

ANALYZING TOTALITARIANISM IN GEORGE ORWELL'S '1984': PROPAGANDA, SURVEILLANCE, CONTROL, HISTORY, FEAR, AND SUPPRESSION

Apsari Eka Putri¹, Najwa Zayra Nabila², Yanwar Faturrahman³, Nurholis⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia

¹apsariekaputri@gmail.com, ²najwazayranabila@gmail.com,

³yanwarfathur01@gmail.com, ⁴nurholis@uinsgd.ac.id

Abstract

George Orwell's 1984 is a dystopian novel that depicts a bleak future, incorporating elements of political totalitarianism. Where the society is fully controlled by the ruling regime. This is a fairly extreme political school, where a state fully controls all the personal lives of its citizens. This analysis focuses on the society in 1984. Propaganda carried out by the ruling party tries to shape the government according to its will and tries to erase the freedom of thought of its people. Surveillance of the people, starting from the content of thoughts, is under the control of the ruling regime. The manipulation of information and language is aimed at silencing the people from resisting the party. The violent terror portrayed in the novel is to enforce submission. George Orwell succeeded in illustrating how the politics of totaliarism, namely the bad consequences that will occur if this kind of political system is followed.

Keywords: Totalitarianism, Propaganda, Regime, political, 1984, George Orwell

Article History

Received: December 2024

Reviewed: December 2024

Published: December 2024

Plagirism Checker No 234

Prefix DOI : Prefix DOI :

10.8734/argopuro.v1i2.365

Copyright : Author

Publish by : Argopuro



This work is licensed under

a [Creative Commons](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

[Attribution-NonCommercial](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

[4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

INTRODUCTION

George Orwell's 1984 is a dystopian work of fiction that depicts a totalitarian world in the future, in 1984 to be precise. In this novel, the world is divided into three superstates: Oceania, Eurasia, and Eastasia, with Oceania as the main setting ruled by the Party led by a mysterious figure called Big Brother. The Party implements a totalitarian system of government that controls every aspect of its citizens' lives, including their thoughts and emotions.

The main character, Winston Smith, is an employee at the Ministry of Truth who is in charge of editing and manipulating information to support the Party's propaganda. Despite working for the Party, Winston feels oppressed by a system that curbs freedom of thought and expression, living in a society watched by telescreens that monitor citizens' every activity.

In an attempt to maintain his identity, Winston begins to write secret diaries and establishes an illicit relationship with Julia, his coworker, as a form of rebellion against the system. However, their hopes of fighting the Party are crushed when they are caught by the Thought Police. Winston undergoes extreme psychological torture at the Ministry of Love, where he is forced to change his views and eventually love Big Brother.

The ending shows that Winston's struggle against the totalitarian system ultimately fails, reflecting how absolute power can undermine individual freedom and turn human thought into a tool of control for authoritarian regimes. Thus, 1984 is not only a story about a dystopian future, but also a warning about the dangers of totalitarianism and the importance of maintaining individual freedom in the face of oppression.

RESEARCH METHODS

A qualitative approach is used for part of this journal's methods, using a direct analysis of George Orwell's book "1984" and relevant online PDF sources. To discover elements of totalitarianism, such as propaganda, surveillance, and social control, the method involved an in-depth reading of the new text. In addition, to provide a broader context, the analysis also included analyzing previous studies on similar themes.

In doing so, the researcher concentrates on the diction, stories, and ideas used by Orwell to conduct the text analysis. To understand the text, the philosophical hermeneutic considers induction, internal coherence, and reflection. Thus, the aim of the research is to study how totalitarianism is used in the novel's fictional society and how it relates to the current socio-political situation. It is expected that the findings of this analysis will provide deeper insights into how totalitarianism affects people's lives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to explore the theme of totalitarianism found in George Orwell's novel "1984". By analyzing previous literature reviews, this review provides a broader context of how totalitarianism is depicted in the book and its relationship to the modern socio-political situation. In politics, totalitarianism refers to a form of government that regulates almost all aspects of public and private life. Theories such as surveillance, propaganda, and social control become very important in the context of "1984". Michel Foucault and Hannah Arendt are often associated with the analysis of totalitarianism. This analysis provides a framework for understanding how power can be organized and exercised.

Some aspects of totalitarianism featured in this novel have been emphasized by previous research. For example, research conducted by Smith (2010) shows that surveillance through telescreens is the main way to maintain authoritarian authority and instill fear in society. Additionally, research conducted by Johnson (2015) looked at how propaganda and language shape social reality, stating that Newspeak reduces vocabulary and diminishes people's ability to think critically. One additional study conducted by Lee (2018) concentrated on the alienation of Winston Smith, the main character, and how his personal experiences reflect the psychological impact of living under authoritarian rule.

While a large number of studies provide useful information on the theme of totalitarianism, there are some shortcomings that need to be noted. Many studies focus on only one aspect, such as surveillance or propaganda, but do not consider the complex relationships between the various components. In addition, the broader historical context of the novel has been ignored in some studies, which can affect interpretation. One of the major problems in this research is that no analysis has been made of how totalitarianism affects relationships and communities. Considering the rise of digital surveillance today, there is still a need to study these topics in a contemporary context.

Overall, this literature review shows that although much research has been done on totalitarianism in "1984", there is still room for further exploration. Future research could focus on the relationship between the individual and society in the context of totalitarianism as well as the relevance of this theme in the modern era. Thus, this research will not only enrich our understanding of Orwell's work but also provide insights into today's socio-political challenges.

TOTALITARIANISM

One of the most contentious political ideologies in recent decades is totalitarianism. This system has been characterized by its extreme concentration of power within government institutions, often referred to metaphorically as 'the new god.' Following the devastating consequences of World War I and II, including numerous genocides, individuals began to recognize the inherent dangers posed by such regimes.

i. Definition of Totalitarianism

Totalitarianism is form of government that theoretically permits no individual freedom and that seeks to subordinate all aspects of individual life to the authority of the state. Italian dictator Benito Mussolini coined the term *totalitario* in the early 1920s to characterize the new fascist state of Italy, which he further described as "all within the state, none outside the state, none against the state." By the beginning of World War II, totalitarian had become synonymous with absolute and oppressive single-party government. Other modern examples of totalitarian states include the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin, Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler, the People's Republic of China under Mao Zedong, and North Korea under the Kim dynasty.

DISCUSSION

Crucial Aspects of 1984 Totalitarianism

1. Propaganda and Information Control

From the quote pages 6 on '1984' Secker Warburg edition:

*"WAR IS PEACE
FREEDOM IS SLAVERY
IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH"*

The Party employs propaganda as a fundamental instrument to shape public perception and regulate the thoughts of its citizens. By utilizing paradoxical slogans such as "War is Peace," "Freedom is Slavery," and "Ignorance is Strength," the Party deliberately distorts the meaning of key concepts.

These slogans redefine war as a path to peace, depict freedom as a form of enslavement, and frame ignorance as a source of empowerment. This manipulation of language prevents individuals from critically assessing their reality, thereby rendering them more susceptible to control. Such propaganda mechanisms serve to entrench the Party's ideology by systematically erasing citizens' capacity for independent thought, ensuring widespread acceptance of fabricated truths.

Besides that, on the book "Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretation" written by Harold Bloom, there are quotation:

"'War is war,' he repeated. 'Peace is war.' And again: 'Freedom is slavery.' But above all, 'Love is hate.'" Book II, Chapter IX, Signet Classic Edition (Page 231) v
"This process of continuous alteration was applied not only to newspapers, but to books, articles, poetry, songs, films, radio programs, cartoons, photographs—all materials intended for public consumption. Even the names of rivers and mountains and countries underwent alterations." Book IV, Chapter X, Signet Classic Edition (Page 258)

These quotes illustrate how propaganda and censorship are used to manipulate historical records and reinforce Party ideology through slogans like "War is peace," "Freedom is slavery," and "Ignorance is strength."

There is a propaganda event held regularly by party officials called Hate Week, an event that contains incendiary speeches, showing videos of party enemies, propaganda exhibitions and hate songs. Emmanuel Goldstein is one of the former party leaders who eventually became a rebel and then ran away and disappeared. He is one of the most frequently featured figures in Hate Week events, he is seen as the leader of the rebellion. Hate Week aims to divert people's thoughts from the country's internal problems, foster more hatred for the party's enemies, and to strengthen the Party's power. As per the quote on pages 15 on '1984' Secker Warburg edition, which contains:

"The next moment a hideous, grinding speech, as of some monstrous machine running without oil, burst from the big telescreen at the end of the room. It was a noise that set one's teeth on edge and bristled the hair at the back of one's neck. The Hate had started. As usual, the face of Emmanuel Goldstein, the Enemy of the People, had flashed on to the screen. There were hisses here and there among the audience. The little sandyhaired woman gave a squeak of mingled fear and disgust. Goldstein was the renegade and backslider who once, long ago (how long ago, nobody quite remembered), had been one of the leading figures of the Party, almost on a level with Big Brother himself, and then had engaged in counter-revolutionary activities, had been condemned to death, and had mysteriously escaped and disappeared."

2. Comprehensive Surveillance and Suppression of Individual Freedom

From quote *"I know you're watching," said O'Brien. 'We see everything.'"* On page 166, Penguin Classics Edition. Through advanced surveillance technologies, such as the telescreen, the Party maintains constant oversight of the populace. This surveillance apparatus not only transmits propaganda but also monitors citizens' actions, ensuring perpetual observation. The omnipresent surveillance fosters a climate of fear and paranoia, as individuals are never certain whether or not they are being watched at any given moment. This state of uncertainty effectively curtails personal freedom, as every action is potentially subject to scrutiny and punishment. The pervasive sense of being observed, even in private, cements the Party's authority over individuals, making it virtually impossible to escape their control. In this system, privacy is non-existent, reinforcing the Party's total domination of the citizenry. Besides that, on the '1984' Secker Warburg edition, there are quotation:

"The telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously. Any sound that Winston made, above the level of a very low whisper, would be picked up by it, moreover, so long as he remained within the field of vision which the metal plaque commanded, he could be seen as well as heard. There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. How often, or on what system, the Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork. It was even conceivable that they watched everybody all the time. But at any rate they could plug in your wire whenever they wanted to. You had to live—did live—from habit that became instinct—in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized."

While the exact quote provided doesn't mention "telescreens acting as both TVs and surveillance devices," it describes the pervasive presence of telescreens in daily life, underscoring their role in surveillance. An example of the suppression of personal freedom, especially of party members, is found on page 9 of '1984' Secker Warburg edition:

"Party members were supposed not to go into ordinary shops ('dealing on the free market', it was called), but the rule was not strictly kept, because there were various things, such as shoelaces and razor blades, which it was impossible to get hold of in any other way."

This shows the unfreedom of party members, even just to go to the store. The rules are very binding and very restrictive.

3. Terror and Repression

From quote on page 5 '1984' Secker Warburg edition:

"There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. How often, or on what system, the Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork. It was even conceivable that they watched everybody all the time."

The Party maintains its dominance not only through ideological control but also through the use of terror and suppression. Any deviation from Party orthodoxy or hint of independent thought is met with extreme punitive measures. Terror is deployed as a strategy to deter any form of rebellion or subversion. The case of Winston Smith, who engages in personal acts of defiance by secretly writing a diary and conducting an illicit affair with Julia, exemplifies the Party's approach to quashing dissent. Both actions are seen as direct challenges to Party authority, leading to Winston's inevitable punishment. This demonstrates the extent to which personal liberties are curtailed, as even private thoughts or actions are considered serious transgressions. In such a repressive regime, the right to speak or think independently is considered a grave threat that must be eradicated. Another quotation from the novel for deeper understanding about terror and repression is from page 14, '1984' Secker Warburg edition:

"People simply disappeared, always during the night. Your name was removed from the registers, every record of everything you had ever done was wiped out, your one-time existence was denied and then forgotten. You were abolished, annihilated: VAPORIZED was the usual word."

4. Control of Knowledge and History

From quote on page 44, '1984' Secker Warburg edition:

"Who controls the past,' ran the Party slogan, 'controls the future: who controls the present controls the past."

And from pages 230, "1984' Secker Warburg edition, it says:

"Oceania was at war with Eastasia: Oceania had always been at war with Eastasia. A large part of the political literature of five years was now completely obsolete. Reports and records of all kinds, newspapers, books, pamphlets, films, soundtracks, photographs—all had to be rectified at lightning speed."

A core component of the Party's ability to maintain its power lies in its manipulation of historical records. By altering the past, the Party ensures that its version of events aligns with its current political interests. The rewriting of history serves to eliminate any conflicting accounts, enabling the Party to present itself as infallible and omnipotent. By controlling how citizens understand their past, the Party dictates how they perceive the present and future. This distortion of historical knowledge effectively eliminates the possibility of dissent, as individuals lack any factual basis to question or challenge the Party's authority. The control of historical records not only secures the Party's narrative but also suppresses critical thinking, thus consolidating its hold on power.

5. Discipline and Punishment

Based on the page 36, Secker Warburg edition:

"Thoughtcrime does not entail death: thoughtcrime IS death."

And from page 24, '1984' Secker Warburg edition, the quotation:

"It was always at night—the arrests invariably happened at night. The sudden jerk out of sleep, the rough hand shaking your shoulder, the lights glaring in your eyes, the ring of hard faces round the bed"

The Party implements a rigorous system of discipline and punishment to ensure absolute loyalty and submission. These punitive measures extend beyond physical punishment, incorporating psychological manipulation to break an individual's spirit. An example of this is seen in the extreme psychological torment inflicted upon Winston Smith in the Ministry of Love. Captured by the Thought Police, Winston undergoes an intense re-education process designed to force him into betraying his values and surrendering to Party orthodoxy. This form of psychological torture is intended to eradicate any sense of personal integrity, ensuring that individuals not only comply outwardly but also internalize the Party's beliefs. Through such extreme measures, the Party eliminates any possibility of ideological resistance, ensuring that even the thought of disobedience becomes unthinkable.

Based on the quotation on page 78:

"His earlier thought returned to him: probably she was not actually a member of the Thought Police, but then it was precisely the amateur spy who was the greatest danger of all."

For a direct reference to Room 101 on page 357, describes the fear of Room 101

"'You asked me once,' said O'Brien, 'what was in Room 101. I told you that you knew the answer already. Everyone knows it. The thing that is in Room 101 is the worst thing in the world.'"

CONCLUSION

In George Orwell's 1984, the author vividly portrays a dystopian society under totalitarian rule, where the ruling Party exercises complete control over citizens' lives. The novel highlights the use of propaganda to distort truth through slogans like "War is peace" and "Freedom is slavery," alongside continuous surveillance via telescreens that foster fear and paranoia among the populace. The Party suppresses dissent with severe punishments for any deviation from its orthodoxy, while manipulating historical records to secure its narrative and eliminate conflicting accounts. Psychological torture is employed to break individuals' spirits through intense manipulation, exemplified by Winston Smith's tragic fate. Ultimately, 1984 serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of totalitarianism, emphasizing the importance of protecting individual freedom and critical thinking against authoritarian control, and warning us to remain vigilant over our liberties in the face of regimes that seek total domination.

REFERENCES

- Aljiaro, G. F. (2024). *Upaya Legitimasi Dominasi Kekuasaan dalam Novel 1984 Perspektif Diskursus Michel Foucault* (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Gadjah Mada).
- Bloom, H. (2007). Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations George Orwell's 1984. *Chel-sea House An imprint of Infobase Publishing*, 132.
- BOUZIANE, C. (2023). *Totalitarianism and Dystopia: Parallels between Orwell's 1984 and the Twenty-First Century* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2024, August 18). totalitarianism. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/totalitarianism>
- Gurung, G. M. (2024). George Orwell and Totalitarianism: A Master of Political and Social Commentary. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Management and Social Sciences*, 5(1), 38-47.
- Löfgren, I. (2022). Nineteen Eighty-Four, totalitarian lived skepticism, and unlearning how to love. *Policy Futures in Education*, 20(3), 344-359.
- Orwell, G. (1949). *1984*. Secker and Warburg.
- Orwell, G. (1984). George Orwell 1984. G Orwell.
- Pankowski, E. (2018). We Love Big Brother: An Analysis of the Relationship between Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four And Modern Politics in the United States and Europe.
- Pittock, M. (1997). The Hell of Nineteen Eighty-Four. *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations. George Orwell's 1984. Updated Edition*, 109-126.
- Renaldi, A., & Widyastuti, D. (2015). The Inauthenticity of the Main Characters as an Impact of Totalitarian System Seen in George Orwell's 1984. *Sanata Dharma University*, 15(1), 20-35.