# Theme 4 – Fascism

1. In the elections of November 1919, no fascists were elected to parliament. Even in his home town of Predappio Mussolini failed to win a single vote. He therefore dropped many of the left-wing elements of the fascist programme and the party began to attract more conservative supporters. Then, during 1919 and 1920 there were many riots and strikes in the countryside and in the cities. Factories were occupied for months, but Prime Minister Giolitti did nothing to help the employers. Against this background, the fascist movement grew. (88 words)
2. The first ‘squadristi’ were often young men who had served in the war, middle class students, small landowners and sharecroppers[[1]](#footnote-1) who were angered by attempts at land reform. They were much more reactionary than the early fascists who had been trade unionists, Futurists and radicals. They hated the socialists and were hard to control. They acted with impunity, especially when the Fascist party gained 35 deputies in the 1921 elections. At a mass rally in Naples in October 1921, they called for a March on Rome. (88 words)
3. Fascism had begun as a movement of young men who believed that their moral strength had rescued Italy from then ignominy neutrality in 1915 and then carried it to victory in 1918. Although many of the movement’s ideas were soon sacrificed on the altar of political advantage, the regime retained a faith in the creative and purifying powers of the superior will. Mussolini said that the main task of fascism was to fashion a new type of Italian, with new values and new ways of behaving. However, this was to be achieved not by appealing to reason but to the irrational. (102 words)
4. The Catholic Church was the greatest obstacle to any totalitarian regime in Italy. All the others – parliament, press, opposition parties, unions – could be defeated or emasculated, but not the Church, for its influence reached into every corner of society. Nor could she be simply ignored, for she has great influence in education and welfare and it proclaimed virtues incompatible with fascism. So, the pacts with the Church were a triumph for Mussolini because he had solved the ‘Roman question’, gaining him prestige both at home and abroad. (88 words)
5. Fascism remained in many ways a Northern movement, born in Milan, Trieste and the Po valley, it neglected the South, although Mussolini offered enough concessions to prevent overt opposition from landowners and lawyers. It is claimed that the principal achievement of Fascism in the South was Mori’s famous ‘Battle against the Mafia’ in the second half of the 1920s. Most leading Mafiosi went underground[[2]](#footnote-2), were imprisoned or forced to emigrate to the USA. However, they were to return at the end of the war along with American tanks. (93 words)
6. Since the late 1920s Mussolini had spoken increasingly of the need for colonial expansion. He claimed that this was justified by the growth in Italy’s population. So, after a particularly brutal campaign to suppress a rebellion in Libya (which involved the use of gas and concentration camps) preparations began for the invasion of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa was captured on 5th May 1936, but the conquest of the country was extremely expensive; so much so that married women were even asked to give up their wedding rings to pay for it. (91 words)
7. Hitler came to meet Mussolini in Rome in May 1938. His visit was seen as the recognition that the Italian ally had become more important in German eyes. Fascists were mobilised not so much to pay homage to the Führer, but to show that the Duce had gained at least as much support as it seemed (from cinema newsreels) that Hitler enjoyed in Germany. The parade in Hitler's honour passed through the sites of Ancient Roman with the intention of showing the Germans that Italy had had a great historical past and that Mussolini and his regime were reviving it. (101 words)
8. After having invaded Albania in the spring of 1939, on 10th June 1940, Mussolini announced that Italy was entering the war. Italy was poorly prepared for war, but Mussolini was convinced that hostilities would soon be over and Italy would become the dominant power in the Mediterranean. However, the next three years saw one military setback after another a disastrous invasion of Greece, the defeat of the navy at Cape Matapan and the loss of the East African Empire, while Libya was lost in 1943. And then on 10th July 1943 Allied forces landed in Sicily. (97 words)
9. Between March 1945 and the end of April, the number of partisans in the north of Italy grew from 80,000 to about a quarter of a million. They were able to hand over the major centres of the North to the British, preventing the Germans from blowing up factories and machinery as they withdrew. While they mad a considerable contribution to the defeat of fascism, the partisans also helped to create the ‘values of the Resistance’ (democracy, freedom, honesty, accountability, openness and modernity) on which the new post-war order would be built. (93 words)

1. mezzadri [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Darsi alla latitanza [↑](#footnote-ref-2)