where you're going, if