

Assess the  
successes and  
failures of mussolini's  
domestic policy essay  
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Mussolini's primary aim in 1919 when he came into power was to fascitise the Italian nation as a whole, young and old; he wanted his nation to be utterly committed and disciplined towards the new fascist state rather than being passive and going along with everyone else. To achieve this goal, Mussolini set about trying to influence and ultimately change domestic establishments more 'fascist', that is, to follow the principles of a very right-wing, nationalist totalitarian state in which the 'Duce is always right' and in which the principles of 'Believe, Obey, Fight' are considered paramount.

Mussolini attempted to alter Church-state relations, to create the perfect fascist woman, to fascitise the educational system and the youths of Italy, to change Italy's economic and political structure, and to create a nation that would be respected by other nations, by using his strategies of the 'battle for land, grain and births' and by proving the strength of the nation through sporting achievements. However, Mussolini's policies failed to unite the country and fascitise the nation as a whole; his economic policies were disastrous, Italy was fairly weak politically, and women and teenagers failed to be heavily affected by a fascist state; Mussolini did handle the Church-State relations well however but in the larger scale of things, it is a relatively minor point.

Although Mussolini was anti-clerical, a totalitarian state cannot allow another establishment with a powerful set of beliefs to survive, he realised that if he could actually win over the support of the Church, he would win further the support of the Italian people, as well as foreign Catholics. The Church at that time was more worried about the threat from socialism, and fascism seemed to be suitable protection, and in actual fact, the Church and the State shared

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some common ground; they both saw the need for order, discipline, respect for leaders and a hierarchy, and a dislike of liberalism. Although progress early on continued at a slow pace, the relations by 1929 were at a peak, but went on to decline throughout the 1930s, with the disbanding of Catholic youth groups by 1931. Early measures included increased clerical wages and a return to compulsory religious education in elementary schools through Gentile's education act of February 1923; relations peaked in February 1929 when the Lateran Accords were signed.

The Church and State gained from this pact. The Church received its own sovereign state in the middle of Rome, the Vatican City, and the state restored the authority of the Papacy. The Church also received 750 million lira in bonds as compensation for the territory lost at unification from the state, which also extended compulsory religious education into secondary schools. The Pope recognised Rome as the capital of Italy, authorising Mussolini as leader of Italy, and also more importantly, withdrew his support of the Catholic Popular Party; this effectively meant that Mussolini was now free of any political rivals. Mussolini was very successful in securing good relations between the Church and the State in the late 1920s, but his policy of anti-Semitism started in 1938 was condemned by the Church, which weakened the totalitarian state throughout the 1930s, with its newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* and the FUCI student federation. However, it gave Mussolini and his Fascist Italy a lot of prestige throughout the world. As Clark says, 'The pacts were a triumph for the Duce. The cost was negligible, the benefits huge...he could count on worldwide prestige and a chorus of admiration.'

Mussolini was not so successful in his fascistisation program in schools in Italy. For Mussolini the control over education was seen as essential, and he wanted to teach all young people the fascist principles of manliness, patriotism and obedience. He also attempted to glorify himself, the Duce, to create a very pro-fascist generation that would be completely disciplined to the state, something that he really desired. The 'Cult of Mussolini' is a key expression here; there was a photo of Mussolini in every classroom, pupils were given Mussolini notebooks, and the school day began with prayers and songs about the Duce. Over time, the state also started controlling exactly what the students learnt and heavily controlled who became teachers and what they taught.

By 1925, teachers not sharing the views of the fascist party were dismissed and 101 of 317 history textbooks were banned, and by 1929 all teachers took a loyalty oath to the state, and a single textbook, the *libro unico*, was introduced, covering all subjects, which was clearly incredibly biased towards fascism, and against everything else. By 1933, all teachers actually had to be party members and even had to wear their uniforms to work, and by 1938, due to the rather weak anti-Semitic racial laws, Jewish teachers and students were also dismissed. Student youth groups, in place to counter the Catholic youth groups established at the time, were also set up; there were four in all, starting with the *Figli della Lupa* for 4 to 8 year olds, the *Balilla* for 8 to 14 year olds, the *Vanguard* for 14-18 years olds and the *Young Fascist*, started much later in 1937, for 18-21 year olds, for the best graduates from the *Vanguard*. Although it seems that the Fascist state looked as if they

controlled education and the Italian youths very directly and aggressively, the policy was not very successful.

Illiteracy was still high at 20% by 1931, and most students were only affected in their elementary schools; by secondary school and university, the young adults had formed their own opinions on Fascism. Many did join the youth groups, but as De Grazia and Tannenbaum say, the young Italians either join for material benefit, a desire not to be excluded, or the fact that they simply liked dressing up in a uniform; not many joined out of obedience and commitment to the Fascist state. Most teachers as well took the oath because they had to in order to keep their positions and not because they actually meant it, and this is why Mussolini's educational policies failed, because the Italian youths were not bothered about being committed to the state and being obedient and disciplined, they simply enjoyed the groups almost like a summer camp or holiday; they did not recognise the significance that it held for Mussolini and the state as a whole.

This is true also with the way in which the regime treated women, that the women simply did not catch on to the ideas that were being thrown at them. Mussolini and his regime wanted to create the perfect fascist woman; a house-wife, who helped out with agriculture, but most of the time stayed at home as a child-bearer. Well-rounded figures and sturdiness were considered more practical than thin, elegant women; the state criticised cosmetics, high-heels and so on. Women's sport was discouraged, as the regime believed that it would distract women from their primary function as child-bearers.

They should also wear very simple clothes and be very obedient to their husbands. Linking in with this idea, Mussolini started his campaign called the <https://assignbuster.com/assess-the-successes-and-failures-of-mussolinis-domestic-policy-essay-sample/>

' Battle for births', an attempt to increase Italy's population by 23 million, to 60 million, by 1950, and to make Italy look like a great power.

Mussolini demanded an increase in the Italian birth rate and implemented some changes in 1927. Large families were financially rewarded with marriage loans and reduced income tax for big families, prolific mothers were awarded with prizes in the annual ceremonies, and the quality of family health-care improved dramatically. On the other hand, bachelors experienced increased taxation, jobs were reserved for fathers, and abortion, contraception and divorce became illegal. The results of this battle were not what Mussolini wanted; the birth rate continued to fall, and the average age of marriage rose and even the marriage rate fell. Due to the improvement in health care the death rate did decrease, but this could not be taken advantage of due to the similar declining birth rate.

The failure of the ' battle for births' was due to the fact that women were simply not affected by the regime's vision of the perfect women. As Willson says, '...the growth of mass culture broadened attitudes and aspirations.' The American culture of the glamorous model would have obviously affected young women not interested in being obedient toward the regime, who had more self-pride and self-confidence than this. Women still regarded child birth as very burdensome and, like today, many believed that one or two children were sufficient. Once again, Mussolini's policies failed to excite the nation and failed to change many people's viewpoints.

Mussolini also believed that the image of Fascist Italy that foreign nations saw was crucial to the progression of the state of and of Italy. Sport was

highly prized by Mussolini, who wanted to provoke patriotism within Italy, and admiration outside. In 1925, he set up the Dopolavoro, an organisation for 'the healthy and profitable occupation of the worker's leisure hours.' It provided entertainment such as cheap holidays, public libraries, free lectures, and theatres much appreciated by the industrious working-class. Major sports were also used to project an image of superiority onto the world; Italy won both the World Cups in 1934 and 1938, and Primo Carrera was World Heavy Weight Champion in the early 1930s, a sport very highly prized by the fascist regime. Inside Italy, Mussolini also wanted complete control over the media, and outlawed any anti-fascist newspapers very quickly. The regime used the media mainly as a means of propaganda, as a way of expressing the fascist principles that Mussolini wanted the Italians to follow. Mussolini also used the OVRA, the secret police, to arrest any political opponents; 10,000 were in internal exile by the end of 1938. Although Mussolini did manage to outlaw any political opposition, in the form of parties and newspapers, he was not able to really affect the nation, and unite them to be committed towards the fascist regime.

Mussolini also completely changed Italy's economic system, abandoning the seemingly successful period of liberal economics under De Stefani, between 1919 and 1925, in which price fixing and rent controls were abolished and government expenditure and unemployment were reduced, and switching to the system of protectionism, the system of sacrificing exporting goods and concentrating on the domestic economy. Mussolini started using devices such as cartels, price-fixing, wage-cutting and the suppression of trade-unions, giving the impression that he clearly favoured stability over mobility.

The Wall Street Crash in 1929 led to the introduction of the Institute for Industrial Reconstruction that took over from private banks, which led to the progression of the two other 'battles', the one for grain and the other for land, both a quest for autarky, or self-sufficiency, which would prove Italy as a successful, 'warrior nation'.

Initially, the 'battle for grain' seemed to be successful, by 1930, 60 million quintals of grain was being produced annually, and by 1939, this figure had risen to 80 million quintals. However, the problem with this was that the price of grain remained very high, and so trade figures did not increase. This passion for producing more grain also meant that other agriculture outputs, such as other crops that were not attended to and grown as much as the grain. So, overall this battle did not work out, as trade figures did not significantly change, and although more grain was being produced, its price remained high.

The last battle was the 'battle for land' for which land, mainly marshland, was recovered in an attempt to increase the size and therefore the power of Italy. The most famous example was the draining of the Pontine Marshes near Rome that created acres of new farmland; this was successful until the war, in which the irrigation system was destroyed and the land re-flooded. However, many motorways were constructed and 5000 km of railway across Italy was electrified, modernising the country as a whole. Although the reclamation of land was not a great success, it showed Italy to be a growing power in world affairs, and was a minor success for Mussolini.



As for his economic policy as a whole, autarky was not negative in any way, it simply left the economy to be very stagnant; there was only a 0.8% annual productivity growth, a big difference from the rate of 3.8% before and after the fascist regime, 1901-25 and 1940-52. The policies simply failed to transform lives, the common man was not really affected by the two battles in any way, and small businesses still found it very difficult to progress, due to the land tax. As well as this, there was no real improvement in the quality of life of the majority of the population; strikes were abolished, there was no minimum wage, and unemployment was still at 1 million in 1933. Industrialists and landlords did benefit from the policy of protectionism, but this is a small minority of the population; once more Mussolini has failed to influence the average Italian's life, and has failed to fascitise the population economically as well.

Politically, there were no surprises in the policies that Mussolini adopted. His policies were anti-communist and anti-capitalist, and used the system of corporatism and a Fascist Grand Council to run the country. The structure of corporatism is simple; it merges the worker's trade unions and the employers' syndicates into corporations in which the population are represented through their different corporations; it is simply decentralisation of political power, in theory. However, Mussolini in actual fact gave no political power to the people as these corporations were surveyed by fascist officials, who decided what was to be discussed and when and in what way. The Rocco Law of April 1926 gave legal recognition to all the fascist syndicates in Italy, who could mediate between the worker's and employer's

corporations, and therefore controlled everything that occurred inside these corporations.

These syndicates and officials reported their findings to the Fascist Grand Council, made up of 56 fascist party members, which was the 'organ of the state', the controlling body. However, Mussolini controlled what was discussed in this council, what the agenda was and even the membership; Italy was basically run by Mussolini. By January 1926, Mussolini was able to pass his own laws and even deprived the King the right to be able to choose the next Prime Minister by the end of 1928. To Mussolini, this political policy was a success, in that he was in complete control, a personal dictatorship. However, for the Italian people, it would not have been seen as a success, as they had no political power and could not convey what they wanted and needed in life. Here we have a contradiction on Mussolini's part; how can he want to fascistise and unite the nation if he does not know what they want? He simply forces his policies upon his people, and expects them to follow them obediently and unquestioningly, which was never going to happen.

Overall, Mussolini did not achieve his aim of fascistising the Italian population; many of his policies were ignored or discarded by the people, and his economic policy failed to show the world how great a nation Italy was. Mussolini was able to establish an individual dictatorship, but not able to rule the country effectively.