

ANTÓNIO COSTA PINTO
Edited by



RULING ELITES AND DECISION-MAKING IN FASCIST-ERA DICTATORSHIPS

SOCIAL SCIENCE MONOGRAPHS

António Costa Pinto

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AND DECISION-MAKING
IN FASCIST-ERA
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The aim of this chapter is to analyse the composition of the Italian political elite during the 21-year Fascist regime (1922–43). Even today the writings on this subject, which have always been circumscribed by the axioms ‘state/party’ (Gentile 2002; Aquarone 1965) and ‘authoritarianism/totalitarianism’ (Collotti 2004; Gentile 2002; Tarchi 2003), have not managed to find a synthesis to define the regime’s true nature. It is our belief an empirical study of the political elite can help define these questions.

It is important to emphasise the fact that the Italian dictatorship emerged, in November 1922, from a coalition government involving the National Fascist Party (PNF—Partito Nazionale Fascista), the Popular Party (PP—Partito Popolare) and members of the Liberal Party (PLI—Partito Liberale Italiano). It should also be noted that the new government had the parliamentary support of 316 deputies against 116, which meant that in practice only the socialist group opposed it. The transition to authoritarianism, however, was to take another two years, during which time the attainment—by more or less violent means, by more or less legitimate means—of an absolute parliamentary majority became of central importance.

The dictatorship’s beginning can be traced to a specific date: 3 January 1925—the day on which Mussolini, in a speech in parliament, accepted direct responsibility for the assassination of the socialist deputy, Giacomo Matteotti.

The transition to authoritarianism in Italy was a process that involved pacts with other actors: the head of state, King Vittorio Emanuele III; the Catholic Church; the business world; and, finally, a parliament in which the PNF was, until 1924, a minority. The Senate, parliament's second chamber, which was made up of life members nominated by the government and appointed by the king, represented an element of continuity between the liberal and Fascist regimes. While the government was able to expel non-Fascist deputies from parliament in 1926, it was not able to do likewise in the Senate, which was never dissolved and which took a long time to be fascistised. Unlike what happened during transitions elsewhere, there were no violent and definitive breaks with the past in Italy.

This chapter is divided into four parts. In the first, we will analyse the Fascist political system as it evolved during the *ventennio* (20 years), establishing the principle stages of the institutional change. In the second, we will compare empirically the elite that made up the council of ministers and the Grand Council, attempting in the process to highlight the locus of power within Mussolini's system. In the third part, we will concentrate on governmental stability with the intention of verifying whether, on the side of the institutional divides analysed in the first part, there was also a parallel division in Mussolini's government's political elite. Finally, in the fourth part we will trace the profile and basic criteria for recruitment to the Fascist elite.

The Fascist political system

The first body created by Mussolini's government was the Fascist Grand Council (Cavallaro 2004). The first meetings of the Grand Council took place at the end of December 1922. Its regulations stated that it had to meet at noon on the 12th day of each month.

From the beginning, the Grand Council was formed as a hybrid organisation located between the state and the party at a time when the question of dictatorship had not yet been raised. Amongst others, the members of the Grand Council included the Fascist ministers, the

leaders of the PNF, the director-general of public safety, the head of the National Security Volunteer Militia (MVSN—*Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale*) and the director of the prime minister's press office. The ambiguities of the Grand Council were not solely related to the 'state/party' cleavage. At the same time as this body introduced Fascism into the state, it also inserted the state into an increasingly centralised party.

Almost overnight, Fascism ceased to be a movement and was transformed into a structured party that was easier for its leader to control. This was a serious problem for a party that moved from opposition to government. Symptomatic of this were the chaotic paramilitary formations linked to the party and which, from 1923, were hierarchically grouped into the MVSN. At a meeting on 15 October 1923, the internal hierarchy of the party was established as follows: the Grand Council, the National Council, and the National Directorate.

However, the first steps taken in the direction of constructing the regime were particularly confusing and contradictory, given that the Fascist political system was based on completely new elements.

The reform of the electoral law proposed by the Grand Council was important during the period of transition. During the first two decades of the 20th century, two fundamental reforms were to profoundly alter the Italian political system: universal male suffrage and proportional representation. In the 1921 elections, the mass parties—the PP and the Socialist Party (PSI—*Partito Socialista Italiano*)—secured control of parliament, while the liberals, whose power was based on *capismo*,¹ were unable to respond with their weak structures and instead backed the PNF (Galli 2004; Colarizi 2002). However, the political earthquake of 1921 was not forgotten and within a parliament in which there were only 35 Fascist deputies the question of governmental stability resurfaced—as did debate on an electoral law capable of reducing party fragmentation.

The commission, which was formed to examine a new electoral law, concluded its report with two distinct proposals. The first of

¹ The *capi* were local political bosses.

these, by Michele Bianchi (one of the *quadrumvirate* who led the March on Rome),² provided for the recognition of two-thirds of the members of the party or the coalition of parties that won the elections; the second, elaborated by Roberto Farinacci, provided for a return to the uninominal majority system.

In 1925, Bianchi's proposal, now called the Acerbo Law, was accepted by parliament, with deputies supporting it by 223 votes to 123, and senators by 165 to 41. The debate around the new electoral law, and the consequent reformulation of the relationship between the executive and legislative authorities, had particularly remote roots that were mainly concerned with keeping the emphasis on government instability. Fascism, therefore, inserted itself into this debate for more than three decades (Adinolfi 2008). The 1924 elections, the last free elections until 1946, were overwhelmingly won by the 'national bloc': that is, by a coalition of liberals and the PNF. Now, with control of two-thirds of the deputies, it was finally possible for the government of Benito Mussolini to move quickly towards a reformulation of the Italian institutional framework. The Grand Council, the driving force of the Italian revolution, worked non-stop to plan the next stages of the destruction of the liberal state.

The years 1925–6 marked the end of the PNF's collaboration with the other parties in the coalition and the beginnings of the creation of a Fascist regime. The protagonist of the institutional reforms of this period was, without doubt, Alfredo Rocco, who led the justice ministry between January 1925 and July 1932. A university professor, Rocco had been a member of the Italian Nationalist Association (ANI—*Associazione Nazionalista Italiana*), an extremely elitist group inspired by the anti-liberal ideology of *Action Française*.

Following Mussolini's speech of 3 January 1925, the Grand Council nominated one more commission to study state reform (the Commission of 18). It was now necessary to give practical application to the speeches made by the prime minister. The commission, which was composed of Nationalists, Fascists and some liberals, was divided

² The other three were: Emilio de Bono, Cesare Maria de Vecchi and Italo Balbo.

over the matter of incorporating the nation's prime movers (*forze vive*) into the state. However, their views converged on the idea of a radical critique against the universal suffrage they believed weakened the state, and on the way to establish lines around which they could redesign the form of government. With respect to this last matter, the members of the Commission of 18 were unanimous in agreeing the solution to the problem rested in the separation of executive power from the fickle humours of parliament.

Until the passing of the Fascist laws of December 1925–January 1926, the Fascist revolution seemed to be following the path marked by elitists like Gaetano Mosca—towards a profound modification of the liberal state rather than its complete destruction. On 24 December 1925, the position of head of government was introduced to the Italian system. The prime minister ceased to be *primus inter pares*, and became responsible only to the head of state. Parliament lost its power both to censure government activity and to establish the government's agenda, which from now on was the exclusive responsibility of the executive. Mosca was one of the few who voted against this reform that, as Rocco himself noted, was a step in the direction of revolutionising liberalism, submitting the individual to the nation.³

Law 100, of 31 January 1926, contributed towards defining the attributes of the head of government, establishing the authority for the executive to issue legal rulings. If on the one hand the legislative norms expanded the government's authority, it also attempted to contain the problem of decree laws, which had frequently been used by ministers without Mussolini being able to supervise them properly (Aquirone 1965). The document outlined a complex mechanism through which each decree law had to pass one month earlier to be discussed and voted upon within the council of ministers before it

³ 'It is without doubt a revolution. Revolution not caused by the violent uprising of the people that culminated in the conquest of power as the result of an act of force, but because it has radically altered the rules... As you can see, I note the new legal and moral laws created by Fascism through its intimate revolutionary virtue.' And what is the central point of this Fascist revolution? 'The subordination of the individual to the nation' (Rocco 1938: 771–80).

could be published in the government gazette. It is worth pointing out that Mussolini had a valuable ally through whom he could limit the excessive and uncontrolled use of decree laws: the council of state (*consiglio di stato*). This body, which could trace its origins to the liberal era, continued, without any modification, its oversight of administrative activities during the Fascist era; this meant that the council of state could veto all decrees from any level of the administrative hierarchy. From 1928 and throughout the *ventennio*, the president of this body was Santi Romano, one of the most notable professors of constitutional law in liberal Italy. Romano was, from the first day of Mussolini's government, one of Il Duce's most intelligent and valuable collaborators, helping him with the complicated task of dominating the complex state machinery (Melis 2003).

The royal decree of 6 November 1926 completed the new legislative framework by giving prefects the power to dissolve all associations that were counter to the national order and at the same time introduced internal exile (*confino*), which was applied to those responsible for crimes of a political nature.⁴ The PNF thus became the 'only' party. On 9 November, all those deputies who had opposed the construction of the regime had their mandates revoked. It was the final phase in the destruction of pluralism that, albeit in a very limited form, had characterised the elections of 1924.

Up to this point, the activities of the regime were designed to eliminate the remains of liberal Italy; however, now it was necessary to construct the new Fascist institutions. During 1928–9, the process of binding the PNF to the Italian state began and reform of the Fascist Grand Council was approved, transforming it into a constitutional body in the context of the single-party state. The secretary of the PNF was no longer simply the most important figure within the party, but was also—to all intents and purposes—a minister of state and as such was a member of the council of ministers (Aquarone

⁴ *Confino* was the name given to the internal exile the regime imposed on political dissidents in which they were forced to live in small villages far from their native cities.

1965). These reforms were the simple legal translation of the actual situation (Macedonio 1937). The most important consequence of this reform consisted in the transformation of the Grand Council and of the party into constitutional bodies (Mortati 1998). Not only did this position have formal repercussions, it also had substantial ones, since the secretary of the PNF—as well as the party's statutes—were approved by a decree-law that was proposed by the council of ministers and ratified by the head of state, who continued to be King Vittorio Emmanuel III. The Fascist Grand Council, the birthplace of all the reforms of this five-year period, saw an increase in its competences. It became an official consultative body both of the government, where it helped determine policy, and with respect to the constitutional reforms. Nevertheless, it also had to compose and maintain an up-to-date list of the possible successors to the position of head of government, who was in fact the person responsible for the party's internal affairs.

It was not strictly necessary for a member of the Grand Council to be a member of the party once its inclusion in the constitution meant it was no longer a party organisation, but rather a state institution. Amongst others, *de jure* members of the Grand Council included: the head of government; the presidents of both houses of parliament; the leading government ministers; the party secretary; the president of the special state defence court; and the presidents of the Fascist trade unions (which were the only permitted labour organisations). The head of government directly nominated the remaining members.

Popular representation was substituted by the idea of the organic state and as such the concept of elections between competing parties ceased to make any sense. Paradoxically, parliament continued to exist, although in a completely transformed manner. From 1929, elections were replaced by plebiscites. Citizens were called to make their voice heard by responding with a 'yes' or a 'no' to a list of 400 names. The Grand Council filled this list with the names of people chosen by leaders of the party, the unions and the employers' associations. This represented the first appearance of the corporatist state. The Senate continued to exist as it had since the 19th century.

Its composition was not suddenly altered with Mussolini's rise to power, although it did change gradually over the years. While this chamber did not overly concern Mussolini; its continuation was a sign of Fascism's inability to completely dominate the liberal state (Musiedlak 2003).

The most debated issue at this time among the community of constitutionalists—who were divided into 'continuists', Fascists and Nationalists—centred upon the nature of the Italian political system after 1929. The 'continuists' believed that the state as it had been shaped was simply an evolution of the rule of law, based on the separation of legislative, executive and judicial power—although this principle had been strongly attenuated (Romano 1933; Mortati 1998). The Fascists saw in these reforms the mark of the Fascist revolution, in which the Fascist state was completely different from the liberal state (Panunzio 1933). Finally, the Nationalists noted that the liberal state had been substituted by an organic state and, unlike Panunzio and the Fascists, stressed the state rather than the party (Rocco 1938).

The last stage in the reform of Italy's institutions took place in 1939 when the Chamber of Deputies was replaced by the Fascist Corporatist Chamber (*Camera dei Fasci e delle Corporazioni*). This reform, which was approved by the Grand Council in 1938, allowed for profound alterations to the concept of legislation, of elected chambers and of plebiscites during a five-year period. The new chamber was corporatist, therefore membership of it was by virtue of membership in a para-state body: corporation; syndicate; party; and employers' association. As a consequence of this reform, the Grand Council abdicated one of its most important tasks: that of composing the list of deputies.

Our impression is that, despite the reforms introduced during the Fascist regime, it never ceased to be a regime in which the state was much more powerful than the party. Two bodies that were products of the liberal period continued to survive without being corrupted by the PNF: the Senate and, more importantly, the monarchy. The king continued to be head of state and, therefore, Italy's most important representative; moreover, as we have seen, the head of government

was responsible to the head of state, who retained the formal authority to remove his prime minister from office. At the moment at which Mussolini was replaced, following the Grand Council's 1943 motion of no confidence in him, the king did not ask this body to provide him with a list of Mussolini's possible replacements. This fact clearly demonstrates that the king was under no obligation to submit to the wishes of the Grand Council, and that he retained autonomy regarding the choice of head of government. While the monarchy's archives have never been made available, it is very probable that the head of government had to take the king's opinion into account when he was countersigning all of the measures put before him. What we do not know is to what extent these measures were negotiated between the two most important men: Vittorio Emmanuel III and Benito Mussolini.

The Fascist Grand Council and the council of ministers

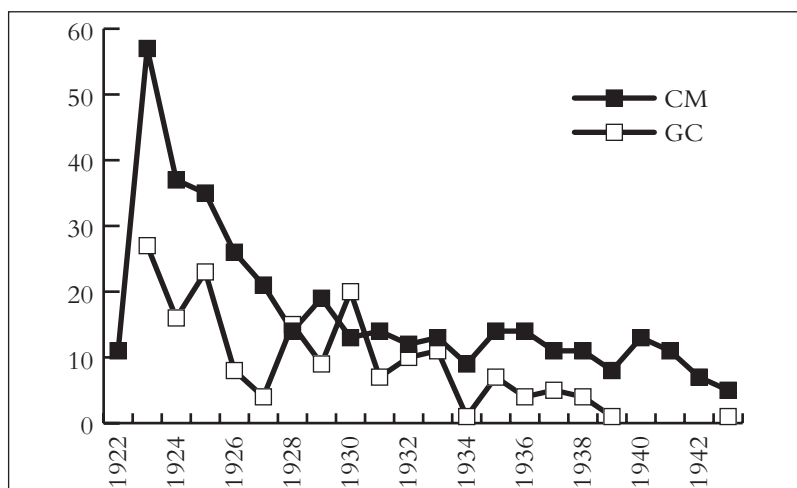
With its own statutes defining it as the driving force of the Fascist revolution, the Fascist Grand Council remains today a largely unknown and mysterious organisation. There exists no archive and the discussions that took place at its meetings were secret: in fact the only references we have are the orders of the day and brief description of the decisions that were taken. The most important material is missing: the agendas through which it would be possible to ascertain the decision-making process and the debates that took place when the regime was at its most divided—such as when the matter of belligerency was being discussed.

We are interested in highlighting the fact that, in the case of the members of the Grand Council, it is often impossible to find their biographies, since many of them were only briefly members of the political elite.

Figure 2.1 provides a comparison of the number of times the Grand Council and council of ministers met during the lifetime of the dictatorship. This data immediately demonstrates two important factors. The first is that, with the exception of 1928 and 1930, the council of ministers met more frequently than the Grand Council;

the second is that the evolution of the two bodies in terms of meetings followed the same pattern, showing a tendency for the meetings to become increasingly infrequent. There was a moment of great dynamism corresponding to the period of transition to authoritarianism—through the phase during which the liberal regime was dismantled and ending in 1928—with the insertion of Fascist institutions into the state. From that moment on, the number of council of ministers meetings remained constant while the frequency of Grand Council meetings declined until 1939 when they stopped altogether until the final meeting in July 1943.

Figure 2.1
Meetings of the council of ministers
and of the Fascist Grand Council

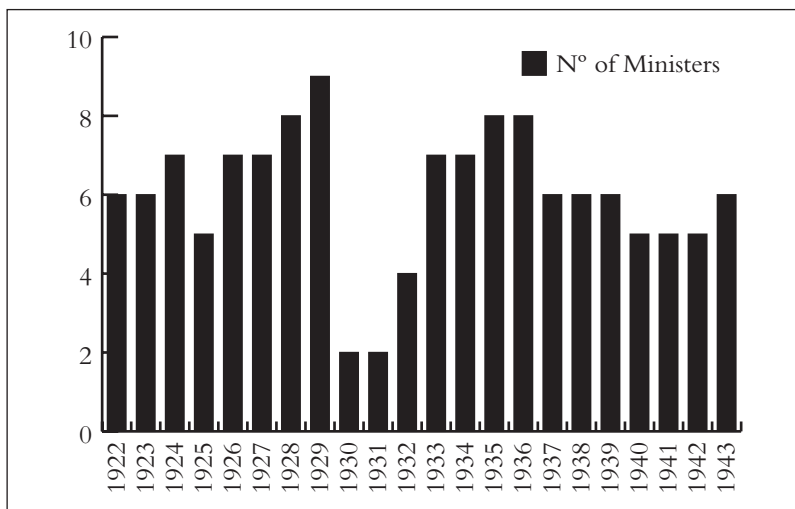


In our view, it is highly probable that the reduction in the importance of these official organisations corresponded with an increase in the power of the officious organisations: that is to say, the negative evolution of both the council of ministers and the Grand Council, which is represented in Figure 2.1, reflects an increase in Mussolini's power.

Figure 2.2 shows the number of ministries that were directly controlled by Mussolini himself, taking into account the fact there were

only around 16 portfolios in total. By personally holding nine portfolios, as was the case in 1929, Mussolini had the power of veto within the council of ministers, given that he had a vote for each of his ministries. On average, Il Duce held six portfolios, including the three defence ministries (air, war and navy), that of the prime minister, internal affairs and the foreign office. In effect, it was an administration within an administration, of centralised power that was parallel to that of the council of ministers, consisting of people who were either loyal to the leader or who had no formal decision-making authority. Ministerial under-secretaries and directors general formed a hierarchy that was mainly separate from the regime's other hierarchies; or, to put it another way, they probably belonged to the hard core of the regime.

Figure 2.2
Portfolios held by Mussolini



Returning to the Grand Council and the council of ministers, Table 2.1 reveals the cleavage between the component who formed part of the government within the Grand Council and those who never reached ministerial rank. As we have seen above, it is clear there were fewer ministers within the Grand Council compared to those

from other groups with a right to join the body: almost 36 per cent against 64.1 per cent. This should not come as much of a surprise to us, as only some of the main ministries were represented, and not the government as a whole.

Table 2.1
Ministers on the Fascist Grand Council

	N	%
Ministers	47	35.9
Others	84	64.1
Total	131	100.0

N = Number of known cases.

Source: *ICS database on the Fascist elite* (2009).

Table 2.2
Ministers on the Fascist Grand Council (by years in office)

Years	Ministers		Others	
	N	%	N	%
1	7	14.9	32	38.1
1-3	1	2.1	19	22.6
3-6	17	36.2	22	26.2
6-10	6	12.8	9	10.7
>10	16	34.0	2	2.4

N = Number of known cases.

Source: *ICS database on the fascist elite* (2009).

Our attention should be on the elite's qualitative rather than quantitative participation in the Grand Council. Table 2.2 shows that while they were fewer in number ministers and former ministers remained members of the Grand Council for longer. We see that 34 per cent of the ministers remained on the Grand Council for more than ten years

and 49 per cent for between three and ten years, with only two from the other groups managing the same feat: Giovanni Marinelli, a fascist from the very beginning, who was condemned at the Verona trial for voting in favour of Grandi's motion on 25 July 1943, and Roberto Farinacci, secretary of the PNF and the face of Fascism's most violent faction, who was almost immediately kept away from the centres of decision-making.

This is not merely a quantitative matter, since the government retained formal decision-making power while, with the exception of formulating the list of members to be elected to the chamber of deputies, the Grand Council had consultative and not decision-making powers. When German forces invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, it was the council of ministers that decided against Italian belligerency, a decision that was later ratified by the Grand Council.

Fascism's ministerial elite

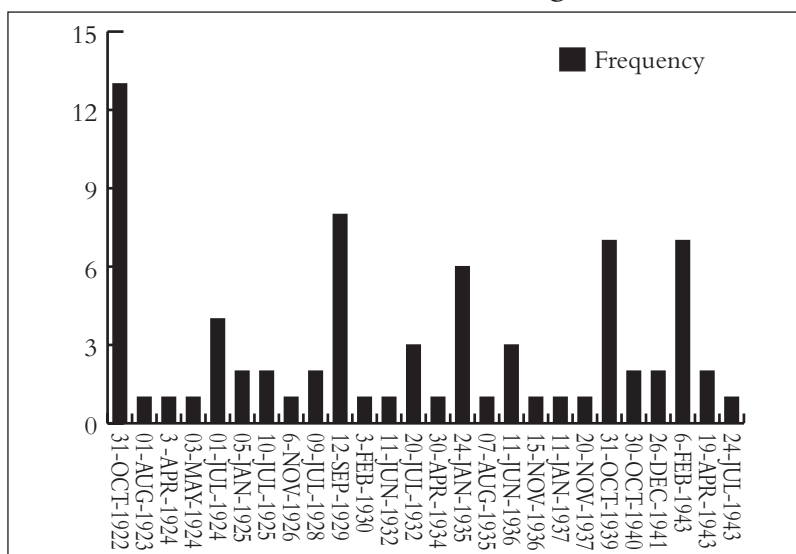
After outlining the Fascist political system, we will analyse Mussolini's government in an attempt to understand whether the periods of institutional change correspond with changes within the ministerial elite.

Figure 2.3 represents an analysis of government rotation; that is, it shows the extent of ministerial substitution—the arrivals and departures—in each portfolio. Mussolini's consulate can be divided into six distinct periods: transition (November 1922–January 1925); overthrow of the liberal regime (January 1925–September 1929); construction of the Fascist regime (September 1929–January 1935); international isolation (January 1935–October 1939); internal isolation (October 1939–February 1943) and crisis (February–July 1943).

As we have shown above, during its first two years Mussolini's government was made up of several political formations, including liberals, *popolari*, Nationalists and Fascists. The group of PNF deputies in parliament was very small, with only 35 out of a total of 535. This was too small a number for it to be possible to think of launching into risky coup attempts, particularly since there were no PNF senators. However, it was during this three-year period, rather than at the be-

ginning, that Mussolini emerged as the central figure of Italian politics. The transitional nature of the government was demonstrated by the high degree of ministerial rotation. Of the 14 ministers appointed in November 1922, only four survived until January 1925 (and two of these left the government in the spring of that year), while two of the portfolios were taken over by Mussolini.

Figure 2.3
Ministerial turnover in Mussolini's governments



The second period began with Mussolini's speech of 3 January 1925 in which, after some months of government instability as a result of the assassination of Matteotti, he accepted political responsibility for the crime. This speech signalled the beginning of the dictatorship. After the 1924 elections, with the PNF having a two-thirds majority in the chamber of deputies, it became difficult to resist the installation of the Fascist regime. The parliamentary opposition, made up of socialists, liberals, communists and *popolari*, was banned. Mussolini, with the implicit agreement of the head of state, went ahead with the process of governmental normalisation: seven ministers were removed

from office and Mussolini took interim control of the three military portfolios. The Nationalist Alfredo Rocco was nominated minister of justice, a position in which he remained for the seven crucial years during which the Fascist regime was constructed. Costanzo Ciano, a soldier, entrepreneur and nationalist who was the regime's most discreet figure and one of Mussolini's principal collaborators, was appointed to the post and telecommunications portfolio, where he remained until 1934. Guiseppe Volpi, who was also an entrepreneur and a former governor of Libya, was appointed minister of finance. Being a Fascist did not guarantee a long ministerial career: indeed, such careers were decidedly short.

The third phase (1929–35) was the 'golden age' of Mussolini's government. Following the overthrow of the liberal regime the Fascist regime was constructed. In February 1929, the Lateran Pacts with the Vatican were signed, bringing an end to the breach between the state and the church that had been in existence since 1870 when Italian troops took control of Rome, ending Vatican rule. In the interest of rigour, it would not be fair to describe the Lateran Pacts as an act of a fascism that can be labelled revolutionary, anti-monarchist, anti-clerical and anti-bourgeois: once again, Mussolini acted to unite around his regime some of those social forces that could strengthen his government. The years 1928–9 were probably the turning point from statist authoritarianism to a form of totalitarianism that was quite clearly Fascist.

We have already seen that by the end of the 1920s the Grand Council and the PNF had been transformed into constitutional bodies: the chamber of deputies, which was composed of strong corporatist criteria, ceased to be elected and followed a course that led to its decline following the conquest of Ethiopia and the decision of the international community to isolate Fascist Italy.

In 1929, Mussolini resigned as interim minister in charge of seven portfolios—foreign affairs, air, war, navy, public works, colonies, and corporations—and appointed to his new cabinet a number of pre-eminent party members: Italo Balbo (air); Dino Grandi (foreign affairs); Emilio de Bono (colonies), Guiseppe Bottai (corporations); and

Michele Bianchi (public works). Nevertheless, this wave of PNF ministers did not last long, and within a few months they had all left. Bianchi resigned from the government in 1930, with Bottai and Grandi following in 1932; then, in 1933, Balbo was appointed governor of Libya. In Mussolini's opinion, the party was increasingly a burden that had been useful to him in his rise to power, but which had become a hindrance to his personal authority. It was no coincidence that in July 1943 Bottai and Grandi were the most enthusiastic supporters of the motion of no confidence in Il Duce.

In December 1931 and after a long and mediocre career, Achille Starace was appointed secretary-general of the PNF: he was chosen largely because there was no chance of him overshadowing Mussolini. His immediate predecessor, Giovanni Giuriati, had sought to increase the party's prestige by removing the more opportunistic elements. Starace did nothing of the kind. Under Starace, the party came to acquire the image that, even today, is associated with the most notable and grotesque symbol of Fascism: uniforms of all types; the omnipresent Roman salute (the shaking of hands was considered too bourgeois); constant demonstrations; and, finally, the Fascist Saturday dedicated to physical education. It was a form of totalitarianism that did not require acceptance of the new ideology's principles, so much as acceptance of its aesthetic.

The lengthy economic crisis that had its epicentre in New York arrived in Italy in the 1930s. It became difficult to distinguish the extent to which Fascist ideology and practice of strong state intervention in the economy, contributed to the economic downturn, and to what extent this was a consequence of the crisis—although it was probably a combination of the two (De Felice 1974; Zani 1988; Dormagen 2008). In 1932, Guido Jung, an original fascist as well as a dynamic and intelligent entrepreneur who was a link in the chain connecting the employers' associations with the regime, was appointed minister of finance. It was at this time that the Industrial Reconstruction Institute (IRI—Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale) was created by the powerful Alberto Beneduce. Many of the companies that were on the brink of bankruptcy were nation-

alised and incorporated into IRI, which soon became Italy's largest company.

During the fourth phase (1935-9), Italy had a strongly controlled economy, the most intelligent and leading elements of the party had been removed from power, the PNF was seeking to break down the barriers that separated the citizens' public and private lives, and the country had entered into two cycles of war lasting ten years—the first in Ethiopia (1935-6), Spain (1936-9) and Albania (1939), and the second being the Second World War (1939-45).

Once more, the political changes were accompanied by significant government reshuffles. Six new ministers entered the cabinet, while eight left. Mussolini once more became the central figure in the government, concentrating responsibility for the three military portfolios in his person, where they were joined by the ministries for corporations, colonies, foreign affairs and internal administration. Few other ministries remained, yet it was during this period that a new star of the Fascist regime emerged in the person of Galeazzo Ciano, son of Costanzo Ciano and husband to Mussolini's daughter, Edda. Ciano's first charge was to head the ministry of popular culture (Miniculpop—the Ministry of Propaganda), following which he was appointed as an assistant at the ministry of foreign affairs. Despite not having been associated with Fascism from the beginning (he was a career diplomat), he was chosen as Mussolini's successor, a fact that caused a great deal of resentment towards him within the party.

The sanctions imposed on Italy by the League of Nations for its attack on Ethiopia caused Mussolini to move closer to German National Socialism. When, in September 1939, Germany invaded Poland, both the Fascist Grand Council and the council of ministers decided not to join the war, opting instead for non-belligerence, although without denouncing the Rome-Berlin Axis pact that had been signed just a few months earlier by Ciano and Von Ribbentrop. Mussolini regarded this decision as a shameful humiliation before Hitler. The years of militaristic propaganda had failed to make Italy a nation of combatants.

The fifth period, from December 1939 to February 1943, began in the context of a profound degradation of Mussolini's governance: the Second World War. Dino Grandi returned to the cabinet while Alessandro Pavolini, a friend of Ciano's, took charge at the ministry of propaganda. On 10 June 1940, Mussolini declared war on the United Kingdom and France; by this time, however, the Grand Council had stopped meeting, while meetings of the council of ministers had become short and sporadic. Mussolini's gamble on a quick victory did not pay off and Italy was obliged to abandon its African colonies. Neither Italian industry nor the country's armed forces were able to support a long war, and, little by little, Mussolini lost his supporters: the king, the industrialists, the workers and the larger part of his followers.

Another substantial remodelling of government marked the final phase of the Fascist regime (February–July 1943). In February, both Pavolini and Ciano resigned. In the face of Mussolini's determination to continue the war on Hitler's side, events such as the general strikes of March 1943, the bombardment of the cities, the flight from the Maghreb, and, finally, the Allied invasion of Sicily, made it imperative for the leadership to remove him from power: it was the only way they could see to end the war while saving both the regime and the monarchy. Presented with this, some of the PNF leaders called on Mussolini to hold a meeting of the Grand Council on 24 July 1943. While they sought Mussolini's removal, he was probably convinced he would manage once more to secure the support of his followers. However, by then it was too late, and the Grand Council voted against Il Duce, greatly weakening his position before the king who now felt able to replace him with another Fascist collaborator: General Pietro Badoglio.

The Fascist political elite: between liberalism and the Republic

Now that the main lines along which the government of Mussolini developed have been outlined, we must frame the Fascist political elite in the context of the development of Italian contemporary history: the liberal phase that preceded it (1913–22), which was based on

a system of proportional representation and universal male suffrage, and the period that succeeded it, the First Republic (1946–92). Two dimensions will be subject of our attention: the characteristics of the Fascist ministerial elite and government stability.

Table 2.3
Average number of cabinets and ministers

	Period		
	1913–22	1922–43	1946–92
Cabinets	11 (0.81)	6 (3.3)	48 (0.96)
Prime ministers	8	1	18
Ministers	107	75	275
Average (years)	2.2	2.9	3.5

Source: *ICS database on the fascist elite* (2009); Cotta and Verzichelli (2002).

From Table 2.3, we can extract generic data that enables us to make an initial assessment. If the stability of the Fascist-era cabinets was incomparably greater than during the other two periods analysed (Table 2.3), this stability is still not very significant, since there were significant reshuffles every three years, resulting in six different governments. The data is surprising and counter-intuitive, although the coherence of what we are asserting is revealed in line four of Table 2.3: at 3.5 years, the average length of time each minister remained in office was greater during the First Republic—a regime well-known for its governmental instability—compared to 2.9 years during Fascism.

We are dealing here with the paradox of an unstable dictatorship: one in which the rate of ministerial rotation was extremely high. The data in Table 2.4 reveals that 82.6 per cent of Fascist-era ministers were responsible for only one portfolio: a proportion clearly greater than that found in the other Italian regimes. Only Benito Mussolini, who controlled 19 different ministries, had a substantial presence within the government.

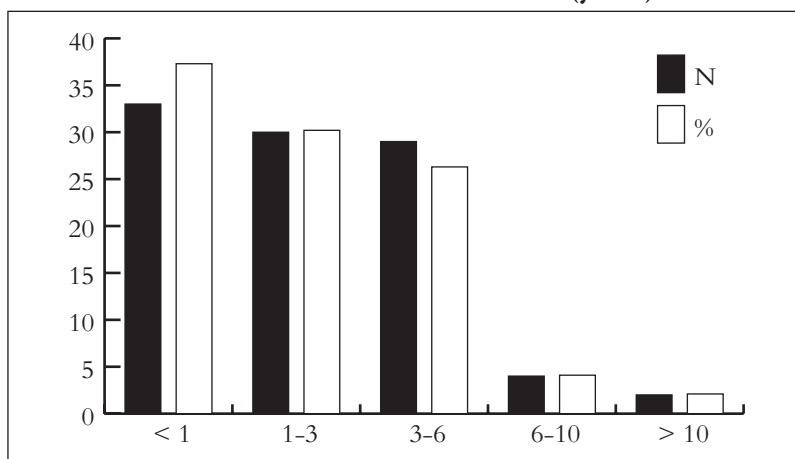
Table 2.4
Mobility of ministers through portfolios (%)

Period	Number of posts				
	1	2	3	4-6	> 7
Liberalism	56.1	24.3	9.3	10.2	0.0
Fascism	82.6	13.3	2.6	0.0	1.3
Democratic transition	57.3	20.8	11.5	7.3	3.1
1st Republic	44.0	2.8	13.9	18.3	0.0

Source: *ICS database on the fascist elite* (2009); Cotta and Verzichelli (2002).

Figure 2.4 completes the preceding table insofar as it demonstrates the permanence, in years, of ministers in Fascist governments. Unfortunately, the lack of data does not permit us to make a comparison with the other regimes; nevertheless, the high turnover in absolute numbers is reinforced by the shortness in years of government continuity. Almost 70 per cent of politicians remained in government for no more than three years, while only two ministers remained in office

Figure 2.4
Duration of ministerial careers (years)



for more than ten years: Mussolini and Costanzo Ciano, who, as we have shown, was not generally thought of as one of the more important faces of Fascism. We will not find many original Fascists in the group that survived in office for between six and ten years. Of those ministers who did survive for this period of time we have Galeazzo Ciano, the diplomat who entered government during the 1930s, and who was only a very superficial follower of *squadristi* fascism, and the Nationalist Alfredo Rocco. Among the Fascists with longer ministerial careers we can mention Thaon de Revel Ignazio, businessman and the powerful minister of finances, and Giuseppe Bottai, who was probably one of Fascism's most significant figures owing to his activities in the field of culture.

The data also reveals that during his time in government Mussolini (who had the final say on all political decisions) was not assisted by a stable political elite.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that throughout the six phases of different governments, Mussolini attempted to interpret the possibilities that were presented by the political context, and pragmatically and systematically to choose what he considered the most appropriate solutions and most suitable men. The transformation of the liberal political system and, therefore, the choice of the new regime's elite, was not the result of any coherent ideological thought that developed in different stages. This indicates that the Fascist regime was largely the fruit of contingent and instinctive responses to problems as they arose.

What are the characteristics peculiar to a Fascist minister? To what extent did Fascism represent a break from liberal Italy? By analysing the data in Table 2.5, we can see that Fascism introduced, in a radical manner, a completely new political elite that was without previous governmental experience.

Only 9.3 per cent of Mussolini's minister held ministerial office before October 1922 (see Table 2.5), which is a very significant number when we consider that 20 per cent of the ministers during the transition to democracy (1943-8) had served in the pre-Fascist liberal governments (Adinolfi 2009). Moreover, while the liberal and republican regimes were separated by a relatively long period of time,

the proportion of 'transit' between the two was more than double that between the liberal and the Fascist regimes. Liberal deputies who served as ministers in the Fascist regime were also a small minority (10 per cent). We should note that parliament is not normally a recruitment path for ministerial office in a dictatorship; however, this affirmation may be premature, since 76 per cent of ministers (Table 2.6), prior to being nominated to ministerial office, had been deputies: a statistic that ought to generate a certain degree of interest and encourage new research into the relationship between the government and parliament during the Fascist dictatorship, since there is an apparent continuity between Fascism and both the liberal regime and the First Republic.

Table 2.5
Continuity with the Liberal Regime*

	N	%
Ministers	7	9.3
Deputies	11	14.7

* Before 1921.

N = Number of known cases.

Source: *ICS database on the fascist elite* (2009).

There were few ministers who, prior to their nomination, had not been politically involved in other organisations (6.6 per cent), suggesting a certain degree of political professionalism that we will examine in closer detail below. We have already seen that work experience in the chamber of deputies was almost a condition *sine qua non* to entering government. Thus, in 34.7 per cent of cases, the ministers were PNF leaders (generally, before being nominated ministers, they served as under-secretaries in 41.3 per cent of cases). It ought to be noted that we have used multiple coding; that is, since all of the positions the minister held before their nomination have been considered, we are able to observe that, at their root, the criteria for recruitment were not very much different from those of the liberal and republi-

can regimes—based precisely on under-secretaries, party leaders and parliamentary deputies. The large Fascist para-state, which comprised corporations, unions and other associations, opened the door to only 22.7 per cent of all ministers. Even less paradigmatic was the presence of ministers with a militia background (10.7 per cent) or who had come up from local government (12 per cent).

Table 2.6
Political offices held by ministers (%)*

Political offices	%
None	6.6
Mayor or local councillor	12.0
Prefect	1.3
Colonial governor	5.3
Parliamentarian	82.7
<i>Deputy</i>	76.0
<i>Peer or senator</i>	6.7
Secretary or under-secretary of state	41.3
Member of <i>cabinets ministériels</i>	0.0
Ministerial director	0.0
Local or national leader of the single party	34.7
Youth movement	1.3
Militia	10.7
Para-state corporatist institutions	22.7
Party officers	61.3
N	210

* Before their first appointment to cabinet. Multiple coding has been applied when ministers had held different political offices.

N= Number of known cases.

Source: *ICS database on the fascist elite* (2009); Cotta and Verzichelli (2002).

One of the most contradictory interpretations in the literature over fascism was that concerning the relative importance of the single-party in the construction and government of the regime. It is increasingly evident that in order for this variable to be more accept-

able, we must only consider those ministers who were members of the party before October 1922, since after that date membership of the party had largely become obligatory.

With around 60 per cent of ministers also being leaders of the PNF, there can be little doubt about the quantitative importance of the party, despite it not being essential for access to the upper layers of the regime's political elite. This proportion is more or less equal to that of the number of ministers who were members of the party before 1921 (58.7 per cent, see Table 2.7), a figure that reveals the difficulties of renewal—which is necessary for any regime seeking to remain vital—of the Fascist political elite.

Table 2.7
Ministers' party membership*

Parties	N	%
None	10	13.3
Liberal Party	9	12.0
PNF	44	58.7
Nationalist Party	9	12.0
Popular Party	3	4.0
Total	75	100.0

* Before October 1922.

N= Number of known cases.

Source: *ICS database on the fascist elite* (2009).

Ministers who had not previously been actively involved in political parties were in the minority: representing only 13.3 per cent of the total. We must not forget that there were other parties: the PLI (12 per cent) and the PP (4 per cent), so it is important to remember that during these first two years Mussolini's government was a coalition in which these parties participated. Of more interest to us is the 12 per cent represented by the Nationalists, who had a particularly conspicuous presence in the government (Rocco and Costanzo Ciano were both Nationalists). The contradiction in this data causes us to ask yet

another question: what was the quantitative weight of the parties in the government? That is, apart from the number of ministers, how long did each party share power?

Table 2.8, which lists the ministers according to the length of time they remained in government, divided by the several parties (without counting the head of government) is particularly interesting. Among the parties that formed the governing coalition between 1922 and 1925, the members of the PP were in power for the shortest time, with 66.7 per cent of their number being removed or removing themselves from government during the first year. Of the liberals, 42.9 per cent of their number lasted less than one year, although a further 28.6 per cent remained in office for between three and six years: paradoxically, an equal number to that of the Nationalists and the Fascists. Of these liberal ministers, we should mention Antonio Stefano Benni, one of the leading figures of the employers' associations and a sponsor of the 2/1000 tax that members of Confindustria paid to finance the PNF's propaganda campaigns in 1923.

Table 2.8
Party representation in Mussolini's government (%)

Parties	< 1 year	1-3 years	3-6 years	6-10 years	> 10
None	36.4	36.4	27.3	0.0	0.0
Liberal Party	42.9	28.6	28.6	0.0	0.0
PNF	33.3	31.4	29.4	5.9	0.0
Nationalist	15.4	46.2	23.1	7.7	7.7
Popular Party	66.7	33.3	0.0	0.0	0.0

Source: *ICS database on the fascist elite* (2009).

The division between Nationalist and Fascist ministers seems to us to be the more important one to note. It became evident that the former had a greater longevity than the latter, who were replaced more often. During the first year, 33.3 per cent of the PNF's ministers were removed from the government, half of whom were National-

ists. However, the most surprising is presented at the opposite end of the table: no Fascist remained at the same ministry for more than ten years, and only 5.9 per cent did so for between six and ten years. The situation with the Nationalists was different, with 7.7 per cent of their number remaining in position for more than ten years, and 7.7 per cent between six and ten years.

There was a substantial difference: that of a quantitative presence that does not correspond to the qualitative presence of the two formations that formed the government in 1923.

The Fascist generation

Among the variables that confirm the high degree of fascism's discontinuity relative to liberalism and the First Republic, we note that the average age of ministers was significantly lower during Fascism (47) than it was during liberalism (52) and the First Republic (54) (see Table 2.9). These statistics demonstrate just one more element, showing not only the party nature of the Fascist political elite, but also its generational character: Mussolini was only 40 years old when the king appointed him prime minister. This means that the ministers were a group that had grown up during the two nationalist wars: the first against the Ottoman Empire in the conquest of Libya in 1911 and then, especially, during the conflicts that led to Italy's intervention in the First World War—which has since become known as the 'May Day of 1915'. However, what united them was not only their support for the same party, but also a shared world-view based on the dramatic and exalting experiences of the front-line trenches: their common language was forged by comradeship, the Roman salute and an obsession with militarism.

Table 2.9 shows the evolution of the age of ministers during the fascist period, which, paradoxically, declines over the years: a trend that is highly counter-intuitive. From the fifth period (1939–43), we note the introduction of a new generation into the governing elite: for example, Alessandro Pavolini became minister of propaganda at the age of 36, while Ettore Muti was appointed to replace Starace as party secretary in 1939. Muti and Pavolini were two of the tragic

figures of Fascism: the former died having been abandoned in April 1945 by a fleeing Mussolini; the latter died during the summer of 1943. Aldo Vidussoni was only 27 when he replaced Muti as party secretary. A young and inexperienced man who fought in Fascism's wars in Ethiopia and Spain, his term as party secretary was very short, being replaced by Carlo Scorza in April 1943.

Table 2.9
Average age of ministers (%)*

Period	Average age
Liberalism	52
Fascism	47
1922-25	48
1925-29	46
1929-35	46
1935-39	46
1939-43	42
Feb-Jul 43	49
First Republic	54

*Age at the time of the first appointment

Source: *ICS database on the fascist elite* (2009).

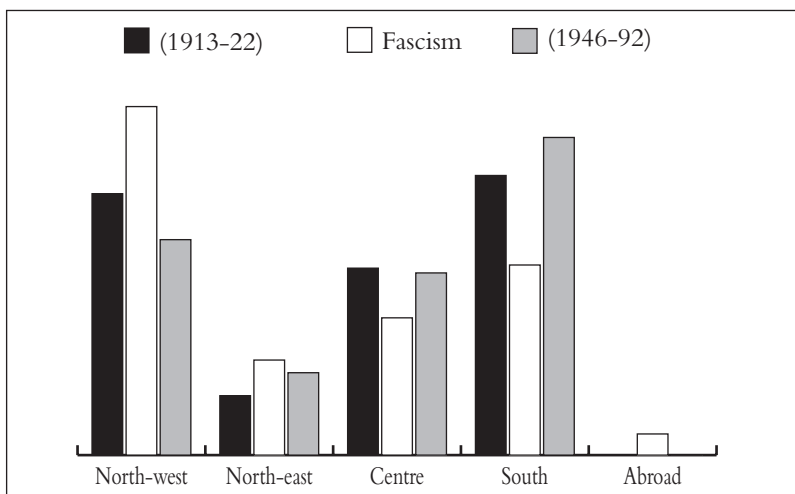
On the one hand, Fascism introduced a new generation of politicians into its leading structures, while the time this new generation remained in government was short, with the average age of ministers during the sixth period rising considerably. The answer to the question of whether Fascism would have been capable of regeneration thus remains wide open.

Geographic origins

Geographic divisions have always been particularly significant in Italy: the Kingdom of Sardinia had only managed to unify the very diverse peninsula in 1861. The history of Fascism is also the history of one part of Italy: Lombardy, Piedmonte and Emilia Romagna are the

three regions within which the Action Squads (*Squadrace d'Azione*) were born and developed. Fascism did not reach the south of the country until much later, when it was no longer a movement, but a regime. The data in Figure 2.5 attests to this fact.

Figure 2.5
Regional origins of ministers: geographical areas (%)



Mussolini's entire political career developed between Emilia Romagna and Lombardy, and it was in these regions that he established his network of companions who were to go on to be the more important party bosses: Dino Grandi, Italo Balbo, Luigi Federzoni (the only minister of the interior other than Mussolini), Emilio de Bono and Cesare de Vecchi.

Fascism presented itself as a phenomenon with a strong generational and regional identity, and it had great difficulty penetrating other strata of Italian society, such as in the south of the country, where its political apogee was to come after the war.

Education

Education provides yet another example of Fascism's break from the past in a country in which, at least since unification in 1861, an

undergraduate degree was considered a basic requirement for ministerial office (Cotta and Verzichelli 2002).

Only 64 per cent of Mussolini's ministers had a university degree, while in the last period of liberalism the percentage was 83.2, rising to 90.8 during the First Republic. Mussolini had not graduated from university, in common with many of Fascism's leaders who had no university education, such as, for example, Guido Jung, who served as minister of finance during the Great Depression, and Achille Starace, who led the party for almost a decade.

During Fascism, the proportion of military in government declined (see Table 2.10); however, as we have seen, more than it being just a 'civilianisation' of the military portfolios, this fact was linked to Il Duce's mistrust of this group, whom he believed were more loyal to the monarchy than they were to Fascism.

Table 2.10
Educational level of ministers (%)

Level	1913-22	Fascism	1946-92
Any degree	3.7	12.0	8.8
Civilian university educated	83.2	64.0	90.8
Military graduate	13.1	13.3	0.4
Secondary school	nd	10.7	0.0

Source: *ICS database on the fascist elite* (2009); Cotta and Verzichelli (2002).

An analysis of the most common degrees (Table 2.11) throws up some surprises that one more demonstrate Fascism's differences. During this regime, only 46 per cent of those with degrees had graduated from the law faculties (64 per cent during liberalism and 62.8 per cent during the First Republic), which had for a long time been a centre for the recruitment of the political elite. On the other hand, the proportion of engineering and architecture graduates rose from 4 per cent during liberalism and the First Republic, to almost 13 per cent during Fascism.

Table 2.11
Fields of higher education of ministers (%)

Fields of education	1913–22	Fascism	1946–92
Agronomy and veterinary	1.0	5.6	1.2
Economics and management	3.0	4.0	11.6
Engineering	4.0	13.0	4.0
Humanities and social sciences	10.0	11.0	13.6
Law	64.0	46.0	62.8
Mathematics and natural sciences	2.0	6.0	3.2
Military	13.0	13.3	0.4
Chemistry and physics	3.0	4.0	3.2

Source: *ICS database on the fascist elite* (2009); Cotta and Verzichelli (2002).

Profession

From an initial look at Table 2.13 (which uses multiple coding), the statistic that jumps out is the high percentage of professional politicians. Approximately 71 per cent of Mussolini's ministers fell into this category (Melis 2008). There were few ministers who, at the time they were appointed, came from private industry (29 per cent). More often they were involved in professions that were linked to the state (45.1 per cent).

Table 2.12
Occupational distribution of ministers
according to employment status (%)

Employment status	N	%
Public	32	45.1
Private	23	29.0
Mixed	54	70.7
Total	109	144.8*

* Does not equal 100 due to multiple coding.

N= Number of known cases.

Source: *ICS database on the fascist elite* (2009).

With respect to the professions, it is first necessary to highlight the fact the data we have is different from that used before now in the comparison of the liberal and republican regimes. We have used a system of multiple coding; consequently, the number of professional politicians increased.

Having stated the premise, we must turn to the number of professional politicians in order to provide a better explanation. As we have seen above (Table 2.6), only 6.6 per cent of ministers held no political office prior to their appointment, while 76 per cent had been deputies and 41.3 per cent had been under-secretaries. Secondly, we must take into consideration the fact the Fascist political elite's careers began with the interventionist demonstrations of May 1915, followed by the experience in the trenches and with *squadristo*. The Fascist regime demanded much of its supporters and gave them much in return: positions within the para-state, within the corporations, the syndicates and in the many institutional organisations.

In addition to the professional politicians, there was also a high proportion of university professors (26.6 per cent during Fascism, against 19.6 and 20.6 per cent during the final days of liberalism and during the 1950s, respectively). Without doubt this was the most important category within Fascism, because within it we find those ministers who actually constructed the regime: Giacomo Acerbo, author of the 1924 electoral reform; Giovanni Gentile, the neo-idealist philosopher who was responsible for the reform of education; and Alfredo Rocco, minister of justice during the central years of the regime's construction, theorist of the organic state and author of the penal code that remains in force to this day. These men were not Fascists, but nationalists—two different ways to understand the regime that was founded in 1925. The final data worth mentioning is based on the paucity of lawyers in ministerial office during Fascism. At 6.6 per cent, the proportion was much lower than during the final period of liberalism (23.5 per cent) and the first phase of the First Republic (43.1 per cent).

Table 2.13
Ministers' occupational background (%)*

Occupational categories	1913-22	Fascism	1950
Military	13.1	8.0	-
<i>Army</i>	8.8	5.3	-
<i>Navy</i>	4.3	2.7	-
<i>Air force</i>	-	-	-
Judge or public prosecutor	-	-	-
Diplomat	-	5.3	-
Senior civil servant	-	2.6	-
Middle civil servant	-	1.3	-
Officer of state corporatist agencies	-	1.3	-
University professor	19.6	26.6	20.6
Teacher	-	-	5.6
Employee	-	-	-
Writer or journalist	-	6.6	4.2
Lawyer	23.5	6.6	43.1
Medical doctor	-	-	-
Engineer	-	3.9	1.4
Manager	5.6	9.3	-
Businessman, industrialist or banker	-	-	6.9
Landowner or farmer	3.6	-	-
Full-time politician	-	70.7	8.3
Other	3.7	2.6	5.6
Total	69.1	144.8	95.7

* Does not equal 100 due to multiple coding.

Source: *ICS database on the fascist elite* (2009); Cotta and Verzichelli (2002).

Conclusions

In the first part of this chapter we analysed the Fascist regime's political system and its evolution during the *ventennio*. The project to restructure the liberal state had to conform to circumstances, and

Fascism did not have an *a priori* objective outlined from the beginning. If the bases of pluralist representation that had largely characterised the final years of liberal Italy had been undermined, the successive reforms did not manage to destroy the foundations of the Italian state. We note that the head of state remained—albeit in a largely symbolic and easily manipulated role, but the Senate also continued, as did the Albertine Statute and institutions, including the council of state, that controlled government activity: in fact, it was within the state and around it that Mussolini constructed his regime. Following the transition to authoritarianism (1922–5) and the consolidation of the single-party state (1925–9), both the Fascist Grand Council and the PNF were subsumed into the state, with the king counter-signing the decree-law naming the party secretary and outlining the party's statutes. While the Grand Council was apparently bestowed with extensive powers, such as the authority to nominate deputies, they were largely consultative in character. The council of ministers was a formal and substantial organisation in which decisions were at least ratified.

It should be noted that in the construction of the Fascist regime, the nationalist ideal of the organic state played a more important role than that of the revolutionary state. This was a path that reached its conclusion in 1939 when the chamber of deputies was replaced by the Fascist Corporatist Chamber, representing one of the steps in the construction of corporatism.

The second part of this chapter compared the council of ministers with the Fascist Grand Council. From the beginning we could see the council of ministers both met more frequently and, above all, with greater constancy, while the Grand Council did not meet at all between 1939 and 1943, without affecting the regime's ability to function. However, the inexorable reduction in the frequency of meetings shows that the decision-making authority rested elsewhere. For this reason we proceeded to an admittedly limited analysis of Mussolini's 'sub-government': the interim government in which he held an average of six portfolios from a total of between 16 and 17, from a minimum of two to a maximum of nine.

The Grand Council, which was the Fascist revolution's driving force, had its hard-core of ministers and former ministers sitting alongside a majority of members who would never achieve ministerial rank. This also means that, given the instability of the council of ministers, there was a group of ten people who remained members of the Grand Council for 15 years.

The third part of this chapter was dedicated to an examination of the evolution of the Fascist political elite in the course of its changes. The emphasis was on the question: 'Were there also governmental changes parallel to the institutional cleavages?'

The numbers provide evidence of a high ministerial turnover and, contemporaneously, that this turnover increased exponentially at those moments the regime changed, so much so that each of the phases had its own elite. We counted six different periods of change, which we labelled: transition (1922-5); destruction of the liberal state (1925-9); consolidation of the organic state (1929-35); international isolation (1935-9); internal isolation (1939-February 1943); and crisis (February-July 1943). This was a process through which Mussolini's closest comrades were removed from decision-making positions until the question of the regime became almost a family affair, with Galeazzo Ciano, Mussolini's son-in-law, being chosen as his successor.

In the fourth part, we sketched a profile of the Fascist ministerial elite. We noted that there was a strong contrast, in almost all respects, between this group, its liberal predecessors and its republican successors: they were younger, less well-educated and came mainly from the north of the country. Secondly, we noted that as well as sharing the same party militancy the Fascist ministerial elite tended to come from the same regions of Italy, with the majority being from Lombardy, Piedmonte and Emilia Romagna—regions in which Mussolini first developed his political activism. Moreover, this group also shared the problems of a generation educated in an atmosphere of belligerent rhetoric that characterised Italian nationalism between the 1911 war against the Ottoman Empire and the First World War. It became difficult to distinguish between the private, professional and political life, given that the majority of the ministerial elite lived entirely within

the many structures formed by the regime, the party, the corporations and the companies that were nationalised following the economic crisis of 1929.

Meanwhile, alongside these statistics, it is impossible for us not to undertake a qualitative investigation of the political elite. We concluded that in the contiguity of the majority of Fascist ministers who were in office for particularly short periods (up to three years), there was an elite within the elite, formed by ministers of nationalist origin, mainly university professors who had been charged with constructing and codifying the main institutional changes (Alfredo Rocco) and who founded an ideology, albeit one that had many contradictions (Giovanni Gentile).

We can say there is empirical evidence to support the conclusions of Aquarone (1965) and De Felice (2000) that the main centres for exercising the regime's authority were the state and Mussolini himself, with the party playing a secondary role, since in not one phase of our analysis could we find any evidence that the party made any attempt to replace the state. Rather, the data analysed here is unequivocal in affirming that not only were the institutions not fascistised, but that the party was subsumed into the state. The most pre-eminent men were not always chosen for their party backgrounds; they were mainly selected for their ability to translate the wishes of a pragmatic leader into concrete policies. The dilution of Fascism by nationalist ideology, which was included in some of the structures of the old liberal state, is, in our opinion, due also to the nature of the transition to authoritarianism: this was gradual and, at least at the beginning, started from a position of weakness that obliged the new regime to incorporate parts of the old.

In conclusion, we leave one important question unanswered, one that was raised by António Costa Pinto (2002): what influence did Mussolini's inner circle, his parallel administration, exercise? That is, what was the influence of that half of the government that was conducted directly by *Il Duce*?

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