

1984 IN 2025: A VIEW OF TRUMPS NEW AMERICA THROUGH THE LENS OF GEORGE ORWELL



How do the themes of surveillance, propaganda, and authoritarian control in *1984* compare to the political and media landscape of Trump's America?

A thesis project by Maria Vesterås

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Methods	4
Theory.....	4
Ethics.....	5
Reflections Around the Research.....	5
Background.....	6
Totalitarianism and Authoritarianism.....	7
The Myth of The Supreme Leader	8
You Are Not Immune to Propaganda.....	10
Big Brother is Always Watching	13
We All Love Big Brother - What's Next?.....	16
The Project - A Retrospective Look.....	17
Sources	19

Introduction

In most Western countries today, totalitarianism and authoritarianism continue to exist as just an abstract idea, a type of regime that happens in other parts of the world, or as remnants of past regimes in history. We, the people of the western world like to imagine ourselves as democratic and free countries, with the freedom-fighting frontliner of this idea being The United States of America. As it is written in the National Anthem, the U.S has been known as the "land of the free" since the "The Star-Spangled Banner" was written in 1814. It is therefore easy to see where this tendency of not believing totalitarianism or authoritarianism can happen to them would come from. If we look back at the historical context of the U.S and the world, why would they?

In Europe, the devastating effects of authoritarianism were revealed during the World Wars, with these regimes leaving Europe in ruin with mass deaths, inflation, corruption, disease and suppression. For the U.S, on the other hand, the effects of the war were quite positive. While the European people were dealing with the massive consequences of Hitler and Mussolini's totalitarian regimes the U.S was experiencing a great business boom, with business investment increasing massively, which made America into an economic superpower. This raised the quality of life of everyday Americans, made new technological advancements possible and placed America as a strong military ally in important positions in NATO and the UN. They helped lift Europe out of the dust with programs such as the Marshall help and the Truman Doctrine. In general, allowing America to cement themselves as the saviour of Europe, democracy and freedom, the furthest thing from dictatorship and totalitarianism.

The experience of living through the Second World War, fighting in the Spanish Civil War, and tales of other totalitarian regimes around this time, inspired George Orwell's classic dystopian novel *1984*, published in 1949. Orwell meant for *1984* to be a cautionary tale and a warning that the same patterns that make up a totalitarian regime can happen everywhere in the world, regardless of the time or place. Orwell felt that the US and Great Britain were at risk of falling into these same patterns, especially after the war.

Today, in 2025, we might have entered the future Orwell feared. The current president of the USA, Donald Trump, and his administration, have been accused since Trump's first term of sending America into a more authoritarian direction. Now in his second term of presidency, it can seem like he has begun to embrace this shift more fully, with publicly admiring dictators (Cillizza, Williams, 2019) , turning on well-established allies such as Canada and Europe

through trade wars, aligning himself more with less democratic regimes such as Putin's Russia, with the US even voting with Russia during the UN vote on the third anniversary of the Ukraine War, it is clear America has changed. What Orwell warned of in *1984*, was the result of accepting this exact kind of shift in society, towards more surveillance, more hatred, more war and anti-intellectualism. So, what are the actual similarities in these regimes, the red flags in propaganda, how a leader is perceived and government surveillance, and where do we go from here in avoiding *1984* in 2025?

Methods

My approach was to use a qualitative and comparative method. I focused on comparing relevant themes and similarities in leadership and how these societies are built up. I started my research by reading the novel *1984*, and analysing the society, and regime in the book. Finding out why and how The Party's regime in the book is the way it is. Then finding the key elements that they use to uphold their regime, and how their society functions. I then looked at these key elements from the book and tried researching if I could find similarities in how American society and government functions now under Trump. The main categories in the text will therefore focus on these key elements. There are of course many more themes and elements to compare between these two societies, but I focused specifically on what I considered to be the most relevant and interesting elements.

Theory

I chose to focus on two research theories, namely critical and institutional theory. Institutional theory explains how rules and organizations shape behaviour, with people following them to fit in, avoid punishment, or gain benefits. Over time, these rules become hard to change (Berthod, 2016). Critical theory focuses on how powerful groups (governments, corporations, media) shape society to maintain control and prevent resistance (Adorno, 2023). I chose these theories because I believe a mix of the two will provide a good framework for examining how political and legal institutions shape governance, media, and surveillance, as well as help analyse the power dynamics, oppression, and resistance within these systems. By combining these two perspectives, I will gain a more comprehensive analysis of the ways in which authority functions in Orwell's dystopia and in American society.

Ethics

The threat of authoritarianism and totalitarianism can be a sensitive subject where I personally don't want to accuse or point fingers at someone. Even though I am referencing a fictional book, I am also directly referencing real life people. Therefore, I found it important that I keep neutral to the best of my ability and try to compare as objectively as possible, but there will be bias in all research, from the beginning when choosing a thesis question which is important that readers keep in mind. It's also important to keep in mind that my specific theories, critical and institutional theory, are going to some degree influence the way I am examining the material.

Reflections Around the Research

Examining the novel was straightforward. I focused mainly on my own interpretation and reading of the book, and supplementing from other literary analyses, articles or sources where appropriate.

When it came to the political part of the research piece, involving current affairs that are still developing when writing about them, the most important thing became finding the most neutral, and reliable sources possible since, as I will write about later in the text, misinformation and propaganda flourishes around on the internet. Finding these neutral sources was not as easy as I thought it would be. When for example referring to things that Trump had said or done, I had to disregard most of the Facebook memes or commentary and seek out the video myself to be sure that this was something that he had actually said or done. Here you also have to be careful with AI-generated pictures and videos flourishing on the internet currently. I tried to fact check Trump's statements and actions with multiple sources where possible, like different news articles, as well as political fact checkers online such as Politifact and the Marshall Project.

I made a choice to include as few news articles as possible, especially from US news media. My reasoning being that most news companies are owned by specific people, who often use their power to enforce a media bias. For example, the Washington Post, a very popular American newspaper, is owned by Jeff Bezos, owner of Amazon and one of the tech giants seen at Trump's inauguration. The owners of the newspapers in the U.S decide what should be posted in the paper and what should not. Most recently, Bezos said that he does not want

articles that “don’t support the free market or personal freedom” to be published in the paper (Viland, 2025). This was just one example, but we can see these types of biases in the majority of news companies in the US, both from Republican and Democratic sides.

I tried to focus on finding academic articles, to see these comparisons from a less biased and more literary and scholarly view. Google Scholar was used as an academic search engine to find these articles. Many articles were unfortunately behind a paywall, becoming hard for me to access, but I tried seeking out other free articles, but it is important to acknowledge that there were potentially other relevant sources that were not included because of this. I also focused on comparing sources to see if the information was at least somewhat similar.

Background

“It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.” This is how we are shepherded into the bleak world of Orwell’s *1984*. A cautionary tale and a warning for the future, we follow our protagonist Winston Smith and his gradual disillusionment and eventual rebellion against the totalitarian regime that rules the country Oceania. Under the watchful eyes of Big Brother, a symbolic representative of “The Party”, the regime exerts power and control to keep the population in line through any means necessary.

1984 is one of those books that creates ripples whenever it is brought up. Controversial, divisive, scary, impossible, possible and cliché, it is one of the most banned books of all time, throughout regimes all the way across the political spectrum from communism to capitalism. It created iconic imagery such as Big Brother and The Thought Police, new vocabulary such as thoughtcrime, newspeak, and doublethink, and essentially created the idea of something being “Orwellian”, meaning that something resembles the world depicted in the novel.

The idea of the novel was sparked after the 1943 Tehran Conference where British prime minister Winston Churchill, US president Franklin D. Roosevelt and Russian Premier Joseph Stalin of the USSR met to strategize against the Axis Powers Germany and Japan. They discussed how to rebuild after World War 2, and here Orwell imagined three incredibly powerful men dividing up the world, inspiring the nations of Oceania, Eastasia and Eurasia in *1984*. In Orwell’s book “Why I Write” (1946) we see this exact ideology behind Orwell’s work: “Every serious line of work that I have written since 1946 has been written directly or indirectly against totalitarian regimes and for democratic socialism as I understand it”.

1984 has been brought up as a literary comparison to countless regimes since its publication, and America is no exception. Donald Trump, the 45th and 47th President of the United States, and especially his new term from January 2025, has been riddled with similarities to The Party in *1984*. A businessman and reality star, Donald Trump has turned America on its head completely. Not only has Trump altered international politics, but he is also trying to change the politics and culture within America. For instance, in the State of the Union speech he held on 5th March 2025, he declared: “We are ending the lie that any child is trapped in the wrong body,” justifying why he signed an order “banning public schools from indoctrinating our children.” These actions have sparked discussions about the erosion of democratic values and prompted comparisons to the authoritarian regime in Orwell’s *1984*, where the state controls not just politics but the very beliefs and thoughts of its citizens.

Totalitarianism and Authoritarianism

Before diving into the analysis of these regimes, I believe it is essential to specify the difference between the two ideologies totalitarianism and authoritarianism. These two ideologies are quite similar, and are easily used interchangeably, even though they are not the same.

Totalitarianism refers to a regime where the government has «total» control over all activities in society, both public and private. This is done through force and oppression (Thorsen, 2025). In reality, such totalitarian regimes are almost impossible to obtain and or maintain, and there hasn't existed any true totalitarian regimes throughout history because of this. Regimes such as Hitler's Nazi Germany, Stalin's Soviet Union and North Korea after Kim Il-Sung, are all societies that utilise certain totalitarian elements, but have not achieved total control. These societies would in reality be better classified as authoritarian regimes, essentially a milder form of totalitarianism, where there still is a dictator at the top trying to oppress and control the population for personal gain, with a focus on maintaining the status quo and power, and reducing democracy. They usually allow some opposition and private thoughts and beliefs as long as it does not threaten power (Thorsen, 2025). They are therefore very similar, but totalitarian regimes control more aspects of the public's life than authoritarian ones. The regime in *1984* reflects more of a totalitarian regime, but real-life regimes that show elements of totalitarianism are often more on the authoritarian side.

The Myth of The Supreme Leader

Depending on what one categorises as a cult of personality both Donald Trump and Big Brother could be seen as examples of figures associated with a "cult of personality." A cult of personality can be defined as a political and psychological phenomenon that arises when an effort is made to idealize and create a heroic image of a leader. This is a phenomenon that historically has been developed through techniques such as the manipulation of the media, the staging of memorable events, patriotism and the spread of propaganda. This often leads to blind loyalty and or uncritical thinking from the people (Kulik, n.d).

A personality cult is not limited to one specific ideology. Elements of personality cults can be found in leaders such as Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, two fascist leaders to Mao Zedong and Joseph Stalin, former communist leaders of respectively China and the Soviet Union. Still there is a common denominator with every single one, either proclaiming themselves, and or being regarded as some kind of "saviour" by the public, put in power to protect the people against some kind of outside threat like occupation or exploitation, or a crumbling economy. There are also multiple instances where supreme leaders say they directly receive the right to reign "from God", or some other higher power to legitimize their position and to undermine criticism towards them. The idea of the supreme leader has examples dating back to Roman times. One of the first to be defined in this manner was the first Roman emperor, Augustus, who referred to himself as the "son of a god", legitimizing his power to take over Rome (Brown University, 2011).

In 1984, Orwell has created the ultimate supreme leader, Big Brother, a character that does not get his power from God, because he *is* God. Big Brothers' figure and role function similarly to how a god-like figure would in a totalitarian regime. The image of the Party for the public, Big Brother is pasted up on every telescreen and poster around Oceania. He becomes a mythical figure, it's uncertain if Big Brother exists or not. Typical of these kinds of leaders is that he has no bad traits, only exaggerated good ones, such as benevolence, bravery and intelligence up to a point of almost divine reverence, which we can see in this quote: "Big Brother is infallible and all-powerful. Every success, every achievement, every victory, every scientific discovery, all knowledge, all wisdom, all happiness, all virtue, are held to issue directly from his leadership and inspiration" (Orwell, p. 208)

This imagery of Big Brother's many great achievements gets reinforced constantly to the public, with a great emphasis placed on his earlier accomplishments as a supposedly genius

inventor, a war hero, a philosopher and a revolutionary. He is everything good, and nothing bad. The people of Oceania have learned to love Big Brother because of constant surveillance and indoctrination. An example of how the citizens is made to love Big Brother is the everyday practice of the Two Minutes Hate, a ritual where they express their anger at the Party's enemies. This ritual along with other forms of propaganda reinforces Big Brother's image as a saviour of the state and protector of the people. A leader that provides them with the safety and unity they need against "enemies" of the state.

Donald Trump is a fascinating counterpart to Big Brother. During his second inauguration as the 47th President of the United States, Donald Trump claimed that God was the one who saved him from an assassination attempt to allow him to return to office, asserting that he was the only one capable of leading America into a new "Golden Age." Trump seems to embrace the image of himself as a saviour for the American people. This notion was further emphasized when the White House's official Instagram account posted an AI-generated image of Trump wearing a crown, with the caption "Long live the king", styled like a Time magazine cover. This image reinforced the idea that his right to rule came not from the people, but from God (White House, 2025).

The Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement was born out of Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, and emerged as a potent force in American politics, encapsulating a vision of reclaiming the perceived lost greatness of the United States. Trump's campaign slogan "Make America Great Again" became representative of the movement. At its core, the MAGA movement is rooted in the romanticization of the past or frequently referred to as the "golden age of America". A time where the "American dream" was the ideal people strived to achieve (Volle, 2025).

In an interview conducted by the BBC, six different Trump supporters voiced their personal reasons for their support of Trump. Their reasons for voting for him was at its core disillusionment with the political and economic system that existed before Trump, with them feeling like Trump was a solution to their everyday problems. They also liked the Trump "charm", feeling that videos of him with his grandchildren showed that not only was he a strong leader inflicting fear in the rest of the world, but also a caring family man. With Trump's politics also focusing on immigration and the invasion of the southern border of "illegal aliens" and "criminals", he presents himself as a saviour that wants to protect America and American values from "outsiders".

Trump has built up a persona as a talented businessman, a strong leader, a family man, a comedian, and in general something new and different from other established politicians that his supporters felt that never listened or cared for them or never discussed their biggest concerns. His followers feel like finally someone is listening to them; someone is talking in a language they understand. Trump is known to lie, exaggerate and make up facts, even when faced with direct proof of the opposite. With various sources fact checking Trump's statements, often finding false or misleading statements, proving that he tends to lie, but this doesn't seem to concern Trump supporters. His followers seem to believe him regardless, despite what other sources claim. Reasons for this may be that they've bought into this cult of personality surrounding Trump, with him giving his followers very simple explanations for why something is the way it is, whether that is the economy, immigration, civil rights, vaccines or climate change. Trump constantly disproves well-established news sources by saying that they are lying, making his followers distrust mainstream media, and pushing them towards news media that support him and his political standpoints with no criticism.

You Are Not Immune to Propaganda

Propaganda is manipulation of people's feelings done to further an ideological agenda through things like political speeches, advertisements, news reports, and social media posts. These ideological agendas are often false, or exaggerated, spread to further a political cause, leader or government (Merriam Webster, 2025).

Traces of what we today categorise as propaganda has roots all the way back to ancient times, with leaders like Augustus the first emperor of the Roman Empire, utilizing coins, statues, and monuments to reinforce authority and an imagery of power (Brown University, 2011).

Propaganda however gained new life through the invention of the printing press and newspapers. World War 1 was the first large-scale organised government propaganda for the masses, afterwards being heavily utilized by Nazi Germany and other world leaders during the second world war, where heavy use was made of posters, as well as the new medium of film. Propaganda was shown to be effective in riling up a population during war times, making them believe in the justness of their side, encouraging voluntary recruitment and often demonising the "enemy", using slogans, symbolism and caricatures (UGA, 2018).

In *1984*, children are vessels of propaganda. They are taught the Party's ideology, becoming brainwashed Spies, essentially the children's version of the Party. They are systematically

turned against their own parents and taught to spy on them and report their deviations. The family has become an extension of the Thought Police, and by capturing the youth, this will extend to the next generation meaning the ones inheriting society will be even less critical of the regime since they have been educated in The Party's ideology all their lives. When someone is more educated, the less control the governing bodies have over the population, which is why education is either undervalued or strongly controlled by the leading party, to make sure people are less likely to protest and try to overthrow the government. Hard to think for yourself when you have never been taught how, and even thinking of doing so is illegal.

Donald Trump and his administration are now focused on shutting down the Department of Education, they support and encourage banning books in schools that do not support their own ideals, they are anti-science, and sceptical of experts and intellectuals (Ma, 2025). They also focus on how their “enemies” like the LGBT community, women, people of colour etc. are “grooming” children, and how trans and gay people want to “turn their children” or associating these groups with paedophilia, pornography or sexual abuse to incite fear and moral panic in their parents, making them more susceptible to what the authority has to say (Lavietes, 2024).

Both these regimes play on one of the most effective propaganda tools, namely fear (Jowett, 2016). Fear of invasion, of extinction, of violence, of things they don't understand, of their children being hurt, of the ever-changing “enemy”. By having people living in a state of fear, especially surrounding times of war or political unrest, the regime places themselves as the saviours, telling people they don't have to worry as long as they're in charge, that they will take care of everything. These situations of political unrest and war are also visible in *1984* and in America and are always used for political gain to promote the country and their leader and find the common enemy. In these regimes, they often declare national emergencies during such times, creating a situation where the leaders are allowed to push through their own agenda for the “greater good of the country” but this often a ploy to change laws, constitutions and regulations or postpone elections for example so they can receive more power or solidify it. They create a world of anti-intellectualism where facts and experts, education and subjects such as history, art and philosophy are undervalued. A world where people don't have to think for themselves anymore, where they mistrust intelligence and look down on intellectual pursuits, therefore leaving them vulnerable to even more propaganda and chained by their own ignorance (Merkley, 2021). Like the Ministry of Truth puts it: “ignorance is strength”, for the people in power that is.

The use of language is also an extremely important propaganda tool. In *1984*, Winston works at the Ministry of Truth, in reality the Ministry of Propaganda. The ministry's main purpose is to falsify historic events and spread misinformation. If for example Big Brother makes a wrong prediction, the Ministry of Truth alters the records making it seem like Big Brother was right all along. On the outside wall of the building, there are the three slogans of the Party: 'WAR IS PEACE', 'FREEDOM IS SLAVERY' and 'IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH' (Orwell, p. 6). Examples of so-called doublethink, basically thinking two completely contradictory thoughts at the same time. Another example of this is $2+2=5$ (Orwell, p. 80), the equation Winston must accept at the end through his "lesson" after being caught by the Party. Here we see how the government can essentially change what's actually true, to us $2+2=4$ is true without question. However, if enough people believe that $2+2=5$, then for all intents and purposes it does. Trump and his administration use words such as "alternative facts", or "fake news" when stating things that are meant to be fact without any proof, or in many cases contradictory proof, putting into question universally acknowledged facts and creating an alternative reality of the truth. A famous example of this is during his first term, when his administration severely overestimated how many people had shown up to his inauguration, prompting the birth of the word "alternative facts" (BBC, 2017).

Newspeak is another important propaganda tool used in *1984*, limiting vocabulary and simplifying words so people are unable to form their own complex opinions and thoughts, because the words they need do not exist. Controlling the narrative always starts by controlling what people are allowed to say, and how they are allowed to say it. The Party constantly refines and perfects Newspeak, with the ultimate goal that no one will be capable of conceptualizing anything that might question the Party's absolute power. Trump has in many ways created his own form of newspeak to scapegoat groups he dislikes and to create a common ideology amongst his supporters. Essentially changing the meaning of words until they don't mean anything anymore, like "woke" or "DEI" to hurt different minorities to either claim they don't deserve their positions at work, or to ridicule their policies. Pressuring the media to call the Gulf of Mexico, the Trump-renamed "Gulf of America" or risking being thrown out of the press rooms (Goodwin, 2025).

The Party controls every source of information, managing and rewriting the content of all newspapers and histories for its own ends. The Party does not allow individuals to keep records of their past, such as photographs or documents. As a result, memories become fuzzy and unreliable, and citizens are forced to believe whatever the Party tells them. By controlling

the present, the Party is able to manipulate the past. And in controlling the past, the Party can justify all of its actions in the present. "When memory failed and written records were falsified—when that happened, the claim of the Party to have improved the conditions of human life had got to be accepted, because there did not exist, and never again could exist, any standard against which it could be tested" (Orwell, p. 93).

Trump recreates history often times when he speaks. In 2018, President Trump negotiated and signed the USMCA, replacing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). He hailed it as "the most modern, up-to-date, and balanced trade agreement in the history of our country, with the most advanced protections for workers ever developed." However, in 2025 he claims, it is one of the worst deals ever made, conveniently forgetting he is the one who made it. He is often caught in spreading misinformation as well as spreading conspiracy theories surrounding previous events. During his campaign run for his second term he claimed, "I know nothing about Project 2025", a conservative right-wing playbook for the next Republican president, and then signed many executive orders directly reflecting proposals in this playbook right when he became president (Durkee, 2025). He claims he won the election in 2020, that the election was stolen and riled his followers up on Twitter, which resulted in a coup on January 6th, 2021, with his followers violently storming the Capitol Building in Washington DC. Similar to *1984*: 'The Party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was their final, most essential command' (Orwell, p.84), even when he says the exact opposite of what all his followers can clearly see is true, his supporters believe him wholeheartedly.

Propaganda is an important tool in maintaining and creating a totalitarian or an authoritarian regime. Propaganda is used to shape how people think and therefore shaping how they act. Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes often use propaganda to push their own agenda, while bashing the opposition, trying to get the public to look at their party as the superior and right choice for the country. The goal with manipulating how people think and act, is to hinder the citizens to rebel against the regime. So, the party in power will keep their position in society, and in the end sway the population to help with their end goal, ultimate power for them forever.

Big Brother is Always Watching

Orwell in many ways predicted the rise of the use of media and technology and how these elements are key to maintaining a totalitarian regime, especially through the act of

surveillance. Surveillance is the act of watching someone or something. The practice of mass surveillance is used both in American society today and in the novel *1984*.

The terror attack on the Twin Towers in New York City on 9/11 2001 marked the start of an expansion of mass surveillance in the U.S. Enacted in 2001 through the USA PATRIOT Act, the government was able to increase the monitoring of phone calls, emails, and other forms of communication. This increase in mass surveillance went under the radar for most American citizens and was only seen as a tool to tackle terrorism through the new War on Terror (Watson Institute, 2025).

We don't know the full extent of this surveillance activity, but through whistleblowers such as Edward Snowden, more details of this surveillance were eventually revealed to the public. Snowden was a previous NDA contractor who leaked various classified documents revealing how the government was not only monitoring potential terrorists, but regular American civilians as well as foreign leaders and civilians. Today, President Trump and ICE are working on increasing mass surveillance again. The Geo Group, the largest single private contractor to US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), said it was building out its surveillance business to be able to monitor hundreds of thousands or millions more immigrants than it already does (Talbot, 2025).

In *1984*, surveillance from the government is constant. Through telescreens mounted in every home and in all public places, and microphones listening in all the time, The Party can have full control over the population, even their thoughts and emotions. It was impossible to avoid the telescreen. You could hear it anywhere, and even when you weren't actively watching, its influence was still pervasive. The telescreens' function both by monitoring and conveying information, they can identify people and their voices and notice when their facial expressions change, or whether their heart or breathing gets faster.

In the late 1700s, Jeremy Bentham developed the idea of a prison design, called the panopticon. It would be designed in such a way that the guards could look into each and every cell in the prison, but the prisoners could not see the guards. This resulted in the prisoners always behaving well, never knowing when they were being watched and therefore acting as if they were observed at all times (Coyle, 2025). This is exactly how The Party operates and their entire surveillance ideology is encapsulated in the most iconic quote from *1984*: "Big Brother is Watching You" (Orwell, p.3). It is not sustainable to watch everyone in a population all the time, but if they think they are being watched they will be too scared to

protest, to show resistance or do anything that under this regime would be illegal. We can see this exact idea of the panopticon in this quote: "there was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment ... you had to live ... in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinised" (Orwell, p.4-5).

Today, we have smartphones and computers that function in many similar ways, something the sociologist Christian Fuchs describes as a form of modern panopticon between the companies and their users. We always want to present ourselves the best way, because someone is always watching. Our gadgets act as a connection to the internet and are the way in which a myriad of private companies from data brokers to social media companies themselves survey our every action. This is what is called surveillance capitalism.

Surveillance capitalism is an economic system where corporations collect, analyse, and monetize personal data for profit and control. Through algorithms and human moderators, companies like Google, Facebook, and Amazon exploit user data to predict and manipulate behaviour, creating new markets for targeted advertising, political influence, and even law enforcement (Zuboff, 2023). These companies can monitor everything we do online, through the inconspicuously named "cookies" that we must accept to access these websites. They build up huge behavioural and interest profiles on each individual user that they then use to nudge them towards the most monetizable behaviours through personalized advertisements.

Silicon Valley has become a monopoly that owns everything tech related. Through this Trump administration it is obvious that tech billionaires have been given incentives to invest in Trump and right-wing ideology, so they receive less regulations and more tax cuts for their companies, with the goal of accumulating more control and more wealth. Tech billionaire and Tesla-owner Elon Musk essentially bought his way into the White House by investing in Trump's campaign, earning him more than 138 billion dollars since the election in November, giving money grants and tax cuts to his own companies and slashing down established government institutions through the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) to help decrease roadblocks for building up his own companies. It is obvious who is being prioritised during this administration with the sheer amount of tech oligarchs present at Trump's inauguration.

In 1984, it was the government that forced these telescreens into every sphere, both public and private to maintain their control. Today it is us who buy the latest devices, upgrade and maintain them, pay for internet and power to run them and allow these companies direct

access into personal data we have no idea what they do with. We also have other unrelated devices that are directly connected to these companies through our refrigerators, watches, toasters, speakers and other regular household items. We don't know what data they have, how much of it and whether it is saved, shared or sold to third parties, because we have no insight into how these companies treat our data. We also have governments putting up CCTV and public surveillance that through the use of AI has begun facial recognition and matching your face to your identity from public images and videos, and with everyone owning a smartphone, you can be filmed or taken a picture of at any time, without your knowledge (Fontes, 2022). There is almost no real privacy from some form of surveillance anymore. Orwell saw surveillance and control as the domain of the state, whereas the new surveillance world is one of private companies monitoring, monetizing and manipulating society for nothing more than commercial gain, now also through political power.

We All Love Big Brother - What's Next?

So, then what are the similarities between Trump's America and Orwell's *1984* that were discovered through his project?

Both Trump and Orwell's fictional character, Big Brother, cultivate strong, personalized images of leadership that demand unwavering loyalty from the public. While Big Brother is a depiction of a society where things have gone further, ending in Big Brother's persona becoming inseparable from the state. Trump has also created a cult of personality surrounding himself that presents only good sides of him, place him as a saviour of America

In *1984*, The Party has full control over what is the truth and what actually is history, constantly rewriting and changing history to benefit their own ideology. Trump uses disinformation through statements such as "alternative facts" or "fake news" to present lies as truth to his followers. They both use language, such as creating contradicting statements, doublethink, or changing the way language is used so people have a harder time conceptualizing their own thoughts, newspeak. They control the media, The Party more overtly, but Trump is going in the same direction with billionaires owning all major media companies in America, and them now being so closely aligned with Trump, makes controlling discourse and the narrative, and suppressing criticism in the media easier. All in the aim of shaping public perception and maintaining power.

The omnipresent gaze of Big Brother mimics growing concerns in America about data privacy, government surveillance, and the erosion of personal freedoms, especially considering the way new technology such as social media is being used to feed everyone their own echo chamber of ideas and opinions.

While America is not an Orwellian state, yet there are some disturbing parallels both to *1984*, but also to previous authoritarian regimes and their claim to power. It shows how vulnerable democracies are to falling for these regimes' rhetoric and strategies. Through the convenience of social media, the subtle creep of less and less privacy through surveillance and the comforting words of a strong leader, we are all susceptible to fall for these tactics in turbulent and difficult times. We are all capable of loving Big Brother. Being able to recognize these signs; to protect important civil rights such as a free press, good education that values critical thinking and free speech is essential to fight back against these types of governments. And to not be so naive as to think it can't happen to us, here. The rise of authoritarianism doesn't discriminate, nowhere is safe from its claws, not even where something like that "could never happen here".

The Project - A Retrospective Look

If I could do something differently next time, I would definitely minimize the project even more. When I went into this project, I didn't realise that there were so many important instances and themes you could relate to the book. So instead of writing a bit about various topics I would rather take the approach of choosing maybe one of the themes instead of the amount I did. I believe it would have been easier to deeply research just one topic, instead of researching various topics, more surface level. As I previously stated the project ended up becoming bigger than I imagined. I did find the research incredibly interesting and relevant to today, and I think there are multiple opportunities to relate new things to this subject for the future. I think that the theories I chose to focus on made sense when it came to what I discovered during this project, and they became the lens through which I chose what to write about. An interesting focus in the future could be to keep the thesis question the same but change out the theories used. This would show different sides to this comparative analysis I was not able to show here.

Sources

ABC NEWS, (20. Jan 2025)," FULL SPEECH: President Donald Trump's inauguration speech", YouTube, [\(32274\) FULL SPEECH: President Donald Trump's inauguration speech - YouTube](#)

Adorno, T, (2023), "Critical Theory (Frankfurt School)", Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, [Critical Theory \(Frankfurt School\) \(Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy\)](#)

Arceneaux, K , (2022), "Donald Trump and the Lie" , Cambridge University Press, [Donald Trump and the Lie | Perspectives on Politics | Cambridge Core](#)

Barzun, J, (2025), "The interwar years", Britannica, [History of Europe - Interwar Years, WWI, WWII | Britannica](#)

BBC, (2025), "What an AI-generated video of Gaza reveals about Trump tactics" ,[BBC Verify: The AI-generated video of Gaza shared by Trump](#)

BBC, (2025), "The impact of World War Two on the US people - OCR A", [Economic growth - The impact of World War Two on the US people - OCR A - GCSE History Revision - OCR A - BBC Bitesize](#)

Berthod, O, (2018), "Institutional Theory of Organizations", Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance, (Pages 1-5), Springer International Publishing, [\(PDF\) Institutional Theory of Organizations](#)

Bhuiya, J, (2025) "Ice contractor plans for surveillance boom under Trump migrant crackdown", The Guardian, [Ice contractor plans for surveillance boom under Trump migrant crackdown | Technology | The Guardian](#)

Blomquist, A, (2025), «Høyrepopulisme i Europa: Hvor langt vil de politiske elitene gå for å beholde makten?», Forskning.no [Høyrepopulisme i Europa: Hvor langt vil de politiske elitene gå for å beholde makten?](#)

Brzezinski, Z, (2013), Totalitarianism and Rationality, Cambridge University Press, [Totalitarianism and Rationality | American Political Science Review | Cambridge Core](#)

Brown University, (2011), "Augustus, First Among Equals Roman Art and Architecture: Julius Caesar to Hadrian",
https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Joukowsky_Institute/courses/romanartandarch2011/14123.html

Butt, M, (2023), "5 Pieces of Propaganda from the Ancient World", The Collector, [5 Pieces of Propaganda from the Ancient World | TheCollector](#)

Cillizza, C & Williams, B (2019), CNN, "15 times Donald Trump praised authoritarian rulers", <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/07/02/politics/donald-trump-dictators-kim-jong-un-vladimir-putin/index.html>

Columbia Law School, (2025), "EPA Announces "Powering the Great American Comeback" Initiative", [EPA Announces "Powering the Great American Comeback" Initiative | Sabin Center for Climate Change Law](#)

Coyle, A, (n.d), «Panopticon », Britannica,
<https://www.britannica.com/technology/panopticon>

Cunic, A, (2023), “How Does Propaganda Work?”, Verywellmind, [Effects of Propaganda and How It Is Used](#)

Dewitt, D, (2025), “Ignorance is not bliss: The dangerous politics of anti-intellectualism”, Ohio Capital Journal, [Ignorance is not bliss: The dangerous politics of anti-intellectualism](#) • [Ohio Capital Journal](#)

Duignan, B, (2025) , “January 6 U.S. Capitol attack”, Britannica, [January 6 U.S. Capitol Attack | Background, Events, Criminal Charges, & Facts | Britannica](#)

Durkee, A ,(2025), “Orders Align With Project 2025—As He Touts Agenda In Speech To Congres”, Forbes, [Is Trump Following Project 2025? How His Executive Orders Compare To Controversial Policy Proposals](#)

Fontes, C, (2022), “AI-powered public surveillance systems: why we (might) need them and how we want them”, ScienceDirect, (Volume 71, Page 1-2)
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0160791X22002780>

Foster, J & Mcchesney, R, (2014), “Surveillance Capitalism», Rows Collection,
<https://pdf.smpn1turen.sch.id/pdf/john-bellamy-foster-2014-surveillance-capitalism.pdf>

Fuller, G, (2006), “America’s Uncomfortable Relationship With Nationalism”, Stanley Center for Peace and Security, [America’s Uncomfortable Relationship With Nationalism](#) | Stanley Center for Peace and Security

Goodwin, G, (2025) , “Gulf of Mexico, or Gulf of America? Trump makes a call, but who follows?”, Business Insider, [Trump's Renaming of the Gulf of Mexico and Its Implications](#) - Business Insider

Gu, L, (2017), “The Fake News Machine: How Propagandists Abuse the Internet and Manipulate the Public.”, The Global Technical Support and R&D Center of TREND MICRO, [The Fake News Machine: How Propagandists Abuse the Internet and Manipulate the Public](#)

Immelman, A, (2017), “The Leadership Style of U.S. President Donald J. Trump”, College Of Saint Benedict, Saint John’s, ["The Leadership Style of U.S. President Donald J. Trump" by Aubrey Immelman](#)

Jowett, G & O’Donald, V, (2016), “Decoding Political Propaganda:Fear” , Nabb Research center online exhibits, [Fear · Decoding Political Propaganda · Nabb Research Center Online Exhibits](#)

Kessler, G & Rizzo S, (2021), “Trump’s false or misleading claims total 30,573 over 4 years”, The Washington Post, [Trump’s false or misleading claims total 30,573 over 4 years - The Washington Post](#)

Knight Foundation, (2016), “How much fake news can we identify on twitter?”, [Disinformation, ‘fake news’ and influence Campaigns on Twitter](#)

Kulik, R, (n.d) , «Cult of personality”, Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/cult-of-personality>

Landal, J & Jackson, P (2025), BBC, “US sides with Russia in UN resolutions on Ukraine”, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c7435pnle0go>

Lang, T, (2018), “Institutional Theory, New», The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology, (Page 1-2), John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Thilo-Lang/publication/319204204_Institutional_Theory_New/links/5c7d4ffd458515831f83c2ea/Institutional-Theory-New.pdf

Ma, A, (2025), “Trump wants to dismantle the Education Department. Here’s what it does”, AP News <https://apnews.com/article/education-department-trump-ab509ad5778497dfbd6d53b9eef692b5>

Merkley, E, (2021), “Anti-intellectualism and the mass public’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic”, Nature Human Behaviour, [Anti-intellectualism and the mass public’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic | Nature Human Behaviour](#)

Merriam-Webster, «Surveillance», (2025), [SURVEILLANCE Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster](#)

Norwich University (n.d.). “History of American Propaganda Posters: American Social Issues through Propaganda”, [History of American Propaganda Posters: American Social Issues through Propaganda | Norwich University - Online](#)

Orwell, G (1949), “1984”, Penguin Books, 2008 Edition

Orwell, G (1946), “Why I Write”, Penguin Books, 2004 Edition

Owen, P, & Holmes, O, (2025), “Trump faces Truth Social backlash over AI video of Gaza with topless Netanyahu and bearded bellydancers”, The Guardian, [Trump faces Truth Social backlash over AI video of Gaza with topless Netanyahu and bearded bellydancers | Donald Trump | The Guardian](#)

Pitman, J, (2017), “Thoughts on the “Cult of Personality” in Communist History”, Guildfords journals, [Thoughts on the “Cult of Personality” in Communist History](#)

Politifact, (2024), “Latest False Fact-checks on Donald Trump”, [Fact-checks | PolitiFact](#)

Sarvan, S, (2022), «Social Communication and Propaganda. How Modern Propaganda Evolves Around the Society», DergiPark, [European Journal of Educational and Social Sciences » Submission » Social Communication and Propaganda. How Modern Propaganda Evolves Around the Society](#)

Sharp, G, (2010), “From Dictatorship To Democracy”, The Albert Einstein Institution, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/126900/8008_FDTD.pdf

Skribekk, S, (2025), «propaganda», SNL, [propaganda – Store norske leksikon](#)

Smith, B, (2025), «Propaganda”, Britannica , [Propaganda | Definition, History, Techniques, Examples, & Facts | Britannica](#)

Strong, C & Killingsworth, M (2011). "Stalin the Charismatic Leader?: Explaining the 'Cult of Personality' as a legitimization technique". Politics, Religion & Ideology. 12 (4): 391–411. [doi:10.1080/21567689.2011.624410](https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2011.624410)

Sæbø, J, (2021), «Institutional theory – concepts”, Universitetet I Oslo, (Pages 1-9)
<https://www.uio.no/studier/emner/matnat/ifi/IN5210/h21/presentations/institutional-theory-concepts---2021.pdf>

Talbot, K, (2025), “PRESS CALL: Experts To Warn Trump’s Immigration Surveillance and Registry Policies Will Turbocharge Mass Raids & Removals”, American Immigration Council, [PRESS CALL: Experts To Warn Trump’s Immigration Surveillance and Registry Policies Will Turbocharge Mass Raids & Removals | American Immigration Council](#)

The Atlantic, (2022), "American history and politics", [Why Do American Elections Always End Up 50–50? - The Atlantic](#)

The Independent, (2025), “What George Orwell would say about Trump – and how to handle him”, [What George Orwell would say about Trump – and how to handle him | The Independent](#)

The Marshall Project, (2024), “Fact-checking Over 12,000 of Donald Trump’s Statements About Immigration”, [Fact-checking Over 12,000 of Donald Trump’s Statements About Immigration | The Marshall Project](#)

The Horizons Project, (2022), «Authoritarianism: How You Know It When You See It», [https://commonslibrary.org/authoritarianism-how-you-know-it-when-you-see-it/#What are the Core Attributes of Authoritarianism](https://commonslibrary.org/authoritarianism-how-you-know-it-when-you-see-it/#What%20are%20the%20Core%20Attributes%20of%20Authoritarianism)

The White House, (2025), Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Proceeds with Tariffs on Imports from Canada and Mexico, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/03/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-proceeds-with-tariffs-on-imports-from-canada-and-mexico/>

«Theory of authoritarian regime», (n.d), Encyclopedia Migrace, [Theory of authoritarian regime : Encyklopédie Migrace](#)

Thorsen, D. (2025). «totalitarisme». SNL, *totalitarisme – Store norske leksikon*

Thorsen, D. (2025). «autoritarianisme». SNL: autoritarianisme – Store norske leksikon

Tufan, Ø, (2025), «Palestinere vil ikke få returnere i Trumps Gaza-plan: – Nesten så man ikke tror det man hører», NRK, [Trump sier palestinerne ikke vil ha rett til retur i hans Gaza-plan – NRK Urix – Utenriksnyheter og -dokumentarer](#)

Vanderbilt University, (2024), “Majority of Republicans nationally identify as MAGA for first time in Unity Poll”, [Majority of Republicans nationally identify as MAGA for first time in Unity Poll | Vanderbilt University](#)

Vaudano, M. (2025), "Trump's newspeak: A semantic war in the federal government", *Le Monde*. [Trump's newspeak: A semantic war in the federal government](#)

Viland, J, (2025), «Jeff Bezos skal nekte meningsmotstandere i storavisen The Washington Post» Aftenposten. [Jeff Bezos nekter meningsmotstandere i storavisen The Washington Post](#)

Volle, A. (2024), "MAGA movement", Britannica, [MAGA movement | Meaning, Beliefs, Origins, Donald Trump & Facts | Britannica](#)

Watson Institute, (2025), «Surveillance», (2025),
<https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/social/rights/surveillance>

Web Companion, (2022), “George Orwell’s Insights on Media, Politics, and Society”
<https://journalism.university/media-and-communication-theories/george-orwell-media-politics-society-insights/>

Wendling, M, (2018) “The (almost) complete history of 'fake news'”, BBC, [The \(almost\) complete history of 'fake news'](#)

Wintrobe , R, (2014), “The Tinpot and the Totalitarian: An Economic Theory of Dictatorship”, Cambridge University Press [The Tinpot and the Totalitarian: An Economic Theory of Dictatorship | American Political Science Review | Cambridge Core](#)

Whitehouse [@whitehouse], "CONGESTION PRICING IS DEAD. Manhattan, and all of New York, is SAVED. LONG LIVE THE KING!" –President Donald J. Trump». [Photograph], Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DGRDGQWxlhX/>

Zuboff, S, (2023), “Social Theory Re-Wired: The Age of Surveillance Capitalism”, (3rd Edition), Taylor and Francis Group, [The Age of Surveillance Capitalism | 27 | v3 | Social Theory Re-Wired](#)

Zurcher, A, (2016), “The birth of the Obama 'birther' conspiracy”, BBC, [The birth of the Obama 'birther' conspiracy - BBC News](#)