

Was Stalin's state totalitarian?

Whilst most historians agree that Stalin's USSR was a dictatorship of party/leader, there is lots of disagreement over whether it could be called 'totalitarian'. Historians have grouped around three historiographical positions: **Totalitarian Group** = Stalin and the State had almost total control; **Pluralist Group** = Stalinist state was not in total control but acted as a referee for different competing interest groups; **Reconstruction/Consolidation Group** = State was very powerful but often had to take account of resistance to official policy from interest groups and sections of society like the Military.

1. According to Leonard Schapiro (1973) in his book, *Totalitarianism*, there are five main aspects which are central to any totalitarian regime. Complete the table below by collecting evidence and notes for each factor.
2. Was Stalin's state totalitarian? Answer this question in your books, using your completed tables from question 1. Also, consider whether you agree with this proposition or whether you agree with the pluralist or reconstruction groups more.

Five Features of Totalitarianism	Evidence for	Evidence against
1. A distinctive, 'utopian' and all-embracing ideology that dominates and tries to reconstruct all aspects of society.		
2. A political system that is headed by an all-powerful leader, around whom a deliberate 'cult of personality' is created, and in which party, parliament and the state are under the control of the leader.		
3. A deliberate use of censorship and propaganda aimed at controlling all aspects of culture, and at indoctrinating (at times mobilising) all sections of society, but especially the young.		
4. A systematic use of coercion and terror to ensure total compliance with all decisions made by the leader and the regime.		
5. Absolute state control and co-ordination of the economy, which is subordinated to the political objectives of the political regime.		

