

Dictatorship and Democracy, 1920-1945 |

Sample answer

What were the characteristics of Fascist regimes in Europe during the interwar period? (2013)

Fascist dictators such as Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler had very similar characteristics, both utilizing force and intimidation to forward their political agendas and come to power. The use of powerful and manipulative propaganda was a key feature of both dictators' leaderships. The "Nazi Party" and the "Black Shirts" encouraged violence and racism which in turn succeeded in manipulating public views and opinions. In this essay, I will compare and highlight characteristics of the German and Italian fascist regimes, assessing how they placed huge pressure on citizens to declare their loyalty to their fascist leaders which inevitably witnessed entire populations moulded into like-minded indoctrinated.

Both Mussolini and Hitler rose to power utilizing fear and intimidation, they used force to overthrow the governments and eliminate their competition. This clear intimidation is evident through Mussolini's "March on Rome" and Hitler's failed "Munich Putsch". In October 1922, Mussolini and 30,000 of his Blackshirts (military force) 'marched on Rome'. As a result, the king ordered the Prime Minister's retirement and appointed Mussolini as the new Prime Minister, Mussolini's use of force and intimidation had proved to be successful. Although Hitler's "Munich Putsch" was unsuccessful, it clearly portrays the similar intimidation which both dictators used to overthrow their rivals.

Both Hitler and Mussolini had secret armed forces which brutally beat and murdered political rivals. They rid their nation of political threats while instilling absolute fear amongst the people.

The SS led by Himmler main job was to destroy opposition to Hitler and carry out Nazi racial policies. The Gestapo led by Heydrich was another organisation that used torture to gain confessions and information while instilling fear in the German population. The Gestapo was so brutal that many people reported their neighbours, family member and even parents to them. Mussolini established the OVRA. They were responsible for arresting anyone who was involved with or supported political opposition. Those found guilty were deported to prison camps situated on islands off Italy. House to house searches was carried out on individuals and freedom become non-existent under Mussolini's rule. These intimidatory measures enabled fascist parties to create a totalitarian state in their countries.

A characteristic of fascist dictators throughout this period was targeting the youth. Both Mussolini and Hitler established youth organisations which were used to manipulate the youth of their nations, instilling fascist beliefs from infancy. It became compulsory after 1936 for children in Germany to join the Nazi youth organisations, "Hitler Youth" and "League of German Maidens". Mussolini's youth organisation was known as "Opera Nazionale Balilla" and like Hitler's, the youth groups trained its boys physical and military training and the girl's motherhood skills. In schools, textbooks were re-written to focus on the glories of the Roman empire or in Germany, the Nazi version of learning. Portraits would be hung off the fascist's dictators in school classrooms. The Fascists were indoctrinating the youth, these children prayed to their fascist dictators regularly, heightening their demi-god status and displays the effectiveness of their "Cult of Personalities".

Both dictators used propaganda to develop their "Cult of Personalities" around them. Joseph Goebbels was in charge of propaganda in Germany during Hitler's reign. In 1933 Goebbels organised a book burning to destroy any books with anti-Nazi ideas. He controlled the radio, news, cinema. Goebbels knew how effective cinema was and had Leni Riefenstahl direct "Triumph of the Will" where she documented the 1934 Nuremberg Rallies. The Nuremberg Rallies are also an example of propaganda in Germany they were held every year from 1933-

1938, the events were mass gatherings with usually over 500,000 people attending. These events demonstrated the strength and unity of the Nazis. In Italy, Mussolini used his own newspaper “Il Popolo d’Italia” as his main vehicle to spread his message along with billboards and official newsreels shown before films in the cinema. The image of M was tightly controlled. He was presented as a man of destiny working tirelessly for the Italian people.

The fascist regime in Germany and Italy both yearned for a prosperous economy. Mussolini and Hitler both transformed their nations, creating healthy economies which contrasted the poor and weak economy after WW1. Unemployment barely existed in either nation which resulted from widespread public work schemes designed to develop infrastructure and improve communities. Mussolini made huge advancements in Italian infrastructure, building numerous motor-ways and buildings which abolished unemployment and enhanced his ‘New Roman Empire’. In Germany, 1936 unemployment was at 200,000 after totalling 6 million in 1933. Both fascist nations had practical views on the running of their economies which in turn resulted in expansion, growth and employment.

Widespread anti-Semitism was a common characteristic in both Germany and Italy. In Germany Hitler introduced numerous laws which stripped Jews of their civil liberties. In 1935 the Nuremberg Laws deprived Jews of German citizenship. “The Night of Broken Glass” November 1938 witnessed Jewish communities throughout the Reich become subject to a great deal of abuse and terror. Over 250 synagogues were burned, 7,000 Jewish businesses were destroyed and dozens of Jewish people were murdered or sent to concentration camps. While Mussolini did not practice as extreme measures towards the Jews in Italy he still introduced a series of “anti-Semitism” laws. Such as banning Jews from civil jobs, forbidding foreign-born Jews to live in Italy, banning marriage between Jews and non-Jews and confiscating Jewish properties and businesses.

It must be noted there are massive similarities between these two fascist parties. They both used similar methods to force their way to power and maintain it. Both shared very ruthless characteristics, instilling pressure on their people to believe their fascist ideas. Both Mussolini and Hitler ruthlessly manipulated the public, utilizing propaganda and rallies to promote distinct fascist ideologies such as nationalism, anti-Semitism and racism.