

Tito's Yugoslavia

To what extent did propaganda contribute to Josip Broz Tito's popularity in Yugoslavia during his presidency from 1953 - 1980?

History Internal Assessment

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Section A: Identification and evaluation of sources

This investigation seeks to answer the question: “To what extent did propaganda contribute to Josip Broz Tito’s popularity in Yugoslavia during his presidency from 1953 - 1980?” Different factors, like propaganda, that influenced Tito’s popularity will be analyzed. In order to consider opposing views on Tito’s popularity while maintaining a manageable scope, I will use a variety of selected sources, two of which will be evaluated for their values and limitations.

The primary source Fitzroy Maclean’s *The Heretic* written in 1957, is a bibliography of Tito recounting his life as an agent of Comintern and a leader of post-war Yugoslavia. This bibliography is relevant because it provides a descriptive background to Tito’s experiences before becoming president which may influenced his actions during his presidency. The source’s origin is valuable because Maclean has personal conversations with Tito, making this source a reliable reflection of Tito’s thoughts behind his actions and motives. However, this bibliography of Tito is also limited by Maclean’s background as a Scottish politician; his political ideology differed from Tito’s communist Partisans and Maclean may portray Tito in a biased, negative light. Moreover, the book was published in the beginning of Tito’s presidency and fails to encompass public reactions to his policies throughout his presidency, a limit of the content. The source’s content is valuable because the detailed, narrative style reflects a close relationship with Tito; Maclean lived with Tito while commanding the Maclean Mission in Yugoslavia. Furthermore, Maclean wrote *The Heretic* in his admiration for Tito and to recount the strong Yugoslavia leader’s life. This purpose is valuable because Maclean can reconstruct the feelings Yugoslavians had for their leader. Maclean may be able to pinpoint aspects of his leadership that

contributed to his popularity, which is the aim of this investigation. However, the purpose is limited by Maclean's focus on relating Tito's rise to power as opposed to his use of propaganda.

The secondary source *Titoism, Self-Determination, Nationalism, Cultural Memory: Volume Two* compiled by Gorana Ognjenović in 2016, provides historians' discussions regarding Yugoslavia under Tito's and the reforms Tito enacted. This is relevant because it provides multiple perspectives about Yugoslavia's environment and Tito's success as president. The origin of this source is valuable because Ognjenović is a notable researcher at the University of Oslo; this source also compiles many former researches from Yugoslavia to create an accurate picture of Tito. Additionally, this source was published in 2016 which allows Ognjenović to benefit from hindsight and consider other sources regarding Tito's character. However, this source is limited for this investigation of popularity because most of the contributing historians did not have first-hand experience of Tito's actions and rely on other sources to reflect civilians' experiences during Tito's presidency. The purpose of this source is to develop a nuanced but accurate image of Tito and Yugoslavia by providing a myriad of expert opinions. This purpose is therefore valuable because it aims to provide a factual analysis of Yugoslavia under Tito and offers different evaluations of his actions that influenced his popularity, the focus of this investigation. The content is valuable as the historians' discussions can be corroborated with others' also included within the source. However, the content's limitation lies in the lack of depth regarding Tito's use of propaganda during his leadership.

Section B: Investigation

Although Josip Broz Tito's methods of achieving power as the President of Yugoslavia are sometimes controversial (Ognjenović x), his effectiveness in consolidating and maintaining power is indisputable. On January 14, 1953, Josip Broz Tito assumed power as the president of Yugoslavia and since then, many see him as a benevolent dictator. During his presidency, Tito reformed multiple sectors of society, expanded freedoms of the Yugoslav people, and pursued an opposing position against the Soviet Union led by Stalin. These factors boosted his popularity among the people; however, methods of propaganda were used to facilitate the citizens support, such as Partisan films and educational systems. Thus, this lends to the following research question: to what extent did propaganda contribute to Josip Broz Tito's popularity in Yugoslavia? In this analysis, popularity is defined as the general population's approval and support for a given person; propaganda is defined as actions taken to influence others' beliefs and gain support.

The investigation's significance lies in a greater understanding of "benevolent dictators"; leaders were popular and largely supported by the public despite their use of repressive and questionable tactics to maintain power. According to historian Sabrina Ramet, Tito used Goli Otok Island as a death camp for "rounding up pro-Stalin Communists after June 1948" (Ognjenović x). His popularity despite his actions can be attributed to the secretive nature of the murders; many civilians were unaware of the blood spilled and in a post-war Yugoslavia; peace was priority (Banac 23). A deeper understanding about the factors that played large roles in a dictator's successful leadership allows for a more comprehensive evaluation of how authoritarian states maintained their stability beyond brute force. Although Tito used propaganda in promoting his policies and enforcing his platform, the ideas behind his policies and the improvements he

made to Yugoslavia are the ultimate reasons as to why he is regarded as a benevolent dictator. Regardless, propaganda contributed to his ascendance and consolidation of power to a limited extent.

One of Tito's main contributions to Yugoslavia that garnered popular support was his societal reforms, especially his expansion of a free education from elementary school to university (Ognjenović 29), an education comparable to those in Western countries. Almost 6 million 45-year-olds received a high school education, and "illiteracy in 10-year-olds dropped from 39% in 1939 to only 5% by 1991" (Ognjenović 30). However, propaganda was undeniably used in education by teaching students about European multiculturalism, namely *Brotherhood and Unity*, in order to promote unity beyond cultural boundaries (Ognjenović 225). Historian Nena Močnik points out how *Brotherhood and Unity* was imposed forcefully by the government although many scholars see this ideology as creating a false feeling of peace that promotes government policies (Ognjenović 226). Furthermore, historian Ivo Banac contends that "Brotherhood and Unity" was a deceptive slogan; it did not, for example, embrace Serb Communists (Banac 182). Evidently, propaganda was used through education to bolster public support for the Tito's political platform of unifying Yugoslavia but his ideologies were not fully realized in form. The overall result was beneficial with the increase in literacy; thus, Tito's popularity can be attributed to the positive results despite Tito's initial intentions.

Aside from Tito's reforms in education, he also created a relatively tolerant Yugoslavia during his presidency. A passport-free traveling system allowed Yugoslav people to move freely between countries in Europe (West 286). Dzamal Gadara, a Bosnian imam, recounts the ease of travel during Tito's presidency but regretfully describes how "such freedom ... will never be again" (Synovitz). According to historian Tvrtko Jakovin, Tito's leadership was the only time

where “[Yugoslavians] played some sort of pivotal role in world events” (Synovitz). Evidently, Tito’s presidency was seen as a golden era where people enjoyed a sense of freedom and importance that empowered citizens to support their leader. However, Tito’s developed this environment largely to gain public favor and is hence propaganda. The traveling system’s dual nature functions to earn public support while still providing tangible benefits for citizens.

Moreover, Tito adopted a firm stance against the Axis powers during his presidency to “preserve Yugoslavia’s national independence” which largely increased his popularity, although not necessarily due to this propagandistic claim (Maclean 356). Tito’s break from Stalin earned him both popular support for liberating Yugoslavia from another country’s domination and political freedom to strengthen his policies (Maclean 359). Banished from Cominform after this split, Tito founded the Non-Alignment Movement in order to battle “imperialism, colonialism ... and all other shapes and forms of aggression, occupation...” (Ognjenović 20). According to historian Gorana Ognjenović, the Non-Alignment Movement gave Yugoslavia an international recognition of not siding with the East, which earned support from the public tired of Stalin’s overarching control. Thus, Tito’s break with Stalin contributes to his popularity, not due to propaganda, but because of the existing negative public opinion on Stalin; his actions brought a desirable change to the status quo.

Yugoslavia later developed friendly relations with Britain and America leading to an influx of foreign aid, namely arms and equipment, that were used to develop Yugoslavia’s military; soon Yugoslavia had thirty trained divisions with first-class equipment (Maclean 360). The assurance of British support coupled with an improving military contributed to Tito’s popularity as citizens enjoyed this sense of security. Visa requirements were eliminated and employment opportunities were expanded (Ognjenović 20). Thus, under Tito’s leadership the

overall quality and opportunities of life peaked when compared to the period both before and after his presidency, explaining his wide popularity among Yugoslavians. The benefits stemmed from his break from Stalin and Tito's popularity is rooted in the benefits reaped by the people, not the motives of his actions.

In addition to Tito's reforms and policies, other factors must also be examined to evaluate his popularity. Big partisan epics and various films presented a globally important Yugoslavia and a glorified Tito; however, these films arose from the split with the Soviet Union to adapt to the identity crisis, according to film critic Jurica Pavičić (Ognjenović 45). Most serve to legitimize Tito's ideologies and propagandize his actions to increase popular support, but these cinema communities were not specifically appointed by the government to produce pro-Tito films (Ognjenović 45). In fact, many turned to focus on individual dilemmas, destinies and psychology (Ognjenović 46). Although the film industry did serve as propaganda for Tito's presidency, it was not the main tool used by Tito to increase his popularity as the movie industry still retained the freedom of choosing their subject matter.

Beyond, Tito's policies during his presidency, his lasting legacy reflect his continuous popularity without the use of propaganda. When examining Tito's legacy, his funeral is most admirable in the number of statesmen that attended. His death brought together an unmatched concentration of dignitaries, numbering 22 prime ministers, 31 presidents and 47 ministers of foreign affairs (Ridley 19). As the President of Sinn Fein stated, Tito had an "enlightened and progressive internationalist policy of non-alignment and defiance of both major power blocs" ("Death of President Tito"). The amount of people Tito's funeral brought together highlights global leaders high regard for Tito, not due to propaganda, but due to his personality, policies, and beliefs. Furthermore, historian Geoffrey Swain reflects that Tito settled for something that

worked: a bureaucracy that attempted to improve the lives of all the people in Yugoslavia (Swain 190). Evidently, Tito was widely well liked due to the advancements he reaped for Yugoslavia.

In evaluating Tito's popularity in Yugoslavia, research highlights how propaganda was present during his presidency although it should not be considered the main factor that garnered his support from the Yugoslavian people. Greater weight can be placed on Tito's actual reforms to sectors of society along with his firm stance against the Soviet Union which earned more freedom for the people of Yugoslavia. As Tito once said, "Our aim is to create a happy life for our people in our country" (Swain 191). Although historians dispute whether this was ever realized, Tito's policies created a golden era in Yugoslavia unmatched by both the present and the past.

Section C: Reflection

Through this exploration, I was introduced to some of the methods, limitations and challenges of historical research. Historians analyze sources from different backgrounds to develop an objective conclusion and I discovered the difficulty in balancing alternative viewpoints on Tito. For instance, historian Gorana Ognjenović explored the consequences of Tito's socialist ideals for various aspects of society whereas film critic Jurica Pavičić discussed the use of Partisan films during Tito's presidency. Although Pavičić's focus was narrow, his discussion was still useful in my evaluation because media is a prime example of propaganda. However, I had to counterbalance his perspective with other historians' because as a film critic, Pavičić offers a limited perspective on Tito's presidency that excluded possible influences on Tito's popularity besides media propaganda.

Moreover, I noticed the challenge historians face in balancing primary and secondary sources. Primary sources capture personal feelings but are limited by the individuals' backgrounds and cannot be generalized. For example, historian Fitzroy Maclean had personal conversations with Tito but his perspective may be compromised because he was a Scottish politician; his democratic ideologies may have clashed with those of communist Tito. The biases introduced by primary sources made fact selection challenging since bias can distort the portrayal of history. One method I applied to selecting facts was choosing overlapping evidence among sources. However, this approach can still be limiting because earlier historians do not have access to a wide range of primary sources, hence overlapping sources may be hard to locate. Absolute truth is often difficult to find in history; thus, historians must consider the origins, purpose and content of sources to judge the source's reliability and develop a sound conclusion.

One challenge I faced during my investigation was defining propaganda and differentiating between “propagandistic” actions. For example, Tito’s expansion of education earned him popularity but the motive of this reform is difficult to evaluate; his domestic policy could have been aimed to gain support (propaganda) or to actually improve societal wellbeing (not propaganda). This process of defining terms underlines the difficulty of research for historians; I gained a new understanding about assigning limits to an exploration and parsing information into different categories for analysis.

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