

UNIFICATION OF ITALY

(1820-1870)

- **Italian unification** also known as the **Risorgimento** Italian was the 19th-century political and social movement that resulted in the consolidation of different states of the Italian Peninsula into a single state, the Kingdom of Italy. Inspired by the rebellions in the 1820s and 1830s against the outcome of the Congress of Vienna, the unification process was precipitated by the revolutions of 1848, and reached completion in 1871, when Rome was officially designated the capital of the Kingdom of Italy.
- Some of the states that had been targeted for unification did not join the Kingdom of Italy until 1918, after Italy defeated Austria-Hungary in World War I. For this reason, historians sometimes describe the unification period as continuing past 1871, to include activities during the late 19th century and the First World War (1915–1918), and reaching completion only with the Armistice of Villa Giusti on November 4, 1918. This more expansive definition of the unification period is the one presented, for example, at the Central Museum of the Risorgimento at the Vittoriano.

Background

- Italy was unified by Rome in the third century BC. For 700 years, it was a *de facto* territorial extension of the capital of the Roman Republic and Empire, and for a long time experienced a privileged status but was not converted into a province until [Augustus](#).
- After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, [Italy](#) remained united under the [Ostrogothic Kingdom](#) and later disputed between the Kingdom of the Lombards and the Byzantine (Eastern Roman) Empire. Following conquest by the [Frankish Empire](#), the title of King of Italy merged with the office of [Holy Roman Emperor](#). However, the emperor was an absentee [German](#)-speaking foreigner who had little concern for the governance of Italy as a state; as a result, Italy gradually developed into a system of [city-states](#). Southern Italy, however, was governed by the long-lasting [Kingdom of Sicily](#) or Kingdom of Naples, which had been established by the Normans. Central Italy was governed by the Pope as a temporal kingdom known as the Papal States.

- This situation persisted through the [Renaissance](#) but began to deteriorate with the rise of modern [nation-states](#) in the [early modern period](#). Italy, including the Papal States, then became the site of [proxy wars](#) between the major powers, notably the [Holy Roman Empire](#) (including [Austria](#)), [Spain](#), and [France](#).
- Harbingers of national unity appeared in the treaty of the [Italic League](#), in 1454, and the 15th-century foreign policy of [Cosimo De Medici](#) and [Lorenzo De Medici](#). Leading Renaissance Italian writers [Dante](#), [Petrarch](#), [Boccaccio](#), [Machiavelli](#) and [Guicciardini](#) expressed opposition to foreign domination. Petrarch stated that the "ancient valour in Italian hearts is not yet dead" in *Italia Mia*. Machiavelli later quoted four verses from *Italia Mia* in [The Prince](#), which looked forward to a political leader who would unite Italy "to free her from the [barbarians](#)".

- The Peace of Westphalia in 1648 formally ended the rule of the Holy Roman Emperors in Italy. However, the Spanish branch of the Habsburg dynasty, another branch of which provided the Emperors, continued to rule most of Italy down to the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14).
- A sense of Italian national identity was reflected in [Gian Rinaldo Carli](#)'s *Della Patria degli Italiani*, written in 1764. It told how a stranger entered a café in Milan and puzzled its occupants by saying that he was neither a foreigner nor a Milanese. "'Then what are you?' they asked. 'I am an Italian,' he explained."

French Revolution

- The Habsburg rule in Italy came to an end with the campaigns of the French Revolutionaries in 1792–97, when a series of client republics were set up. In 1806, the Holy Roman Empire was dissolved by the last emperor, [Francis II](#), after its defeat by Napoleon at the [Battle of Austerlitz](#). The [Italian campaigns of the French Revolutionary Wars](#) destroyed the old structures of feudalism in Italy and introduced modern ideas and efficient legal authority; it provided much of the intellectual force and social capital that fueled unification movements for decades after it collapsed in 1814.^[8] The French Republic spread republican principles, and the institutions of republican governments promoted citizenship over the rule of the Bourbons and Habsburgs and other dynasties.^[9] The reaction against any outside control challenged [Napoleon Bonaparte](#)'s choice of rulers. As Napoleon's reign began to fail, the rulers he had installed tried to keep their thrones (among them [Eugène de Beauharnais](#), viceroy of Italy, and [Joachim Murat](#), [king of Naples](#)) further feeding nationalistic sentiments. Beauharnais tried to get Austrian approval for his succession to the new Kingdom of Italy, and on 30 March 1815, Murat issued the [Rimini Proclamation](#), which called on Italians to revolt against their Austrian occupiers.

Reaction and Dreams 1815–1848

- After Napoleon fell, the [Congress of Vienna](#) (1814–15) restored the pre-Napoleonic patchwork of independent governments. Italy was again controlled largely by the [Austrian Empire](#) and the [Habsburgs](#),^[10] as they directly controlled the predominantly Italian-speaking northeastern part of Italy and were, together, the most powerful force against unification.
- An important figure of this period was Francesco Melzi d'Eril, serving as vice-president of the Napoleonic [Italian Republic](#) (1802–1805) and consistent supporter of the Italian unification ideals that would lead to the Italian *Risorgimento* shortly after his death.^[11] Meanwhile, artistic and literary sentiment also turned towards nationalism; [Vittorio Alfieri](#), Francesco Lomonaco and [Niccolò Tommaseo](#) are generally considered three great literary precursors of Italian nationalism, but the most famous of proto-nationalist works was [Alessandro Manzoni's](#) *I promessi sposi* (*The Betrothed*), widely read as a thinly veiled allegorical critique of Austrian rule. Published in 1827 and extensively revised in the following years, the 1840 version of *I Promessi Sposi* used a standardized version of the [Tuscan dialect](#), a conscious effort by the author to provide a language and force people to learn it.

- Pope in his 1842 book *Of the Moral and Civil Primacy of the Italians*.^[13] [Pope Pius IX](#) at first appeared interested but he turned reactionary and led the battle against liberalism and nationalism.
- Giuseppe Mazzini and [Carlo Cattaneo](#) wanted the unification of Italy under a [federal republic](#), which proved too extreme for most nationalists. The middle position was proposed by [Cesare Balbo](#) (1789–1853) as a confederation of separate Italian states led by Piedmont.

The Carbonari

- One of the most influential revolutionary groups was the [Carboneria](#), a secret political discussion group formed in [Southern Italy](#) early in the 19th century; the members were called *Carbonari*. After 1815, [Freemasonry](#) in Italy was repressed and discredited due to its French connections. A void was left that the Carboneria filled with a movement that closely resembled Freemasonry but with a commitment to Italian nationalism and no association with Napoleon and his government. The response came from middle-class professionals and businessmen and some intellectuals. The Carboneria disowned Napoleon but nevertheless were inspired by the principles of the [French Revolution](#) regarding liberty, equality and fraternity. They developed their own rituals, and were strongly anticlerical. The Carboneria movement spread across Italy.

- Conservative governments feared the Carboneria, imposing stiff penalties on men discovered to be members. Nevertheless, the movement survived and continued to be a source of political turmoil in Italy from 1820 until after unification. The Carbonari condemned [Napoleon III](#) (who, as a young man, had fought on their side) to death for [failing](#) to unite Italy, and the group almost succeeded in assassinating him in 1858, when [Felice Orsini](#), [Giovanni Andrea Pieri](#), [Carlo Di Rudio](#) and [Andrea Gomez](#) launched three bombs at him. Many leaders of the unification movement were at one time or other members of this organization. The chief purpose was to defeat tyranny and to establish constitutional government. Though contributing some service to the cause of Italian unity, historians such as Cornelia Shiver doubt that their achievements were proportional to their pretensions

Giuseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi

- Many leading Carbonari revolutionaries wanted a republic,^[18] two of the most prominent being [Giuseppe Mazzini](#) and [Giuseppe Garibaldi](#). Mazzini's activity in revolutionary movements caused him to be imprisoned soon after he joined. While in prison, he concluded that Italy could – and therefore should – be unified, and he formulated a program for establishing a free, independent, and republican nation with Rome as its capital. Following his release in 1831, he went to [Marseille](#) in France, where he organized a new political society called [La Giovine Italia \(Young Italy\)](#), whose motto was "*Dio e Popolo*" (God and People), which sought the unification of Italy.^[19]
- Garibaldi, a native of [Nice](#) (then part of [Piedmont](#)), participated in an uprising in Piedmont in 1834 and was sentenced to death. He escaped to [South America](#), though, spending fourteen years in exile, taking part in several wars, and learning the art of guerrilla warfare before his return to Italy in 1848.

Early revolutionary activity

- Many of the key intellectual and political leaders operated from exile; most Risorgimento patriots lived and published their work abroad after successive failed revolutions. Exile became a central theme of the foundational legacy of the Risorgimento as the narrative of the Italian nation fighting for independence.^[21] The exiles were deeply immersed in European ideas, and often hammered away at what Europeans saw as Italian vices, especially effeminacy and indolence. These negative stereotypes emerged from Enlightenment notions of national character that stressed the influence of the environment and history on a people's moral predisposition. Italian exiles both challenged and embraced the stereotypes and typically presented gendered interpretations of Italy's political "degeneration". They called for a masculine response to feminine weaknesses as the basis of a national regeneration, and fashioned their image of the future Italian nation firmly in the standards of European nationalism.^[22]

Two Sicilies insurrection

- In 1820, Spaniards successfully [revolted](#) over disputes about their Constitution, which influenced the development of a similar movement in Italy. Inspired by the Spaniards (who, in 1812, had created their constitution), a regiment in the army of the [Kingdom of Two Sicilies](#), commanded by [Guglielmo Pepe](#), a Carbonaro (member of the secret republican organization),^[23] mutinied, conquering the peninsular part of Two Sicilies. The king, [Ferdinand I](#), agreed to enact a new constitution. The revolutionaries, though, failed to court popular support and fell to Austrian troops of the [Holy Alliance](#). Ferdinand abolished the constitution and began systematically persecuting known revolutionaries. Many supporters of revolution in [Sicily](#), including the scholar [Michele Amari](#), were forced into exile during the decades that followed.

- The leader of the 1821 revolutionary movement in [Piedmont](#) was [Santorre di Santarosa](#), who wanted to remove the Austrians and unify Italy under the [House of Savoy](#). The Piedmont revolt started in [Alessandria](#), where troops adopted the green, white, and red *tricolore* of the [Cisalpine Republic](#). The king's regent, prince [Charles Albert](#), acting while the king [Charles Felix](#) was away, approved a new [constitution](#) to appease the revolutionaries, but when the king returned he disavowed the constitution and requested assistance from the [Holy Alliance](#). Di Santarosa's troops were defeated, and the would-be Piedmontese revolutionary fled to [Paris](#).
- In [Milan](#), [Silvio Pellico](#) and [Pietro Maroncelli](#) organized several attempts to weaken the hold of the Austrian despotism by indirect educational means. In October 1820, Pellico and Maroncelli were arrested on the charge of carbonarism and imprisoned.

1830 insurrections

- [Denis Mack Smith](#) argues that:

Few people in 1830 believed that an Italian nation might exist. There were eight states in the peninsula, each with distinct laws and traditions. No one had had the desire or the resources to revive Napoleon's partial experiment in unification. The settlement of 1814–15 had merely restored regional divisions, with the added disadvantage that the decisive victory of Austria over France temporarily hindered Italians in playing off their former oppressors against each other. ... Italians who, like [Ugo Foscolo](#) and [Gabriele Rossetti](#), harboured patriotic sentiments, were driven into exile. The largest Italian state, the Bourbon Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, with its 8 million inhabitants, seemed aloof and indifferent: Sicily and Naples had once formed part of Spain, and it had always been foreign to the rest of Italy. The common people in each region, and even the intellectual elite, spoke their mutually unintelligible dialects, and lacked the least vestiges of national consciousness. They wanted good government, not self-government, and had welcomed Napoleon and the French as more equitable and efficient than their native dynasties

- After 1830, revolutionary sentiment in favor of a unified Italy began to experience a resurgence, and a series of insurrections laid the groundwork for the creation of one nation along the Italian peninsula.
- The [Duke of Modena](#), [Francis IV](#), was an ambitious noble, and he hoped to become king of [Northern Italy](#) by increasing his territory. In 1826, Francis made it clear that he would not act against those who subverted opposition toward the unification of Italy. Encouraged by the declaration, revolutionaries in the region began to organize.

- During the [July Revolution of 1830](#) in France, revolutionaries forced the king to abdicate and created the [July Monarchy](#) with encouragement from the new French king, [Louis-Philippe](#). Louis-Philippe had promised revolutionaries such as [Ciro Menotti](#) that he would intervene if Austria tried to interfere in Italy with troops. Fearing he would lose his throne, Louis-Philippe did not, however, intervene in Menotti's planned uprising. The Duke of Modena abandoned his Carbonari supporters, arrested Menotti and other conspirators in 1831, and once again conquered his duchy with help from the Austrian troops. Menotti was executed, and the idea of a revolution centered in Modena faded.
- At the same time, other insurrections arose in the [Papal Legations](#) of [Bologna](#), [Ferrara](#), [Ravenna](#), [Forlì](#), [Ancona](#) and [Perugia](#). These successful revolutions, which adopted the *tricolore* in place of the [Papal flag](#), quickly spread to cover all the Papal Legations, and their newly installed local governments proclaimed the creation of a united Italian nation. The revolts in Modena and the Papal Legations inspired similar activity in the [Duchy of Parma](#), where the *tricolore* flag was adopted. The Parmese duchess [Marie Louise](#) left the city during the political upheaval.

- Insurrected provinces planned to unite as the *Province Italiane unite* (United Italian Provinces), which prompted Pope Gregory XVI to ask for Austrian help against the rebels. Austrian Chancellor Metternich warned Louis-Philippe that Austria had no intention of letting Italian matters be, and that French intervention would not be tolerated. Louis-Philippe withheld any military help and even arrested Italian patriots living in France.
- In early 1831, the Austrian army began its march across the Italian peninsula, slowly crushing resistance in each province that had revolted. This military action suppressed much of the fledgling revolutionary movement, and resulted in the arrest of many radical leaders.

Revolutions of 1848–1849 and First Italian War of Independence

- In 1844, two brothers from [Venice](#), [Attilio and Emilio Bandiera](#), members of the [Giovine Italia](#), planned to make a raid on the [Calabrian](#) coast against the [Kingdom of Two Sicilies](#) in support of Italian unification. They assembled a band of about twenty men ready to sacrifice their lives, and set sail on their venture on 12 June 1844. Four days later they landed near [Crotone](#), intending to go to [Cosenza](#), liberated the political prisoners, and issued their proclamations. Tragically for the Bandiera brothers, they did not find the insurgent band they were told awaited them, so they moved towards [La Sila](#).

- They were ultimately betrayed by one of their party, the [Corsican](#) Pietro Boccheciampe, and by some peasants who believed them to be Turkish pirates. A detachment of [gendarmes](#) and volunteers were sent against them, and after a short fight the whole band was taken prisoner and escorted to Cosenza, where a number of Calabrians who had taken part in a previous rising were also under arrest. The Bandiera brothers and their nine companions were executed by firing squad; some accounts state they cried "*Viva l'Italia!*" ("Long live Italy!") as they fell. The moral effect was enormous throughout Italy, the action of the authorities was universally condemned, and the martyrdom of the Bandiera brothers bore fruit in the subsequent revolutions.

- On 5 January 1848, the revolutionary disturbances began with a civil disobedience strike in [Lombardy](#), as citizens stopped smoking cigars and playing the [lottery](#), which denied Austria the associated tax revenue. Shortly after this, revolts began on the island of [Sicily](#) and in Naples. In Sicily the revolt resulted in the proclamation of the [Kingdom of Sicily](#) with [Ruggero Settimo](#) as Chairman of the independent state until 1849, when the Bourbon army took back full control of the island on 15 May 1849 by force.

- In February 1848, there were revolts in [Tuscany](#) that were relatively nonviolent, after which [Grand Duke Leopold II](#) granted the Tuscans a constitution. A breakaway republican provisional government formed in Tuscany during February shortly after this concession. On 21 February, [Pope Pius IX](#) granted a constitution to the Papal States, which was both unexpected and surprising considering the historical recalcitrance of the Papacy. On 23 February 1848, King [Louis Philippe of France](#) was forced to flee [Paris](#), and a republic was proclaimed. By the time the revolution in Paris occurred, three states of Italy had constitutions—four if one considers Sicily to be a separate state.
- Meanwhile, in Lombardy, tensions increased until the Milanese and Venetians rose in revolt on 18 March 1848. The insurrection in Milan succeeded in expelling the Austrian garrison after five days of street fights – 18–22 March ([Cinque giornate di Milano](#)). An Austrian army under Marshal [Josef Radetzky](#) besieged Milan, but due to defection of many of his troops and the support of the Milanese for the revolt, they were forced to retreat.

- Soon, [Charles Albert](#), the King of Sardinia (who ruled Piedmont and [Savoy](#)), urged by the Venetians and Milanese to aid their cause, decided this was the moment to unify Italy and declared war on Austria ([First Italian Independence War](#)). After initial successes at [Goito](#) and [Peschiera](#), he was decisively defeated by Radetzky at the [Battle of Custoza](#) on 24 July. An armistice was agreed to, and Radetzky regained control of all of [Lombardy-Venetia](#) save [Venice](#) itself, where the [Republic of San Marco](#) was proclaimed under [Daniele Manin](#).
- While Radetzky consolidated control of Lombardy-Venetia and Charles Albert licked his wounds, matters took a more serious turn in other parts of Italy. The monarchs who had reluctantly agreed to constitutions in March came into conflict with their constitutional ministers. At first, the republics had the upper hand, forcing the monarchs to flee their capitals, including [Pope Pius IX](#).

- Initially, Pius IX had been something of a reformer, but conflicts with the revolutionaries soured him on the idea of constitutional government. In November 1848, following the assassination of his Minister [Pellegrino Rossi](#), Pius IX fled just before [Giuseppe Garibaldi](#) and other patriots arrived in Rome. In early 1849, elections were held for a Constituent Assembly, which proclaimed a [Roman Republic](#) on 9 February. On 2 February 1849, at a political rally held in the Apollo Theater, a young Roman priest, the Abbé [Carlo Arduini](#), had made a speech in which he had declared that the [temporal power](#) of the popes was a "historical lie, a political imposture, and a religious immorality".^[31] In early March 1849, [Giuseppe Mazzini](#) arrived in Rome and was appointed Chief Minister. In the Constitution of the Roman Republic,^[32] religious freedom was guaranteed by article 7, the independence of the pope as head of the [Catholic Church](#) was guaranteed by article 8 of the *Principi fondamentali*, while the death penalty was abolished by article 5, and free public education was provided by article 8 of the *Titolo I*.

- Before the powers could respond to the founding of the Roman Republic, Charles Albert, whose army had been trained by the exiled Polish general [Albert Chrzanowski](#), renewed the war with Austria. He was quickly defeated by Radetzky at [Novara](#) on 23 March 1849. Charles Albert abdicated in favour of his son, [Victor Emmanuel II](#), and Piedmontese ambitions to unite Italy or conquer Lombardy were, for the moment, brought to an end. The war ended with a treaty signed on 9 August. A popular revolt broke out in [Brescia](#) on the same day as the defeat at Novara, but was suppressed by the Austrians ten days later.

