



## Summary

The most famous aspect of Stalin's Russia was the Terror. This grew from his paranoia and his desire to be absolute autocrat, and was enforced via the NKVD and public 'show trials'. It developed into a centrally-enforced 'cult of Stalin-worship', and a terrifying system of labour camps - 'the gulag'.

## Links

[Stalin's Purges](#) [more](#) [more](#)  
[Interesting information from AskWinston](#)  
[Gendercide](#) - very detailed  
[Frank E Smitha](#) - online book VERY hard

## Reasons for the Terror

### (Why Unnecessary Purges?)

#### 1. Whole Country

Stalin believed that Russia had to be united – with him as leader – if it was to be strong.

#### 2. Urgency

Stalin believed Russia had 10 years to catch up with the western world before Germany invaded.

#### 3. Paranoia

Stalin became increasingly paranoid (seeing plots everywhere) and power-mad (he demanded continuous praise and applause). In 1935, his wife killed herself.

## The Apparatus of Terror

### (Stalin Takes Total Control)

#### 1. Secret Police

The CHEKA became the OGPU (1922), then the [NKVD](#) (1934).

#### 2. The First Purges, 1930–33

Including anybody who opposed industrialisation, and the kulaks who opposed collectivisation.

#### 3. The Great Purges, 1934–39

##### ■ Political Opponents

**1934:** [Kirov](#), a rival to Stalin, was murdered. Although he probably ordered the assassination, Stalin used it as a chance to arrest thousands of his opponents.

**1934–1939**, Stalin's political opponents were put on 'Show trials', where they pleaded guilty to impossible charges of treason (e.g. Zinoviev and Kamenev 1936/ Bukharin, Tomsy & Rykov 1938).

##### ■ The Army

In 1937, the Commander-in-Chief of the Red Army and 7 leading generals were shot. In 1938–39, all the admirals and half the Army's officers were executed or imprisoned.

##### ■ The Church

Religious leaders imprisoned; churches closed down.

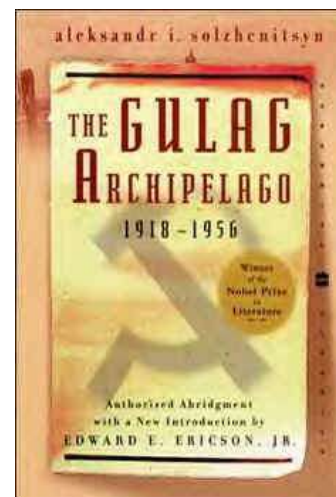
##### ■ Ethnic groups

Stalin enforced 'Russification' of all the Soviet Union.

##### ■ Ordinary people

Were denounced/ arrested/ sent to the Gulag (the system of labour camps). 20 million Russians were sent to the camps, where perhaps half of them died. People lived in fear. 'Apparatchiks' (party members loyal to Stalin) got all the new flats, jobs, holidays etc.

[How did Stalin control the Soviet Union?](#) - good list from AskWinston



The most famous description of Stalin's Terror is [The Gulag Archipelago](#), by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

One reviewer writes:

'Drawing on his own experience before, during and after his eleven years of imprisonment and exile, on evidence provided by more than 200 fellow prisoners, and on Soviet archives, Solzhenitsyn reveals the entire apparatus of Soviet repression - the secret police operations, the labor camps and prisons, the uprooting or extermination of whole populations.'

#### 4. Cult of Stalin

- Censorship of anything that might reflect badly on Stalin
- Propaganda everywhere - pictures, statues, continuous praise and applause
- Places named after him
- Mothers taught their children that Stalin was 'the wisest man of the age'
- History books and photographs were changed to make him the hero of the Revolution, and obliterate the names of purged people (e.g. Trotsky).

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#### Source A

At the end of the conference, a tribute to Comrade Stalin was called for. Of course, everyone leapt to his feet.

However, who would dare to be the first to stop – after all, NKVD men were in the hall waiting to see who quit first. And in that obscure hall, unknown to the Leader, the applause went on – 6, 7, 8 minutes! They couldn't stop now till they collapsed of heart attacks!

Aware of the falsity of the situation, after 11 minutes, the director of the paper factory sat down in his seat.

And, oh, a miracle took place! Everyone else stopped dead and sat down.

That, however, was how they found who the independent people were. And that was how they set about eliminating them. They easily lasted 10 years in a labour camp on him.

Solzhenitsyn, writing about a Communist Party meeting in 1938.

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#### Source B

I plead guilty to being one of the leaders of this 'Bloc of Rightists and Trotskyites.' I plead guilty to the sum total of crimes committed by this counter-revolutionary organization, whether or not I knew of, whether or not I took part in, any particular act...

For three months I refused to say anything. Then I began to testify. Why? Because while in prison I made a revaluation of my entire past. For you ask yourself: "If you must die, what are you dying for?"

Nikolai Bukharin's [Last Plea](#) to the court in 1938

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## Results of the Terror

### (Results Of The Terror – Insane Stalin Grabs All Power)

1. **Russification** – Russia came to dominate the whole USSR.
2. **Orthodox Church attacked**
3. **Twenty million arrested** – perhaps half died.
4. **Terror** – People lived in fear of the Secret Police.
5. **Industry** – grew (the Terror provided free slave labour), but technology and science were held back by loss of top engineers and scientists.
6. **Stalin Cult**
7. **Gulag**
8. **Army and navy weakened** by purges of leading officers
9. **Purges** – political opponents eliminated

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#### Extra:

1. 'The worst aspect of the Terror was not the deaths, but the stultifying effect it had on the everyday life of ordinary people' Using Source A, discuss this claim with a friend.
2. An amazing aspect of the Show Trials was that the accused often pleaded guilty to crimes they could not possibly have done. Using Source B, talk with a friend about why they might have done this.

