

# An Analysis Of Freedom Under Totalitarian Power In The Novel “1984” By George Orwell

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## Abstract

Penelitian ini mengkaji kontrol institusional dan pembatasan kebebasan individu dalam novel “1984” karya George Orwell melalui perspektif sosiologi sastra. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah mengidentifikasi bentuk-bentuk kontrol institusional, menganalisis bagaimana struktur institusional membatasi otonomi individu dan keadilan sosial, serta menjelaskan relevansi persoalan tersebut dalam masyarakat modern. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kepustakaan. Sumber data utama berupa beberapa bab pilihan dalam novel, sedangkan data penelitian meliputi dialog, narasi, dan peristiwa yang berkaitan dengan pengawasan, kontrol ideologi, manipulasi kebenaran, perlawanan, dan pembatasan kebebasan. Data dikumpulkan melalui metode simak dan catat serta dianalisis menggunakan model analisis interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kontrol institusional dilakukan melalui pengawasan teknologi, pengaruh ideologis, dominasi psikologis, dan manipulasi kebenaran sejarah. Mekanisme tersebut secara bertahap mengurangi otonomi individu, kebebasan berekspresi, rasionalitas, dan privasi. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa novel tersebut menggambarkan kekuatan institusi totaliter dalam mengendalikan perilaku sosial maupun pola pikir manusia sehingga menjadi kritik sosial yang masih relevan dalam masyarakat modern.

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## 1. Introduction

Literature plays a vital role in human life because it serves not only as entertainment but also as a space for understanding ourselves and the world around us (Nurliza et al., 2025). Literary works allow for the expression of a variety of experiences, ideas, and moral dilemmas in a more profound and reflective sense. By providing readers with the opportunity to observe life from a variety of viewpoints, literature cultivates an awareness of social and cultural concerns. Conversely, literary works frequently convey the reality of their era by illustrating the social dynamics, conflicts, and values that motivated them. Therefore, literature not only enriches language and imagination but also shapes how people think and interpret life within their social context (Ulviyani, 2025). Additionally, literature does not develop in a vacuum, free from the influence of social and historical circumstances. The imprint of the circumstances that underlie a work is evident in its themes, settings, and the conflicts it presents.

Literary texts are frequently interpreted as symbolic representations of societal reality by authors, who frequently address social and political questions through the narratives they create. A work is not merely understood as a product of individual imagination, but rather as a component of a more comprehensive social system, from a sociological perspective on literature. The text, the author, and society are in a mutually influential relationship (Prasetyo & Wirajaya, 2025).

Through Characters, events, and narrative structure can provide readers with a deeper understanding of the ideological dynamics, conflicting values, and power relations that are present during a particular era. As a result, literature not only reflects reality but also creates significance within that social reality.

One of the values frequently explored in literary works is freedom. Freedom is a fundamental value in human life because it relates to the right to think, speak, and act without pressure from oppressive power (Putri et al., 2025). In general, freedom is defined as the ability of individuals to express their opinions and make decisions. Freedom is also associated with the acknowledgement of human dignity and the respect for human rights in social and political contexts. Freedom's presence facilitates the establishment of a society that is receptive to dialogue and diversity. Nevertheless, social life is not always characterised by complete freedom. Freedom may be curtailed by dominant power structures in specific circumstances. The definition of freedom is constrained when social systems strictly regulate the flow of information, methods of thinking, and spaces for expression. Formal regulations or nuanced ideological mechanisms may serve as such constraints. In societies under totalitarian systems, these restrictions are systematic and pervasive (Tan, 2024). Freedom is no longer considered a fundamental right; rather, it is regarded as a resource that must be managed to preserve the stability of power.

The novel "1984" by George Orwell graphically depicts the struggle for freedom. The novel posits that the state has complete control over information, language, and truth, resulting in a loss of individual freedom. Power mechanisms are used to construct social reality, which results in a lack of space for society to develop independent understanding. The manipulation of language, surveillance of information, and the establishment of a single truth demonstrate how ideology shapes social structures (Rico et al., 2024). The text presents a system that negates the plurality of perspectives through these representations. The relationship between freedom and literary works can be comprehended by examining the manner in which literature portrays the relationship between individuals and social structures. In many works, conflict arises when individuals confront a system that limits the space for choice and expression (Sella, 2025). This illustrates that freedom is not solely an abstract concept, but rather a component of concrete social dynamics. This issue is presented in the literature through narratives that illustrate the operation of power structures in society. Consequently, literary works function as a medium that enables readers to comprehend the relationship between the value of freedom and the social conditions that envelop it.

The absence of freedom is often linked to the rise of totalitarian ideology within a country (Tan, 2024). Totalitarianism is a form of power that aims to exert control over all facets of social life by means of political and ideological domination. In this system, the state establishes itself as the epicentre of truth and establishes a social structure that maintains its authority. Uniformity is perceived as a form of stability, while differences in opinion are perceived as a threat. This process leads to a society that is influenced by control, surveillance, and limitations on public discourse. Control over language and information is one of the primary instruments in a totalitarian system. Language is no longer solely a tool for communication; it has evolved into a method for influencing the way society thinks. The space for alternative interpretations becomes increasingly limited as a result of the simplification of meaning and the restriction of specific terms. In order to facilitate the functioning of society, information is selected and organised in accordance with the interests of the dominant ideology. Receives only a reality that has been constructed by the authorities. Within the framework of literary sociology, this condition demonstrates how ideological structures influence the production and distribution of meaning in society (Watson, 2025).

In these circumstances, literature provides a substantial contribution. Literature offers the potential for a variety of viewpoints, in contrast to official discourse, which has a tendency to construct a single narrative.

Literary works can expose the mechanisms of power that operate behind the scenes of society by depicting social systems in their texts. Literature not only reflects social conditions but also demonstrates how ideology shapes the relationship between the state and its citizens (Irmayanti et

al., 2025). By presenting portrayals of repressive systems, literary works serve as a medium for uncovering the dynamics of power within society.

The relationship between literature, totalitarianism, and freedom can be interpreted as a relationship between a text and the social structure that underpins it, in light of this connection. Literature functions as a representational space that demonstrates the influence of ideology on social reality. Through the depiction of power systems and relationships within narratives, literary works demonstrate how freedom is negotiated or constrained within a societal order (Nandisa et al., 2024). Therefore, the sociology of literature is enriched by the examination of works that explore the themes of totalitarianism and freedom, as it enables a comprehension of the manner in which texts reflect, respond to, and critique the social systems of their era.

In a totalitarian system, the limitations on freedom not only impede visible actions but also influence the way in which individuals conceive and comprehend the world. Power is not exclusively derived from physical punishment or regulations; it also permeates the collective consciousness. Through constant surveillance, the dissemination of propaganda, and the regulation of information and language, the state imposes limits on the possibility of divergent thought (Tan, 2024). In this way, social control is not only external but also internal, as individuals are progressively encouraged to adopt a single version of truth that is recognised as accurate. In these circumstances, social freedom is more severely restricted. The opportunity to critically consider and question the system is significantly diminished, despite the fact that individuals may still be able to conduct their daily activities. There is a reduction in the capacity to articulate diverse ideas when language is simplified and meanings become restricted. Consequently, society is not only governed by strict regulations but also by the shaping of uniform ways of thinking (Yunidar, 2025). In contrast to other forms of power, a totalitarian system is distinguished by its control over thought. Compliance in action and loyalty in thought are both required by the regime. In this context, social freedom is no longer regarded as mere the right to act, but also as the right to consider, to doubt, and to comprehend reality independently.

Other research has investigated the mechanisms of surveillance and control in George Orwell's novel "1984." One such example is Patil's (2025) research, which examines the ways in which surveillance systems, including telescreens, the Thought Police, and the language of Newspeak, are used as instruments of totalitarian authority to regulate society. However, studies specifically addressing how institutional authority shapes social freedom and influences individual autonomy from a literary sociology perspective remain limited (Nasyirudin, 2025). In accordance with this objective, this investigation investigates the mechanisms of control that appear within the totalitarian power structure portrayed in the novel, which is situated in the nation of Oceania. Power is preserved through propaganda, surveillance, and ideological influence, as demonstrated by this investigation. It discusses the manner in which the institutional structures of the narrative restrict individual autonomy and impede the possibility of social justice. Subsequently, the novel "1984" was chosen for examination due to its robust

Depiction of a totalitarian regime. This work not only tells a fictional story but also illustrates the ways in which power can shape individual thought, restrict freedom, and influence society. Consequently, this novel is worth examining because it illustrates the connection between ideology, social control, and individual lives, while also illustrating that literature can function as both a reflection of and a critique of social dynamics.

## **2. Method**

### **Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative design with a descriptive approach to understand the meanings within literary works, particularly regarding the relationships between power, surveillance, and restrictions on individual freedom in the society depicted in the text. The object of the study is George Orwell's novel "1984." A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to interpret social phenomena in depth, including interactions between characters, the ideological context of the Party, and institutional control mechanisms. This research includes descriptive library research, as data is obtained from written sources and analyzed systematically without manipulating variables (GEDE ARI, 2025). This analysis is also relevant to the objectives

of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 16, which emphasizes the importance of justice, freedom, and the protection of individual rights in social life.

### Data And Data Sources

The research data consists of textual excerpts that include dialogue, narration, and events representing the exercise of power, surveillance, and restrictions on individual freedom. The data sources focus on Part One, Chapters 1–3, Part Two, Chapters 1–3, and Part Three, Chapter 2, as these sections provide an overview of the Party's surveillance system, ideological control, manipulation of truth, individual resistance, and institutional domination experienced by the main character, Winston Smith. Relevant data is then classified by theme to facilitate the analysis of patterns, interactions among characters, and forms of resistance that emerge. The data is organized into tables to ensure the flow of information is clear and supports systematic analysis (Wahid et al., 2023).

**Table 1**

| SECTION | CHAPTER | SUMMARY OF DATA SHOWING THE ABSENCE OF FREEDOM                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1       | 1       | The telescreen constantly broadcasts sound and images; posters of "Big Brother Is Watching You" stare down from every corner, and police helicopters patrol the streets. Winston feels that "every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized," and this signifies the erasure of privacy among people. (Part One, Chapter 1) |
| 1       | 2       | The Parsons' children (fanatical neighbors) become spies, eavesdropping on their parents and reporting their mutterings as thoughtcrimes; Mrs. Parsons is the victim of a family betrayal. (Part One, Chapter 2)                                                                                                                                                     |
| 1       | 3       | Winston was ordered to falsify history at the Ministry of Truth; this is an example of how the Party controls facts to limit the freedom of historical memory. (Part One, Chapter 3)                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 2       | 1       | Julia gave Winston a note that said "I love you," a violation of the Junior Anti-Sex League; their secret meetings defied surveillance, but were fraught with the risk of getting caught. (Part Two, Chapter 1)                                                                                                                                                      |
| 2       | 2       | Their first sexual encounter took place in the countryside, free from telescreens, but Winston realized that "nothing was your own except the few cubic centimetres inside your skull," highlighting the fragile nature of privacy between individuals. (Part Two, Chapter 2)                                                                                        |
| 2       | 3       | The regular Julia-Winston meetings, discussions of party criticism, and freedom of speech emerged, but were curtailed by paranoia about betrayal. (Part Two, Chapter 3)                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 3       | 1       | O'Brien tortures and forces Winston to believe that $2+2=5$ through doublethink; "Reality is in our minds" marks the culmination of the loss of free thought. (Part Three, Chapter 2)                                                                                                                                                                                |

### Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through a documentation method involving a literature review. This process was supported by the "read and note" method, which involves reading texts carefully, thoroughly, and repeatedly, then noting down quotations that indicate surveillance, the dominance of power, ideological control, or forms of restriction on freedom experienced by the

figures. Each piece of data was recorded systematically, including the section and chapter, to ensure the data could be traced back. This approach ensures that the collected data is accurate, relevant, and consistent with the research focus (Nurhayati et al., 2024).

### Data Analysis

Data analysis employs the interactive analysis model developed by Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña (2014), which comprises four main stages: data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification. The analysis process is iterative, in which the collected data is continuously reduced and organized to identify patterns and major themes systematically. This approach allows researchers to interpret social interactions, mechanisms of power control, and forms of individual resistance in the text descriptively. This interactive model has been applied in recent qualitative research to produce findings that are systematic, comprehensive, and consistent with the research focus.

### 3. Results

This section presents findings on how institutional control is depicted in George Orwell's novel 1984 and how it affects individual autonomy and social justice. The main issue addressed in this study is how forms of control within a totalitarian system shape and limit individual freedom in the state of Oceania. This issue stems from the research question, which examines how various control mechanisms affect individual autonomy under totalitarian rule in Oceania.

In line with the research questions, this study aims to identify the forms of control depicted in the novel 1984, analyze how institutional structures limit autonomy and social justice, and explain why institutional authority is portrayed as a factor shaping individual freedom, including its relevance in contemporary society. Institutional control in the novel operates through surveillance, manipulation of the truth, and institutional domination, undermining individual autonomy and eroding social justice.

The data analysis in this study follows the interactive model proposed by Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña (2014), which includes data condensation, data presentation, and concluding. The selected textual data were reduced and categorized into thematic patterns, which are then presented in Table 1.1 as a systematic form of data presentation.

Table 1.1

| TYPE OF CONTROL                    | DATA                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | IMPACT                                                                                                     |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Supervision                        | The telescreen constantly monitors sound and images; "Big Brother Is Watching You" posters are everywhere, and police helicopters keep watch over the houses; Winston feels that "every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized." (Part One, Chapter 1) | Technological and institutional oversight; the loss of privacy and the feeling of being constantly watched |
| Supervision                        | The Parsons' children acted as spies, watching their parents and reporting them to the Thought Police. (Part One, Chapter 2)                                                                                                                                                                      | Social control; lack of trust within the family and the breakdown of social relationships                  |
| Manipulation                       | Winston falsified historical records at the Ministry of Truth. (Part One, Chapter 3)                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Information control; the loss of objective truth and the manipulation of memory                            |
| Resistance (which remains limited) | Julia left a note saying "I love you" as a way of breaking the rules. (Part Two, Chapter 1)                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Individual resistance; temporary emotional freedom with high risks                                         |

|                                       |                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Resistance<br>(which remains limited) | Winston and Julia have sex in a place without a telescreen, but they still feel as if they are being watched. (Part Two, Chapter 2) | Individual resistance; fragile privacy and a false sense of security               |
| Resistance<br>(which remains limited) | Winston and Julia's regular meetings to criticize the Party. (Part Two, Chapter 3)                                                  | Individual resistance; freedom of speech is limited by fear                        |
| Institutional Power                   | O'Brien tortured Winston and forced him to accept that 2+2=5 through doublethink. (Part Three, Chapter 2)                           | Ideological and psychological control; the loss of rationality and total obedience |

#### 4. Discussion

George Orwell's novel "1984" depicts life under a totalitarian regime in the country of Oceania, where individuals are completely under the control of the authorities. This system not only restricts physical actions but also controls thoughts, language, and perceptions of reality. From a literary-sociological perspective, this novel can be understood as a representation of a social structure that emphasizes the dominance of power and social control, as well as the unequal relationship between individuals and institutions. Thus, this work functions not only as a fictional narrative but also as a critical reflection on the mechanisms of control that can occur in real society.

Based on Table 1.2, it can be seen that the forms of control in George Orwell's novel 1984 emerge gradually and systematically through various events in the story. The classified data show that control is exercised not only directly by institutions, but also through social and ideological mechanisms that influence individuals' behavior and ways of thinking.

**Table 1.2**

| THEME                                        | EXPLANATION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | IMPACT                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Surveillance<br>(Part One, Chapter 1)        | Surveillance in the novel is depicted through the presence of telescreens, "Big Brother Is Watching You" posters, and monitoring from various directions. The telescreen serves as the primary tool that allows the Party to constantly monitor individuals, both in terms of their voices and their activities. In addition, the presence of "Big Brother" posters reinforces the impression that individuals are always under surveillance. Winston states that "every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized." | Individuals have no privacy because their actions can be observed at any time. This creates fear and encourages people to control their own behavior. Surveillance therefore functions both physically and psychologically. |
| Social Surveillance<br>(Part One, Chapter 2) | Surveillance is carried out not only by institutions but also by society itself. This is evident in the role of Parsons' children, who act as informants and report their parents to the Party. The novel explains that children are trained to become "child heroes" who denounce their parents to the Thought Police.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Social relationships, especially within families, are damaged by suspicion and fear. Trust disappears because individuals constantly monitor one another.                                                                   |

|                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Manipulation of Truth (Part One, Chapter 3) | The manipulation of truth is carried out through the Ministry of Truth, where Winston works to alter historical records in accordance with the Party's interests. The Party slogan states, "Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past." | Objective truth gradually disappears because history can be changed according to political interests. Society becomes dependent on the Party as the sole source of truth and reality. |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

As a result, truth becomes fluid and subject to alteration at the whim of those in power. Individuals have no access to the facts, so they can only trust what the Party conveys. This situation reinforces the dominance of power because society loses the ability to question reality.

**Table 1.3**

| THEME                                       | EXPLANATION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Resistance (Part Two, Chapters 1–2)         | The data in Chapter 2 reveals forms of individual resistance against the system, as demonstrated by Julia's act of giving notes to Winston and the secret relationship they maintain. These actions violate Party rules, particularly the norms governing personal relationships. Julia gives Winston a note saying "I love you," which becomes the beginning of their rebellion against the Party's restrictions on intimacy. However, this resistance is limited because it occurs only in private spaces and cannot alter the larger power structure. Furthermore, although they try to find a place free from surveillance, fear remains. Winston realizes that "nothing was your own except the few cubic centimetres inside your skull." This indicates that control has been internalized within the individual. |
| Limited Freedom (Part Two, Chapter 3)       | The data further shows that although Winston and Julia tried to discuss and criticize the Party, their freedom remained constrained by fear and the possibility of betrayal. They could not express their thoughts freely due to the threat posed by the system. Their regular secret meetings and conversations criticizing the Party are constantly overshadowed by paranoia and fear of being discovered. This demonstrates that individual freedom in a totalitarian society is severely limited. Even when individuals attempt to resist, they remain under the shadow of strict control.                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Institutional Power (Part Three, Chapter 2) | The data in Chapter 3 show that power reaches its peak through O'Brien's actions in torturing Winston and forcing him to accept the reality dictated by the Party. In this process, Winston is forced to accept the concept of doublethink, including accepting that "2 + 2 = 5." This demonstrates that power controls not only actions but also an individual's way of thinking. At this stage, the individual loses the ability to distinguish right from wrong, becoming completely subservient to the system.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

Based on all the data in the table, it can be concluded that control in the novel "1984" operates through various interrelated mechanisms, namely surveillance, social control, manipulation of truth, limited resistance, and institutional power. These mechanisms form a comprehensive system of control that significantly restricts individual freedom.

From a sociological perspective on literature, this situation reflects how social structures can be used to maintain the dominance of power. Individuals are not only controlled directly but also through the internalization of norms and fear, which causes them to unconsciously support the system. Furthermore, the resistance depicted in the novel is not strong enough to alter the existing social structure. This suggests that in a highly controlled system, social change cannot occur solely through individual action. Thus, this novel can be understood as a critique of a

power system that oppresses individuals and as a reflection on the potential for similar forms of control to emerge in real society.

## 5. Simpulan

Based on the analysis, the novel “1984” by George Orwell demonstrates that the totalitarian system in the state of Oceania restricts individual freedom through various interrelated forms of control, such as surveillance, manipulation of truth, ideological influence, and institutional power. These controls shape not only the physical movements of society but also the way people think, speak, and perceive reality. The presence of telescreens, social surveillance, and the Party’s manipulation of information deprive individuals of privacy, security, and independent thought. Furthermore, this study shows that the resistance carried out by Winston and Julia only offers temporary freedom and does not change the overall structure of power. This indicates that, in a totalitarian system, control has been internalised within society, where fear and obedience become part of individuals’ everyday lives. Ultimately, institutional power reaches its peak when the Party demands not only obedience in action but also loyalty in thought through the concept of doublethink. From a literary sociology perspective, the novel illustrates how social structures and ideologies can be used to maintain power domination and limit individual autonomy. Therefore, the novel functions not only as a work of fiction but also as a social critique of repressive systems of power and a warning about the dangers of excessive control in society.

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