

Due parole sull'Italia: Storia



Rome begins as a rural settlement on hilltops by the Tiber River. Its mythical date of foundation is 753 BCE. After a period of monarchical rule (the mythical Seven Kings of Rome) an oligarchic Republic is formed in 509 BCE.

The Roman Republic, 509 BCE – 27 BCE

Over the course of several centuries Rome expands from its city limits to encompass all of the Italian peninsula, most of Western Europe and parts of the Near East and North Africa.



Roman Empire, 27 BCE – c. 476 CE

Under the Emperors, Rome further expands, but ultimately dissolves (in the West) under pressure from the ‘barbarian’ invasions.



**Middle Ages,
c. 476 - c. 1350**

Italy ceases to be a unified political entity, breaking up into a collection of independent and semi-independent states, with ever-shifting rulers, borders and alliances.

The Pope rules over a vast area in central Italy.



“Renaissance”
c. 1350 – c. 1500

The Arts and Sciences blossom as local rulers and the Pope finance artists, scholars, writers, architects etc., often with an eye toward their own self-aggrandizement. Political fragmentation continues, and the peninsula descends into a centuries-long period of wars and foreign domination.



Modern Era, 1494 - 1860

Italy comes under foreign domination as France, Spain and Austria carve up the peninsula, leaving the Papal States in the center, which shifts its alliance between the larger powers as the occasion dictates.



This cartoon depicts Ferenc Gyulay, the Austrian governor of Lombardy-Venetia as he slices his enemies up into pieces ... at least on paper.

Risorgimento, c. 1769-1870

A period of growing yearning for national unity.

Garibaldi and the Kingdom of Sardinia conquer and annex territories one by one, officially uniting the peninsula as a parliamentary monarchy under the House of Savoy in 1861. Rome is annexed in 1870 and the Pope is allowed to stay Vatican City.



1861-1918

- The period between 1861 and 1915 is difficult for the new Kingdom of Italy, which must form itself and consolidate. Many Italians do not approve of the fledgling state, with its new taxes and laws.
- Italy embarks on colonial wars to gain territory in Africa.
- At the start of World War I in 1914, Italy declares itself neutral, but it enters the war on the side of France and the UK the following year, in hopes of expanding into areas controlled by Austria-Hungary (Trentino Alto –Adige, Venezia Giulia, parts of the Dalmatian coast).
- At the end of a brutal war (1918) Italy emerges victorious, and annexes some of the territory it had wanted. However, Italy sustains enormous human and economic damage, causing popular discontent.

Fascist Italy 1922-1945

- Benito Mussolini takes advantage of this discontent and founds the Fascist Party in 1919. Mussolini and his militia (the Black Shirts) amass their power through intimidation, until the King asks Mussolini to form a government in 1922. Over the course of a few years, Mussolini consolidates power, and Italy becomes a de facto dictatorship (with the King as head of government in name only).



- Fascist Italy allies itself with Hitler's Nazi Germany with two pacts, in 1936 and 1939.
- In 1938 the Italian government passes the Racial Laws, which are strongly anti-Semitic.

- World War II begins in 1939. In 1940 Italy enters the war alongside Germany against the Allies (France, UK, USSR, and later, the US).
- The war is a disaster for Italy, and in 1943 Mussolini is overthrown and arrested. Italy signs an armistice with the Allies, and the Germans invade and occupy Northern and Central Italy, while the Allies take Southern Italy.
- 1943-45: Civil war between Italian partisans who fight alongside the Allies, and the Nazi-Fascists (those Italians who stayed loyal to the Fascists and their German allies).
- April 25, 1945: The war comes to an end when partisans and the Allies liberate Milan. Mussolini is captured as he tries to escape to Switzerland, and the partisans execute him.



Partisan women

The Italian Republic

After the disasters of Fascism and WWII, Italians vote to oust the king and become a democratic parliamentary republic with a multi-party system in 1946, and the division into twenty administrative regions is established.

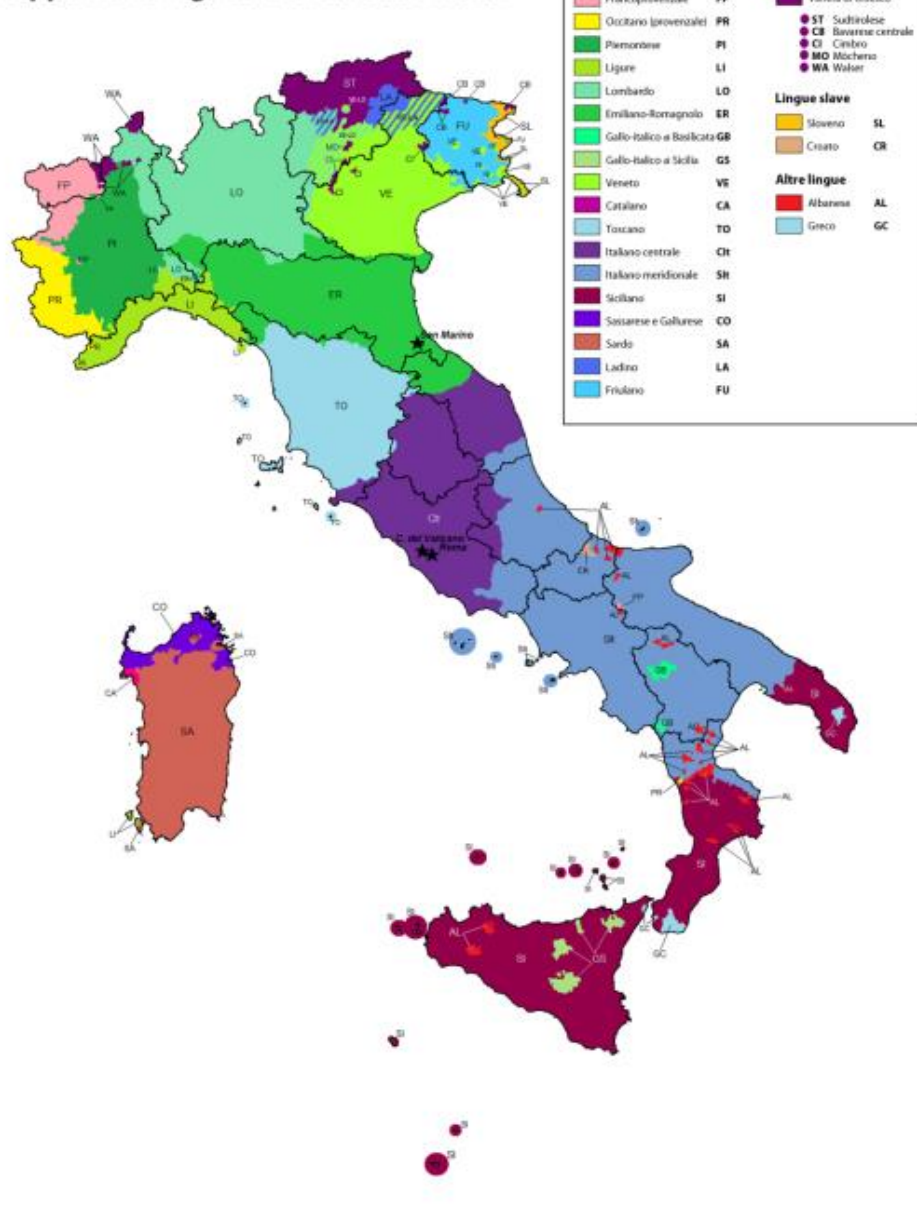
Italy has had 61 governments between 1946 and 2020.

Italy aligns itself with the US during the Cold War.

Italy is one of the founding members of the European Union.



Mapa delle lingue e dei dialetti d'Italia



Standard Italian & Dialects

Centuries of political and social fragmentation created great linguistic diversity on the peninsula, with thousands of local dialects (languages), many mutually unintelligible.

At unification in 1860 only 2.5% of Italians could actually speak Italian. Thanks to public education and mass media (radio, television, etc.) nearly all Italians can now speak Italian (with extant regional variation), while local dialects are still quite commonly spoken in familiar situations, especially in the South and Northeast of the country.