

Italy

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Introduction

In the aftermath of World War I, Italy faced internal challenges and political instability. The economic hardships, social unrest, and a sense of dissatisfaction towards the limited territorial gains produced by the victory created a fertile ground for new political parties and, eventually, the dissolution of the democratic system (Bosworth, 2006). The liberal elite, who had ruled since the Italian unification in 1861, was not equipped to cope with the mass mobilization created by the extension of suffrage and the discontent with the peace agreements expressed by nationalist groups. As a result, the heterogeneous group of liberal forces progressively lost its political centrality after the end of the war. The political turmoil during the years of *biennio rosso* (red biennium), with general strikes and occupation of factories and land, convinced segments of the political establishment and sizable portions of the electorate that the communist threat had to be stopped, even by resorting to violence (Sabbatucci, 2014).

Elections

Italy voted in two democratic elections in the interwar period: 1919 and 1922. Italian bicameral parliament consisted of two houses: an elective Chamber of Deputies (*Camera dei Deputati*) and a Senate with members appointed by the king. An electoral reform in 1919 replaced a single-member district system with a PR system. Under the new rules, MPs were elected with D'Hondt divisor in 54 districts, with district magnitude ranging from 5 to 20 (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010). With the extension of suffrage voted by parliament in 1912 all literate men above 21 years old (or above 30 without literacy requirements) could vote.

16 November 1919

The 1919 elections were held in the shadow of the so-called *biennio rosso*. The liberal bloc did not manage to get a majority of seats for the first time in Italian history. The Socialist Party tripled its seats, thus becoming the largest parliamentary group with around

25% of the seats. The recently founded Italian People's Party obtained more than 20% of votes at the first elections contested. The prevailing revolutionary faction in the Socialist Party did not accept any compromise with non-revolutionary forces, making a potential coalition with the Catholics unfeasible. The only viable coalition, therefore, was between the Catholics and the fragmented constellation of liberal-democratic forces. Three governments alternated during this term. The first two were led by the liberal Francesco Saverio Nitti (1919–1920), while Giovanni Giolitti, a prominent and experienced liberal leader, was prime minister in the third cabinet. The supporting coalitions were weak and unstable, and included, among others, the Italian People's Party and the Socialist Reformists.

15 May 1921

After Giolitti failed to stabilize his government coalition, snap elections were called in May 1921. The liberal constellation coalesced into a “national bloc”, where conservative, liberal, and democratic forces were joined by fascist candidates. By including fascists in the coalition, Giolitti intended both to moderate their stances and absorb them in the liberal group and to increase his bargaining power with socialists and Catholics. However, in the 1919 elections, the electoral support for the Socialist Party decreased only marginally and the votes for the Italian People's Party even increased. While the liberal bloc increased their seats too, it was not enough to build a stable supporting coalition. Thanks to their inclusion in the national bloc, 34 Fascist members entered into parliament. The recently founded Communist Party also elected its first members (15). In the following year and a half, three cabinets were formed, eventually resulting in parliamentary stalemate. In the meantime, paramilitary groups organised by the newly constituted National Fascist Party increasingly engaged in acts of intimidation and violence against political opponents, particularly targeting socialist, communist, and left-wing groups. This violent campaign culminated in October 1922 with the March on Rome, a large demonstration that pressured King Vittorio Emanuele III to appoint Mussolini as prime minister, paving the way for the Fascist regime.

Parties

In the interwar period, the Italian party system underwent a significant transformation as two mass parties, namely the Italian Socialist Party and the Italian People's Party, emerged and took centre stage in the Italian party system. The Socialist Party garnered support from the working class, capitalizing on the expanded suffrage implemented in 1912. The entry of a Catholic party activated the state-church cleavage, which had previously been latent due to the Catholic Church's discouragement of Catholics' active political involvement (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010; Hershey, 1914).

Italian Socialist Party

The Italian Socialist Party was the main socialist party from its foundation in the late XIX century to the rise of fascism. The history of the party was plagued by internal divisions between revolutionary ("massimalist") and reformist factions. The massimalist wing took control of the party in the mid-1910s, causing a first split of a group of reformists who founded the Italian Socialist Reformist Party. In 1921, the party experienced another split, this time from the left. A faction of members led by Antonio Gramsci and Amedeo Bordiga left the party for its alleged lack of revolutionary spirit. Despite these party splits, the Socialist Party consistently increased its electoral support in the 1910s, becoming the largest parliamentary group after the 1919 elections.

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|--------------|-----------------------------|
| Original | Partito socialista italiano |
| Other Names | Italian Socialist Party |
| Abbreviation | PSI |
| Factions | Riformisti / massimalisti |

Italian People's Party

The Italian People's Party was founded in 1919 by Luigi Sturzo, a Catholic priest. It represented the first attempt to mobilize Italian voters with an openly Catholic platform, primarily in opposition to socialism. Before its creation, Catholics' involvement in Italian politics had been limited, reflecting the Church's hostility towards the Italian state.

The Italian People's Party sought to represent the interests of Catholics and promote social justice within a democratic framework, with a platform inspired by Catholic social teaching. It positioned itself as a centrist and reform-oriented party, advocating for the rights of workers, social welfare, and the independence of the Catholic Church.

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|--------------|---------------------------|
| Original | Partito popolare italiano |
| Other Names | Italian People's Party |
| Abbreviation | PPI |
| Factions | |

National Bloc

The National Bloc was a coalition which included liberals, fascists, and nationalists in a common list competing in the 1921 elections. Giolitti, its most prominent member, proposed the electoral alliance in order to try to stabilize the unstable parliament that emerged from the 1919 elections. The coalition allowed the fascists to enter parliament with 34 seats.

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|--------------|------------------|
| Original | Blocco nazionale |
| Other Names | National Bloc |
| Abbreviation | |
| Factions | |

Communist Party of Italy

The Communist Party of Italy was founded in 1921. After a socialist congress in which the decision not to expel reformists prevailed, the more extreme revolutionary wing left the party and established a new Communist party. The Communist Party advocated a strong adherence to the Soviet revolutionary experience and had as its immediate goal the introduction of the dictatorship of the proletariat. At the elections held a few months after its birth, the party obtained almost 5% of the votes and 15 seats in parliament.

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|--------------|----------------------------|
| Original | Partito Comunista d'Italia |
| Other Names | Communist Party of Italy |
| Abbreviation | PCdI |
| Factions | |

Italian Radical Party

The Italian Radical Party was founded in 1904 in the tradition of the Historical Left. It was characterized by a centre-left platform, combining elements of republicanism, secularism, and social liberalism. In the 1913 elections, the party obtained more than 10% of the votes and over 60 seats in the Italian lower house. It later merged into the Italian Democratic Liberal Party.

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|--------------|---------------------------|
| Original | Partito Radicale Italiano |
| Other Names | Italian Radical Party |
| Abbreviation | |
| Factions | |

Italian Democratic Liberal Party

The Italian Democratic Liberal Party was a party established in 1921 based on the Liberals, Democrats, and Radicals' alliance which ran in the 1919 elections. It included some of the most prominent liberal political figures, such as Vittorio Emanuele Orlando and Francesco Saverio Nitti. The good results obtained by the alliance in 1919 (it was the third most-voted list) encouraged its members to constitute a party. In Duverger's terms, the party represented an example of an elite party, with loose organizational structures and mainly relying on the initiatives of a small group of influential MPs.

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|--------------|---------------------------------------|
| Original | Partito Liberale Democratico Italiano |
| Other Names | Italian Democratic Liberal Party |
| Abbreviation | PLDI |
| Factions | |

Italian Reformist Socialist Party

The Italian Reformist Socialist Party was a reformist socialist party founded by members expelled from the Italian Socialist Party for their willingness to support a liberal cabinet.

Its featured notable socialist figures such as Ivanoe Bonomi and Leonida Bussolati. In 1919, the party won less than 2% of the votes. Due to declining popularity and internal conflicts, the party did not run in the 1921 elections.

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| Original | Partito Socialista Reformista Italiano |
| Other Names | Italian Socialist Reformist Party |
| Abbreviation | PSRI |
| Factions | |

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