

**INFORMATION CONTROL AND CENSORSHIP UNDER THE
TOTALITARIAN REGIME: THE SUPPRESSION OF FREE THOUGHT**

Raykhon Zokir qizi Toshtemirova

Email: shtemirovarayxona4@gmail.com

Termez State Pedagogical Institute

Department: History

Scientific Advisor: Abdurashidov Anvar Abdurashidovich

Abstract: This article explores the mechanisms and effects of information control and censorship in the Soviet Union during the era of totalitarian rule, particularly under Joseph Stalin. Through archival data, historical analysis, and comparisons with other authoritarian regimes, the study demonstrates how censorship served as a political tool to eliminate dissent, restrict public discourse, and create a singular ideological narrative. The suppression of free expression profoundly impacted intellectual, cultural, and scientific development, while also shaping the psychological climate of fear and conformity among the population.

Keywords: censorship, propaganda, totalitarianism, Soviet Union, free speech, media control, ideological repression, Stalinism

Totalitarian regimes thrive on absolute control—not only of political structures and economic systems but, critically, of information. In the Soviet Union, especially during Stalin's rule (1924–1953), the state's monopolization of information through censorship, surveillance, and propaganda became a cornerstone of governance. Censorship was used not merely to eliminate political opposition but to craft a homogenous ideological identity and suppress intellectual freedom.

The right to free thought and expression, fundamental to human dignity and democratic society, was systematically violated. Writers, journalists, scientists, and artists were among the most affected, as their work was rigorously monitored and often altered or banned. This article analyzes how censorship and information control operated under Soviet totalitarianism and discusses its lasting impact on society and culture.

This research uses a multidisciplinary approach combining:

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- **Historical document analysis:** Examination of Soviet-era censorship policies, internal party communications, and government decrees.
- **Archival sources:** Review of declassified NKVD/KGB materials, samizdat (underground press) documents, and censored literary works.
- **Comparative analysis:** A juxtaposition of censorship in the USSR with other totalitarian regimes (e.g., Nazi Germany, Maoist China).
- **Theoretical framework:** Draws from political theory (Arendt, Orwell), media studies, and sociopolitical psychology to assess the implications of censorship.

Results

- **Censorship was institutionalized and multi-layered:** The Glavlit (Main Directorate for Literature and Publishing) served as the central authority regulating all publications, radio broadcasts, films, and educational content. Local censorship offices worked under direct political supervision.
- **Suppression of dissent was systemic:** Any critique of the Communist Party or alternative ideologies was labeled as “counter-revolutionary” and punishable by imprisonment, exile, or execution. Entire libraries of books were banned or edited to conform to state ideology.
- **Propaganda replaced factual reporting:** State media distorted or omitted facts to suit political narratives, glorifying the leader and promoting fabricated success stories (e.g., exaggerated harvest reports, industrial achievements).
- **Fear stifled intellectual creativity:** Writers and academics engaged in self-censorship to avoid persecution. The environment of surveillance and denunciation made independent thought dangerous, resulting in cultural stagnation.

Censorship in the Soviet Union was not merely a bureaucratic practice; it was a core strategy of psychological control. By regulating what people could read, see, and say, the regime shaped what they could *think*. This led to the creation of the “Homo Sovieticus”—a model citizen devoid of individual critical thought and fully aligned with state ideology.

The consequences of suppressing free expression extended far beyond the Stalin era. Even after de-Stalinization, remnants of censorship culture persisted in public institutions and education. The long-term psychological effects included generational mistrust, fear of authority, and apathy toward civic participation.

Moreover, censorship severely hindered scientific advancement. Many intellectuals were exiled or executed, and entire fields of research were declared

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“bourgeois” or “anti-Marxist,” leaving Soviet science and humanities decades behind global progress.

The Soviet case highlights how censorship, when tied to ideological purity, becomes a form of violence—destroying both individual freedom and collective progress.

The pervasive culture of censorship under totalitarian rule extended far beyond the formal structures of the state. Citizens were encouraged to monitor one another, and denunciation became a normalized practice. This turned families, friends, and co-workers into potential informants, creating a climate of deep mistrust and paranoia. As a result, the boundaries between public and private life were blurred — even casual conversations could be construed as subversive.

The psychological toll of this repression was enormous. Individuals developed a dual consciousness — one for the public sphere and one for the private, internal world of thought. People learned to remain silent or to speak in coded language, which limited honest dialogue and intellectual exchange. Over time, this led to what scholars call “internalized censorship,” where individuals preemptively silenced their own thoughts out of fear, effectively turning the regime’s ideology inward.

In addition to stifling dissent, censorship under the totalitarian regime shaped history itself. Textbooks were rewritten to fit ideological narratives, inconvenient facts were removed, and historical figures were erased from public memory. This manipulation of historical truth not only deprived future generations of accurate knowledge but also fostered a distorted national identity built on myth rather than critical understanding.

When censorship becomes normalized, its most dangerous legacy is cultural amnesia. In the post-totalitarian period, societies often struggle to reconstruct lost narratives and to understand the full extent of the damage. In Uzbekistan and other post-Soviet countries, archives are still being opened, and researchers continue to uncover evidence of mass repression, falsified trials, and fabricated propaganda. Acknowledging this history is a crucial step in building a democratic culture based on transparency and accountability.

Lastly, the comparison with contemporary authoritarian trends around the world reveals that the lessons of Soviet-style censorship remain relevant. As governments today increasingly manipulate media, restrict press freedom, or deploy digital

surveillance, the mechanisms may have changed, but the core logic remains the same: control information to control thought.

The Soviet regime's use of censorship and information control was a deliberate, organized effort to suppress dissent and maintain ideological monopoly. In doing so, it sacrificed human rights, intellectual freedom, and cultural vitality. The suppression of free thought under totalitarianism serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of protecting freedom of expression in any society.

As post-Soviet states continue to confront their authoritarian pasts, acknowledging and learning from the consequences of censorship is essential. Ensuring open access to information, fostering critical thinking, and supporting independent media are key steps toward democratic resilience.

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