

## Stalin's Rise to Power

Basis of comparison	Argument	Limitations
Personality	<p><b>Topic Sentence</b> Stalin's administrative skills, ruthlessness and opportunism enabled him to rise to strategic positions and outmaneuver his opponents, eliminating challenges to his rise to power.</p> <p><b>Historiography:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intentionalist school eg. <b>Robert Tucker</b>: Argued that it was Stalin's abilities that helped him rise to power</li> <li>Was an opportunist who appropriated Lenin's prestige to gain appeal within the CPSU, recognizing that Lenin was the preeminent figure in the Party</li> <li>Associated himself with the cult of Lenin by identifying with the "infallible" doctrine of Leninism, which became the measure of correctness in the CPSU</li> <li>Never claimed ideological originality, but attributed everything he advocated to Lenin</li> <li>Eg. During the ideological debates surrounding the NEP, Stalin accused Trotsky's preference of ending the NEP as being anti-Leninist</li> <li>His public displays of dedication and loyalty to Lenin as chief pallbearer at his funeral made him appear to be Lenin's close disciple and defender of his ideology</li> <li>Allowed his leadership to gain legitimacy and support, which was crucial to his rise to power</li> <li>A master of dissimulation, causing his opponents to underestimate him as a mediocre rival for power and blinded them to Stalin's true ambitions</li> <li>Hence, Kamenev and Zinoviev willingly colluded with him in a troika against Trotsky</li> <li>Withheld the publication of Lenin's Testament, which had warned against giving Stalin too much power and called for his removal as General Secretary</li> <li>Stalin manipulated his opponents' weaknesses and used divide and rule to eliminate them</li> <li>Used war fatigue to discredit Trotsky's ideology of Permanent Revolution</li> </ul>	<p><b>Circumstances/Ideology</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Was not a natural orator like Trotsky and Zinoviev, who were skilled at mobilizing support for their factions</li> <li>Did not play a prominent role in the Russian Revolution</li> <li>In contrast, Trotsky had been Lenin's right-hand man during the Revolution, and was credited for leading the Red Army to victory during the Russia Civil War</li> <li>In ordinary circumstances, it would have been unlikely for him to win support within the masses and party</li> <li>Therefore one must also consider how Stalin was helped by circumstances, advocated by Structuralists like <b>Edward Carr</b></li> <li>Were important in providing him the right opportunities to exercise his abilities to outmaneuver his rivals and gain power</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accused the United Opposition (Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev) of breaking Lenin's Ban on Factions and expelled them; turned against Bukharin's faction in 1929</li> <li>With his personality and intent to rise to power, Stalin was able to take advantage of the various circumstances he was presented with to gain power</li> </ul>	
Use of Force	<p><b>Topic Sentence</b> Stalin used the OGPU to discredit his opponents and thus minimize opposition to his rise, however his use of force was minimal.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The OGPU harassed party members who opposed Stalin's policies</li> <li>Were occasionally arrested or expelled from the party</li> <li>Stalin accorded the OGPU with a great deal of power the authority to seek out hostile elements in the party</li> <li>Eg. The decision to exile Trotsky, Stalin's main rival, in 1928 was made by the OGPU</li> <li>Was important in removing the largest threat to his rise to power</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ideology</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>However, much of these tactics were only employed after 1927 when Stalin had already amassed a significant amount of power within the Central Committee</li> <li>Did not play a critical role in his rise to power</li> <li>In addition, before Stalin could effectively use of the OGPU to eliminate his opposition, he had to first establish a powerbase so as to discredit his rivals</li> <li>This was only achieved through gaining support for his ideology</li> </ul>
Existing regime/ Circumstances	<p><b>Topic Sentence</b> By ensuring Bolshevik dominance over the USSR, Lenin unwittingly reinforced the authoritarian tendencies within the party, which meant that Stalin only needed to control the party in order to gain supreme power.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lenin had made the USSR a strong centralized single-party state, with the Bolshevik party overlapping and dominating it</li> <li>Purged the existing bureaucracy and replaced them with Bolsheviks</li> <li>Banned all political parties, destroyed the autonomy of workers, peasants and soldier's soviets, and controlled the press and education</li> <li>To prevent any challenge to the Bolsheviks, he deployed the Cheka, which used coercion and terror to suppress counter-revolutionaries</li> <li>War Communism extended Bolshevik control over the economic system</li> <li>Ban on factions in 1921 reduced intra-party opposition</li> <li>Stalin could outwit his rivals by targeting them as being anti-Leninist or creating factionalism</li> <li>By ensuring Bolshevik control of the political and economy system, Stalin only needed to focus on eliminating his rivals within the Bolshevik party to become <i>vozhhd</i></li> <li>Most importantly, according to <b>Moshe Lewin</b>, Lenin's ill health and subsequent death was what enabled Stalin to openly contend for power in the first place as he dared not oppose Lenin</li> </ul>	<p><b>Personality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>However, anyone could have taken advantage of these circumstances to get to power during the succession struggle following Lenin's death</li> <li>Stalin's personal appeal and ability was what allowed him to win support</li> <li>Managed to manipulate the situation created by the centralization of power to his advantage</li> <li>Cannot be assumed that any individual who had the position of General Secretary would have become the next leader of Russia</li> <li>It was Stalin's personality and intent to rise to power that made holding these positions very significant</li> </ul> <p><b>Weaknesses of opponents/Ideology/Economic conditions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>However, anyone could have taken advantage of these circumstances to get to power during the succession struggle following Lenin's death</li> <li>We thus need to consider why his opponents did not eventually do so</li> </ul>

	<p><u>Stalin's positions in the CPSU</u></p> <p>Stalin's positions within the CPSU gave him a significant amount of control over the party and were instrumental to his rise to power.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Had been appointed to many leadership positions like the Head of the Workers and Peasants' Inspectorate and Liaison officer between the Politburo and Orgburo</li> <li>• Most crucially the General Secretary in 1922, which gave him the power of patronage over the Bolshevik party</li> <li>• According to <b>Robert Daniels'</b> "circular flow of power" argument, Stalin could appoint local party leaders, who in turn controlled elections to the central Party Congress and ultimately the Politburo</li> <li>• By exploiting the Lenin Enrolment process, Stalin was able to stack the upper levels of the party with his own supporters, leaving his opponents isolated</li> <li>• This was made most obvious when Kamenev and Zinoviev were unable to remove Stalin from his position due to his domination of the Central Committee</li> <li>• This party base enabled him to outmaneuver his rivals at all stages and remove them from power</li> </ul> <p><b>Historiography:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structuralist school eg. <b>Edward Carr:</b> argued that Stalin's rise to power was due to his bureaucratic power</li> <li>• Traced this to Lenin's centralization of the USSR</li> </ul>	
Opposition	<p><b>Topic Sentence</b></p> <p>Stalin made use of the political rivalry within the party and their individual weaknesses to eliminate them, which was crucial to his rise to power.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Under Lenin's rule, the Cheka had arrested potential opponents and sent them to gulags, removing any political threat to the Bolsheviks</li> <li>• Hence, only prominent opponents were left to oppose Stalin's bid for power, however they were disunited and underestimated him</li> </ul> <p><u>Trotsky</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While Trotsky was Lenin's right-hand man during the Russian Revolution and was seen as the likely inheritor of Lenin's legacy, he was unpopular within the Bolsheviks</li> <li>• Was arrogant and aloof, dismissive towards other Bolshevik leaders</li> </ul>	<p><b>Personality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weaknesses of rivals would not be significant without Stalin's personal strengths</li> <li>• Stalin's opportunistic personality enabled him to exploit his opponents' weaknesses to rise to power</li> </ul> <p><b>Historiography:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Robert Conquest:</b> Argued that Stalin was seen as being determined and manipulative whereas his opponents were seen as weak and indecisive</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was previously a Menshevik before joining the Party in 1917, despised by some Party members – saw him as an outsider and questioned his loyalties</li> <li>• Lacked political skills, failing to use the Red Army as a power base</li> <li>• Instead he resigned as War Commissar in 1925, which lost him a vital pillar of support</li> <li>• Committed the cardinal mistake of failing to turn up at Lenin's funeral, which was interpreted as a sign of irresponsibility and great disrespect to Lenin</li> <li>• Served to further diminish his popularity in the party</li> </ul> <p><u>Zinoviev and Kamenev</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Underestimated Stalin, believed his positions were innocuous and failed to appreciate his true ambitions</li> <li>• Instead, they saw Trotsky as a far greater threat as they feared that he sought to create a dictatorship</li> <li>• Ironically, it was he who favored greater intra-party democracy</li> <li>• Feared Trotsky due to his prominent role during the Russian Revolution and Civil War, and his power base in the Red Army</li> <li>• Hence, they willingly colluded with Stalin in a troika to isolate Trotsky, and suppress the publication of Lenin's Testament</li> <li>• Moreover, Stalin's opposition was divided on the issues of the NEP and Permanent Revolution (<i>link</i>)</li> <li>• Using divide and rule, Stalin took advantage of their disunity and eliminated them one by one</li> </ul>	
Ideology/ Economic conditions	<p><b>Topic Sentence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ideological debates that divided the Bolsheviks were cunningly manipulated by Stalin to eliminate his opponents and gain total power by 1929</li> <li>• Stalin took advantage of economic instability in the USSR during the debate surrounding the NEP to eliminate his opponents within the Politburo</li> </ul> <p><b>Historiography:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ideological school eg. <b>Edward Carr</b>: Focused on the importance of the political struggle concerning the NEP and permanent revolution where Stalin steered a middle course during the ideological debates</li> </ul> <p><u>The debate on the NEP</u></p>	<p><b>Personality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It was Stalin's manipulative and opportunistic personality that enabled him to use the ideological debates to neutralize prominent rivals</li> <li>• Unlike his opponents who strictly aligned themselves to an ideological stand, Stalin was adaptable to the changing circumstances for his own gain</li> </ul> <p><b>Circumstances</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• However, Stalin's policy was seen as a departure from traditional Marxist theory, which may have diminished his support from radical party members</li> <li>• This did not happen due to the unique circumstances post-1924</li> <li>• Many of the ideologically-committed working class had died during the Russian Civil War, leaving behind Red Army members who became</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The NEP served to restore economic stability to the USSR after Lenin's disastrous imposition of War Communism, which had led to massive famine</li> <li>• The issue centered over the pace of industrialization, which was vital to establish communism in the backwards and agrarian country</li> <li>• The left and right wing wings were diametrically opposed to each other on this issue</li> <li>• Trotsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev sought to end the NEP and begin rapid industrialization, thus forming the leftist United Opposition</li> <li>• In contrast, the rightist Bukharin faction favored continuing the NEP, mollifying peasants to generate more capital</li> <li>• Caught in this conflict, Stalin was able to adapt to the changing economic circumstances in the USSR to defeat his rivals</li> <li>• The early 1920s saw significant increases in agricultural output and hence favored the NEP and the rightists</li> <li>• Stalin allied with Bukharin, accusing the United Opposition of factionalism and expelling them from the party in 1927</li> <li>• However when the tide shifted to the leftists due to the procurement crisis of 1927, Stalin betrayed the Bukharin faction and removed him from the Politburo in 1929</li> <li>• Hence, by appearing to present solutions to the changing economic situation, Stalin eliminated his opponents and left the Politburo dominated by members loyal to him, securing his rise to power</li> </ul> <p><u>Nature of revolution</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ideological debates were centered on the issue of Permanent Revolution, where Marxist ideology called for the extension of communism to Europe, convinced that it was vital for the survival of the backwards and agrarian USSR</li> <li>• This position adopted by Lenin was strongly supported by Trotsky</li> <li>• In contrast, Stalin espoused "socialism in one country"</li> <li>• Stressed the USSR's ability to construct socialism on its own without external aid</li> <li>• Played on war-weariness and nationalistic fervor where Trotsky was accused of lacking faith in the Russian people's ability to construct socialism</li> <li>• The failure of revolution abroad such as the 1919 Spartacist Uprising in Germany and the fall of Bela Kun's regime in Hungary further served to legitimize his ideology</li> <li>• Hence, Stalin's ideological appeal won him support both nationally and</li> </ul>	<p>increasingly authoritarian</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Led to an influx of ideologically ignorant and poorly educated members who had little knowledge of communism</li> <li>• Stalin was able to capture the support and loyalty of these new members who were less ideologically entrenched through perks and privileges</li> </ul> <p><b>NB:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic instability was more important than ideology as it provided the opportunity for Stalin to eliminate his rivals</li> <li>• Even in 1924 when Stalin started promoting "socialism in one country", Trotsky still held great power in the party as War Commissar</li> </ul>
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	<p>within the party, which was crucial in his rise to power</p> <p><u>Manipulation of ideology</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stalin appropriated Lenin's legacy in his ideology (<a href="#">link</a>)</li> <li>• <b>Robert Tucker:</b> Stalin's aim was to make himself into a revolutionary hero as important and famous as Lenin</li> <li>• Delivered the Foundations of Leninism lectures after Lenin's death, simplifying and making Leninism accessible to the masses</li> <li>• Stalin's incorporation of Lenin's legacy into his own ideology made him appear to be Lenin's heir in the leadership of the party</li> </ul>	
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#### Most critical factor:

1. Personality
2. Circumstances

**Time frame:** 1924 (death of Lenin) – 1929 (became vozhd of the USSR after the elimination of Bukharin's faction)

#### Terms:

1. "Personal appeal" – Qualities that allowed Stalin to attract support and be a popular choice for a leader
2. "Personal ability" – Skills or actions that Stalin possessed that he used to gain more power, eg. opportunism and ruthlessness
3. "Ideology" – Set of ideas and beliefs based on which a country is governed in, which Stalin used to gain support
4. "Conditions of the state" – Structure of the existing regime that facilitated Stalin's rise
5. "Economic crisis" – State of turmoil and suffering brought about by economic collapse
6. "Force" – Use of violence through military and paramilitary organizations to combat and suppress opponents
7. "Rise to power" – Stalin's rise to power would refer to his efforts and the circumstances that led to him outmaneuvering his opposition to emerge as vozhd in 1929

#### Personality intro

Much of the great man historical theory as suggested by Thomas Carlyle would have suggested that the rise of dictators like Stalin was more due to their personal appeal and ability.

#### Circumstances intro

The rise to power of many leaders of single-party states in the 20<sup>th</sup> century would have been impossible without the unique circumstances and conditions within their respective nations. Stalin was no exception.