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Dark Personalities in Power: An investigation into institutions which facilitate dark triad individuals attaining power

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Dark Personalities in Power

An investigation into institutions which facilitate dark triad individuals attaining power

“...It is a well-known fact, that those people who most want to rule people are, ipso facto, those least suited to do it... anyone who is capable of getting themselves made President should on no account be allowed to do the job” – Douglas Adams



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List of Abbreviations

ASPD - Anti-Social Personality Disorder

DSM-5 - Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Volume 5

NKVD – People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs - Secret Police

SDLP - Russian Social Democratic Labour Party

USSR - Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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Chapter I - Introduction

Plato's perfect politician "spends his time in philosophy", but when his turn comes "he drudges in politics and rules for the city's sake, not as though he were doing a thing that is fine, but one that is necessary" (1968, p. 540b). In order to achieve this utopian system, society must be totally reorganised, beginning with the complete re-education of all children under the age of 10. For better or worse, we don't live in this world. Instead, we seem to live in political systems where, as Douglas Adams puts it "anyone who is capable of getting themselves made President should on no account be allowed to do the job" (1989, p. 184). Establishing how political institutions might facilitate those with malignant personality disorders gaining and holding onto power is a vital step towards understanding the workings of political systems past and present.

Despite the importance of this issue, research into personality disorders in politics has remained neglected. This stands in stark contrast to business literature, where the issue of the dark triad personality traits; psychopathy, narcissism and Machiavellianism in leadership has been written about in some detail. This paper aims to be a vital step in a research agenda investigating dark triad personality traits in political leaders, asking the essential questions where and under what circumstances they are likely to rise to power. The research question to be investigated will be: "To what degree do domestic political institutions facilitate the rise to and consolidation of power by dark triad personality trait individuals?".

This paper will argue that individuals with so called dark triad personality traits have an increased desire to gain power as well as behavioural matrixes which often advantage them in struggles for leadership. It will support this theory through an analysis of the rise to power of Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union. It will argue that Stalin fits the portrait of a dark triad trait individual. It will further argue that the domestic political institutions in the Soviet Union were well suited for the rise of a dark triad trait individual and that Stalin's personality traits helped him exploit these institutions to rise to power, giving him a decisive edge over his competition. It will further conclude that the findings from this case are likely applicable to many other cases, although further research is needed.

Chapter II - Literature Review

This literature review intends to provide the necessary background for an investigation into how political institutions affect the rise of power of individuals with dark triad personality traits. Firstly, it will explain why the analysis of personality and psychopathology (personality disorders) in politics is crucial and when it is especially useful. It will also explain why research into psychopathology in politics has barely progressed and why this is a lost opportunity. It will secondly introduce the dark triad of personality traits and suggest that dark triad behavioural traits dispose an actor well to *Realpolitik*. Thirdly, it will show that dark triad individuals often have an increased desire to seek power and that they have two main traits which enable them to gain power more easily than others. Fourthly, it will assert that an important goal in a research agenda into psychopathology in politics will be determining what situations facilitate the rise to power of dark triad individuals. It will show that systems with large rewards for leadership, loose political structures and poorly defined rules and regulations will be prone to takeover by dark triad individuals.

Why Personality Matters

Firstly, it will be necessary to show that an investigation into the personality and psychopathology of political leaders is not only useful but necessary. Some theoretical disciplines, such as neorealism, argue that “analysis of the character and personality of political actors” should be “left aside” when analysing domestic political institutions (Waltz, 1979, p. 82). This is foolhardy¹. It is undeniable that most “political institutions and processes operate through human agency”, meaning “it would be remarkable if they were not influenced by the properties that distinguish one individual from another” (Greenstein, 1992, p. 124). The belief in the importance of personality and psychology is reflected in the work of many historians. For example, Gaddis argues that “as long as Stalin was running the Soviet Union a cold war was unavoidable” (1997, p. 292). The importance of personality and psychology in politics, both domestic and international simply cannot be understated. Personality matters for two main reasons. Firstly, personality interacts with preference

¹ Although Waltz acknowledges that personality may not be unimportant, he nonetheless chooses to leave it aside, also leaving aside crucial explanatory power.

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formation and identity creation (Hafner-Burton et al., 2017). This means that people with different personalities are likely to form different preferences (Johnston & Wronski, 2015). Secondly, people with different personalities have different decision making processes (Riaz et al., 2012). In part this stems from their different preferences, however it can also stem from, for example, what they believe is right or acceptable to do in certain situations. This is worth specifying in our case because it implies that people with different personality types will have different preferences and desires when it comes exercising power. They will also use different means to get it.

Personality tends to make more of a difference to political decision making when two conditions are fulfilled; actor dispensability and action dispensability (Birt, 1993). Actor dispensability asks the question as to whether another actor would have made the same decision, especially the question whether an actor's personality make a key difference in the decision made. Action dispensability asks whether the decision made was crucial in altering significant events or whether external factors were at play. If both of these criteria are fulfilled, as they are in many political processes, then a political process is ripe for personality analysis.

Many researchers have already extensively examined how personality impacts political decision making (Gallagher & Allen, 2014). However, serious studies into the personality disorders of political leaders were effectively banned by the American Psychiatric Association after thousands of psychiatrists wrote (often anonymously) against the mental fitness of Republican presidential nominee, Barry Goldwater, mainly because they politically opposed his conservative agenda (Levin, 2018). The Goldwater Rule, as it became known, of 1973 meant that psychiatrists could no longer offer their professional opinion on a politician without conducting an official examination, something that politicians are often loath to do. The election of Donald Trump in 2016 led some psychiatrists to call for the abolition of this rule, however the rule stands to this day (Lee & Singer, 2018). Given that "normality and pathology reside on a continuum" with personality disorders at the extreme end of the continuum, this means that investigation into the most extreme personalities, and therefore those most likely to be relevant for analysis, has barely progressed for the last 50 years (Millon et al., 2012, p. 12).

Introducing the Dark Triad

For classical realists the “moving force” of world politics is “the aspiration for power” (Morgenthau, 1948, pp. 8–9). Classical realists also have pessimistic views of human nature, including the pervasive self-interest which political leaders and the populace alike are seen to have. Meanwhile, Waltz sets out several examples in microeconomic rational choice theory which underpin a fundamental neorealist text *Theory of International Politics* (1979). While these two views of human nature are not congruent with one another, they do have similarities with personality traits and disorders. For example, aspirations for power were one of the key motivations for psychopaths in a study done by Glenn et al. (2017). Likewise, Yamagishi et al. find that “individuals who best fit the mold of the *Homo economicus* [a rational agent] in psychology are psychopaths” (2014, p. 2). This lies in stark contrast to people without personality disorders who, for all their flaws, are on average far less likely to commit crime and, unlike psychopaths, exhibit altruistic behaviour (Babiak & Hare, 2006; Yamagishi et al., 2014). This suggests that the perfect actor for carrying out realist *Realpolitik* is an actor with personality disorder(s).

The concept of a dark triad of personality types encapsulates the sort of leader who would embody the realist mold. It was put forward by Paulhus and Williams (2002), who noted that Machiavellianism, subclinical (meaning with symptoms not severe enough to be defined as a personality disorder) psychopathy and subclinical narcissism are moderately inter-correlated. This finding was later backed up by other research and holds true in forensic (in the judiciary system) as well as non-forensic populations (Hart & Hare, 1998; Muris et al., 2017). This is significant because it suggests that these negative traits overlap to a significant extent and can be viewed as an independent constellation worthy of investigation. As Million et al. note, personality disorders are not “distinct entities”, they interact with each other in exceedingly complex ways (2012, p. 9). In the case of this paper it is especially interesting because, as Paulhus and Williams state, individuals with dark triad traits are “socially malevolent character(s) with behaviour tendencies toward self-promotion, emotional coldness, duplicity, and aggressiveness.” (2002, p. 557). This perfectly matches our description of both a classical and neorealist agent above.

Dark Triad Individuals and Power

There are a number of reasons why dark triad individuals have both the will and means to rise to power in certain situations.

Firstly, dark triad individuals have a personality makeup which often leads them to desire power, as explained above. Psychopaths are primarily self-interested and therefore often desire power and status, as well as the material gain that these bring (Babiak & Hare, 2006; Lyons, 2019). The same rings true for narcissists (Joubert, 1998). Furthermore, Peterson and Palmer directly find that dark triad individuals have more higher political ambition than other personalities (2019). Overall, it can be seen that dark triad individuals often form interests which are fulfilled by gaining power.

Secondly, dark triad individuals often have the means necessary to gain power through the behavioural patterns that their personality engenders. Boddy finds that corporate psychopaths are “prepared to lie, bully and cheat and to disregard or cause harm to the welfare of others” in the cause of their own advancement (2011c, p. 256). Babiak and Hare argue that especially their Machiavellian skills of manipulation and character assassination help dark triad individuals gain positions of power (2006). In a comprehensive overview, Boddy argues essentially the same thing, reeling off a list of Machiavellian skills that psychopathic and dark triad individuals will not be afraid to deploy due to their lack of conscience (2011b, p. 14).

However, it is not just these Machiavellian traits that lead to dark triad individuals rising to power. Hare notes that psychopaths often have self-confidence and easy charm (1996). Furthermore, narcissists are skilled at radiating “an image of a prototypically effective leader” and gaining leadership positions off the back of this despite often achieving little (Nevicka et al., 2011, p. 1). A variety of studies by Brunell et al. found a link between subject narcissism and leader emergence in unacquainted groups, possibly due to the fact that in order to serve their self-interest narcissists are “typically very socially skilled” (2008, p. 1664).

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These two factors result in dark triad individuals being massively overrepresented in leadership positions. Psychopaths only compose around 1% of the general population (Sanz-García et al., 2021), but they compose a far higher percentage of CEOs and business leaders, studies suggest between 16% (Boddy, 2011a) to 21% (Jasper, 2016). However, individuals with dark triad traits that encompass subclinical psychopathy could make up an even larger percentage (Kets de Vries, 2012). In the smaller body of work in politics, the same holds true, dark triad traits are over-represented in political participation like voting, contacting politicians and donating money (Fazekas & Hatemi, 2021). Ahuja and Van Vugt (2010) claim individuals with dark triad personality traits are overrepresented in political leadership because of evolutionary reasons, including the fact we no longer live in egalitarian hunter gather societies today, as humans have for much of their existence.

Furthermore, most literature suggests that psychopaths and to a lesser extent narcissists are leaders who prioritize their promotion and material gain over all else (Babiak & Hare, 2006; Boddy, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; Kets de Vries, 2012). Boddy even goes as far as to attribute the blame for the 2008 financial crisis to corporate psychopaths (2011c). Babiak and Hare concur and find that widescale manipulation for personal gain is a defining feature of their tenures (2006).

Therefore, the literature suggests that dark triad individuals have the motivation to seek power and material gain, often have the ability to carry this out through manipulation and charm and are generally self-interested leaders once in power.

Different Institutions, Different Leaders?

One of the major research puzzles that must underpin any research project into dark triad individuals in politics is how and where dark triad individuals are able to rise into power in politics. Because the above literature suggests that, in many businesses at least, dark triad individuals are able to rise to power with ease. This question is crucial to answer as it may simply be that dark triad individuals are overrepresented in all types of political entity.

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However, if there are certain circumstances in which they are more easily able to rise into power, it would (given their leadership style) be highly significant to find out what these circumstances were. Most research in this field thus far has been in the field of business and management rather than politics. Kets de Vries argues that because most companies are by their very nature psychopathic because they focus often on profit maximization above all else, this creates a “Darwinian” workplace environment where those who are prepared to lie, cheat and stab others in the back will get ahead (2012, p. 22). Examining dark triad individuals in organisational contexts Mathieu finds that because dark triad individuals are “not loyal to anyone or anything other than themselves” they often aspire to join organisations purely to “gain more personal power, money and to further one’s career” (2021, p. 195). Mathieu also concurs that it is in part the obsession with profits and growth that spurs the rise of many dark triad individuals. Much of politics could be seen to represent a similar sort of Darwinian environment. However, it seems clear that different systems would provide different levels of both motivation to rise to the top and opportunities to exercise Machiavellianism unconstrained by conscience.

Firstly, given the motivating factors behind dark triad individuals, it seems likely that systems that award less power, social prestige and chances for material gain to the individual in charge would be less attractive to dark triad types. For example, it seems unlikely that a dark triad individual would aspire to become the leader of a small charity. Instead, the careers to which dark triad individuals gravitate are those “which provide money, power, and status” rather than “communal domains centred on caring and taking care of others” (Mathieu, 2021, p. 29). This implies that these individuals would be more drawn to political roles that hold high amounts of power or status.

Secondly, it seems likely that systems in which dark triad individuals are able to exercise the various skills in the Machiavellian toolset without being censured for this would be more likely to fall prey to a dark triad leader. Here, the literature supports the above hypothesis with Mathieu finding that dark triad individuals “prefer to operate in environments where rules and regulations are not clearly defined” (2021, p. 27). Likewise, Okanes and Stinson find that in “loosely structured situations” Machiavellians are likely to find more “latitude

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for improvisation” where they are able to find opportunities for “manipulation” and are able to “initiate structure” (1974, p. 259). Transferring this to a political context, this means not only systems in which they will face less backlash for lying, cheating and all of the minor tools of Machiavellianism but also contexts where dark triad individuals are able to use every tool in the Machiavellian toolset including murder, blackmail and far more serious tools to rise to power. This goes as well for exercising these measures unnoticed as well as being able to get away with it if noticed. For example, a very anti-corrupt country with a watertight legal system, free press and strong social stigma against lying, cheating, blackmail and the various other dark triad behaviours seems like it would be less likely to fall prey to a dark triad leader. On the other hand, a post conflict country with a weak central government, no free press and a long-established practice of might makes right would seem more likely to fall prey to a dark triad leader.

Therefore, in the context of this paper, domestic political institutions can be understood to mean the features of political systems that mediate the motivations, methods and practices that can effectively be used to rise to power. The factors above in domestic political institutions are hypothesised to facilitate the rise to, and consolidation of power by dark triad individuals. Therefore, these factors will be those focused upon in this paper. In summary, the hypothesis of this paper is that domestic political institutions with latitude for improvisation in manipulation, poorly defined rules and regulations and loose political structure will provide fertile ground for the ascent to power of an individual with dark triad personality traits. An additional motivating factor will be the benefits conferred by leadership.

Chapter III - Methodology

In order to answer the research question “To what degree do domestic political institutions facilitate the rise to and consolidation of power by dark triad personality trait individuals?”, this paper will analyse the case of Joseph Stalin’s rise to power in the Soviet Union. The analysis will broadly consist of three different parts.

Firstly, the personality of Stalin be assessed and determined to fit the profile of dark triad individual. This will be done primarily through a thorough investigation of his personal history and by taking into account the opinions of various historians on his personality. This has some precedent in political science. For example, Nai and Martinez i Coma build a dataset by using expert opinions on the personalities of world leaders when examining populists worldwide (2019). This is also a method in history, Gaddis uses Stalin’s personality as a powerful explanatory mechanism in explaining the beginning of the cold war (1997). There have also been attempts by psychiatrists to evaluate political leaders. The methodology of these attempts includes analyses of their early life and how their behaviour evolves as well as correlation of their behaviour in office with typical behaviour of personality disorders (Zimbardo & Sword, 2017). These methods, which fall short of official examination, will be used throughout the course of this thesis in the examination of Stalin’s personality. As such, Stalin’s personality will be assessed through both the methods above and this evidence will be corroborated with expert opinions.

The second section of the analysis will be a historical process tracing analysis which will uncover the process through which Stalin was able to attain leadership of the Soviet Union. The construction of a “theoretically oriented narrative” through process tracing is valuable because it “generates numerous observations within a case” that can be tested for congruence with theory (George & Bennett, 2005, pp. 255–257). This makes process tracing “an indispensable tool for theory testing and theory development” (2005, p. 257). The process tracing component will track how Stalin was able to reach a position of importance in the Bolshevik party during the Tsarist era and then how he was able to gradually gain and consolidate power during the post-revolutionary era. It will be seen that Stalin’s decisions and personal agency were a large, if not the decisive factor that resulted in his rise to power.

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The third section of analysis will entail an analysis of the domestic political institutions prevalent and an analysis of how Stalin's dark triad traits interacted with them as he rose to and consolidated power. As per the hypothesis, the domestic political institutions will be analysed with respect to the latitude for Machiavellian improvisation given to actors as well as how far well-defined rules and regulations and a well-defined power structure exist. This portrait will be built through historiographical analysis of material both primary and secondary. An analysis of Stalin's actions during his rise to power will then be carried out to establish to what degree his dark triad trait behaviour interacted positively with the domestic political institutions in his rise to power. This analysis will take part in two different contexts, as the domestic political institutions in Tsarist Russia were different from the domestic political institutions in the early Soviet Union.

There are a few reasons why a within case analysis has been chosen for the research methodology. The first is the startling difficulty to find a negative contrasting case for a cross case analysis. This is mainly because of the relatively scarce nature of research into the psychopathology of political leaders, meaning that few leaders have been written about enough in this context to make an analysis of this kind possible. The second is the considerable advantages that a within case analysis grants. Having numerous observations within the same case allows for more robust conclusions about an actor's psychopathology and how this interacts with political institutions. Furthermore, it will still be possible to contrast the case with the counterfactual case of different political institutions prevailing within the USSR.

Therefore, the case of Stalin has been selected for two main reasons. The first is that, as one of the most powerful statesmen in the 20th century, a wealth of material exists on his life and actions, some of which consists good source material for a personality analysis. The second is that the early Soviet Union seemed to fit the conditions in domestic political institutions outlined in the hypothesis during preliminary research.

As for the motivational aspect of power-seeking behaviour, the position of leadership of the Soviet Union confers immense power and prestige upon the individual holding it, making it a likely target for dark triad aspirations. This aspect does not need to be investigated further.

A Note on Sources

The empirical section of the analysis will be based on both primary and secondary sources. The material in this section will be divided between psychological theory and historical information about Stalin's behaviour and his rise to power. The psychological theory is often based on experimentation and therefore primary. However, the historical information on Stalin's behaviour and his rise to power will often be taken from secondary sources. This is for two main reasons. Firstly, during his lifetime Stalin made a significant effort to rewrite his own personal history. This was both to erase the more violent and duplicitous actions he took and also to meet his own personal self-image. The official Soviet histories of his life, edited by him, are almost complete fabrications (Montefiore, 2008). This opaqueness even persists today, Antony Beevor, a historian, has noted that "today's Russia is at times just like the Soviet Union in its attempts to preserve past legends" (Beevor, 2018). Secondly, easily accessible accounts of Stalin from people who knew him well are rare, as most of his notable contemporaries did not survive long enough to write memoirs (mostly perishing in the great purge). These factors mean that accessing enough valuable primary sources, would require an unduly large expense in money and time. For example, accessing the Russian state archives requires purchasing the services of an official archivist. It is also worth mentioning that the majority of the secondary sources used were written by western historians including a few who have historical and cultural reasons to dislike Stalin and the Soviet Union. In order to make up for this bias, much of the material in this paper was verified with multiple sources. Secondary sources were also used as a conduit to find primary material like Stalin's quotes and Politburo minutes and any explicit opinions of authors are of course attributed.

Case Study: A Dark Triad Rise to Power – Stalin in the Soviet Union

As laid out before, this will first entail an assessment of Stalin's personality, then a portrait of the domestic political situation in the Soviet Union and then an analysis of how the two factors interact.

Chapter IV - Stalin's Personality

In assessing Stalin's personality, we are primarily interested in whether his personality profile fits the traits outlined in the specification of a dark triad grouping. As outlined in the literature review above, Paulhus and Williams found that Machiavellianism, subclinical narcissism and subclinical psychopathy were moderately inter-correlated (2002). This means that in order for Stalin to be considered a dark triad individual, his behaviour would have to correlate to psychopathy, narcissism and Machiavellianism. In this section the outlined behavioural traits of dark triad personalities will be summed up and compared with corroborating evidence from Stalin's life to establish a portrait of Stalin's personality. Some of these traits and concepts are still under debate, but in most cases differences in conceptualisation will make little difference to this argument as many of these traits are intercorrelated. Expert opinions will also be brought in from Stalin's biographers, historians, and political scientists as to the nature of his personality and how far this meshes with the earlier portrait.

Psychopathy

At current, the latest version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Volume 5 (DSM-5) published by the American Psychiatric Association does not include psychopathy as a personality disorder, instead including antisocial personality disorder (ASPD) (Crego & Widiger, 2015). There is a debate in the field of psychology as to what degree psychopathy and ASPD are linked. Hare argues that most psychopaths "meet the criteria for ASPD, but most individuals with ASPD are not psychopaths" (1996, p. 1).

Although there is still disagreement about the relationship between psychopathy and ASPD, there is agreement that the two are heavily related (Skeem et al., 2011). The fact that psychopathy is defined via personality rather than behavioural measures means it is a more coherent and useful concept. For example, psychopaths are "as much as three or four times more likely to violently reoffend following release from custody" than non-psychopathic individuals, whereas the predictive power for offenders with ASPD is much lower (Hare, 1996, p. 1). This is the reason why the concept of psychopathy is still widely used in psychology, including by Paulhus and Williams when they investigated the dark triad.

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Williams et al. present the four-factor model of psychopathy (2007). The traits in this description will form a major part of the investigation into Stalin's personality. These four factors are together strongly intercorrelated with each other and together construct the "superordinate" of psychopathy (2007, p. 215). The four factors are interpersonal manipulation, antisocial behaviour, erratic lifestyle and callous affect. The behavioural patterns listed below, as they interact with the four-factor model of psychopathy will now be assessed light of Stalin's behaviour.

Firstly, the factor interpersonal manipulation will be examined, of which two behaviours will be examined. The first group of behaviours is "pathological lying, conning, and manipulating" (Williams et al., 2007, p. 209). The great purge, where Stalin systemically removed any and every obstacle to his absolute control over the Soviet Union, provides several examples of these traits. One comes in his use of hostages in the form of family members and supporters of his perceived political enemies at purge trials. Often, the accused would be threatened with the deaths of their family members, including children, if they did not confess exactly what Stalin desired them to at the trials (Conquest, 2018). For example, Stalin was only able to convince Zinoviev and Kamenev to acquiesce to his demands to go on trial and confess to various crimes (that they were innocent of) by guaranteeing that they, their supporters and their families would be spared execution. Twenty-four hours after their trial they were executed. In the following months and years their supporters and family members were arrested and shot or sent to their deaths in labour camps (Conquest, 2018). This shows how Stalin lied to people in order to manipulate them to his will and then broke his promises immediately after he got what he wanted. There are more examples of similar behaviour below.

The second group of behaviours of the interpersonal manipulation factor is "superficial charm and deceit", which is often deployed in the process of manipulation (Harms & Sherman, 2021, p. 37). Stalin abounded with charm, indeed "the foundation of Stalin's power in the party was not fear: it was charm" (Montefiore, 2010, p. 49). When Stalin "set his mind to charming a man, he was irresistible", he inspired a sense of trust and greatly impressed many with his temperament (2010, p. 49). One of his Lieutenants, Sudoplatov, thought "it was hard to imagine such a man could deceive you" (Montefiore, 2010, p. 50). Yugoslav communist Djilas was "swept up by Stalin and his witticisms" in 1944 on a visit to

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Moscow (Djilas, 1962, p. 87). When Stalin wanted to get people to do what he wanted, he often resorted to flattery, writing to Molotov “I could cover you with kisses in gratitude for your action” (2010, p. 46). It is clear to see that Stalin was able to charm people, although many later saw through this façade. For example Djilas later referred to Stalin as “one of the cruellest, most despotic personalities in human history” (1962, p. 86).

The second factor in the four-factor model of psychopathy is antisocial behaviour, including criminal behaviour. This represents the willingness to transgress social norms and is therefore differently defined according to social contexts (Crego & Widiger, 2015). Over the course of his life, Stalin was responsible for millions of deaths, many of them illegally carried out, even by Soviet law (Conquest, 2018). Additionally, before Stalin’s rise to power he carried out train and bank robberies, clearly exceeding the threshold for criminal behaviour, even considering differences in social norms (Montefiore, 2008). His willingness to transgress social norms like keeping promises and not killing children is also shown in the examples above and below.

The third factor is erratic lifestyle which reflects “undependability, recklessness, and impulsivity” (Williams et al., 2007, p. 209). In fact, over the course of his career Stalin was generally “dull, cool [and] calculating” (Conquest, 2018, p. 64). However, Stalin often “got carried away by hubris”, for instance his “reckless” military offensives against the Germans in early 1942 went against the advice of his military professionals and caused the Red Army great losses (Reynolds, 2011, p. 1). Likewise, Stalin made many impulsive economic decisions, which in part stemmed from the narcissistic belief that he knew best. These decisions, by the admission of the Khrushchev era Central Committee organ *Kommunist*, “caused immense damage to agriculture which still suffers from the results of the cult of Stalin’s personality” (Conquest, 2018, p. 323). Aside from the hubris of narcissism, Stalin “often acted out of anger or spite” in carrying out impulsive measures, as can be seen in his killings of people who were of no threat to him, for example his killing of Yagoda for a perceived slight (2018, p. 64).

The fourth factor is callous affect which is defined by “low empathy and a general lack of concern for other people” (Williams et al., 2007, p. 209). As can already be seen by many of the other examples listed, Stalin had little to no empathy for anyone around him. Over the course of his life, Stalin was directly responsible for the deaths of millions of people and

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often took a direct interest in their demise. For example, he maintained close oversight over the Gulag camp system and was directly responsible for the brutal conditions in the camps which led to millions of deaths. What is remarkable is that his lack of empathy extended even to those closest to him. For example, his son attempted suicide at the age of 18 by shooting himself, in part due his father's poor treatment of him, however doctors managed to save his life. In response, Stalin remarked "He can't even shoot straight" (Brackman, 2004, p. 194). It can be seen that Stalin had very little or no empathy for other human beings, an assertion which historians support. For example, Kotkin notes that Stalin was "not capable of genuine empathy" (2014, p. 544).

Narcissism

Narcissism has long been studied in psychology, and the concept was made especially popular by Freud. Individuals who are very narcissistic are generally "vain and grandiose" and feel entitled because they believe themselves to be better than others (Lyons, 2019, pp. 9–10). Campbell et al. state that narcissism contains three components: "the self, interpersonal relationships and self-regulatory strategies" (2011, p. 269). These will be examined in turn below.

The first component, the narcissistic self, is defined by a sense of one's own uniqueness, "vanity, a sense of entitlement and a desire for power and esteem." (Campbell et al., 2011, p. 269). There is much evidence for this being true in the case of Stalin. Even before Stalin's rise to power, a fellow Bolshevik roommate complained of his "egotism" (Montefiore, 2008, p. 356). This became more easily recognisable once Stalin reached a position of power. Taylor and Lee describe how a "failure of differentiation", where someone ascribes their own feeling, beliefs and interests to the state, facilitates "narcissistic entitlement" (2021, p. 1). This failure of differentiation was indeed the case with Stalin, who believed he was a "leader of genius" in whom "the revolutionary cause was personified" (Tucker, 1992, p. 21). Indeed, Montefiore describes Stalin's opinion of himself as being a "messianic hero" (2010, p. 51). This view of himself was later reinforced by an immense cult of personality, which reached bizarre proportions. This visibly appeared in the vast number of representations of Stalin in the form of paintings, statues and writing across the Soviet Union (see Figure 1

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below). Figure 1 below is representative of many propaganda posters of the period. Stalin is the largest figure in the poster and is seen directing the army to victory against Nazi Germany. In reality, Stalin was militarily incompetent. His cult of personality was also pronounced in the sciences where the enforced view of Stalin as “an inexhaustible fount of wisdom” meant that scientists who wrote pieces that did not conform to Stalin’s views were often executed (Conquest, 2018, p. 323). This cult of personality reached absurd proportions, philosophically Stalin “was celebrated as a profound critic of Hegel, as the first to elucidate certain pronouncements of Aristotle, as the only man to bring out the full significance of Kant’s theories”, despite in reality making negligible contributions to only communist literature (2018, p. 323). As can be seen Stalin was vain with an incredible desire for power and esteem which led to the development of an immense cult of personality centred around praising his leadership as well his intellectual and military ability.

Figure 1 (next page): “During the war ...”, Vlasob, 1943 - (Pisch, 2016)

Мүһарибенин кедишинде Гызыл Орду надр ордусу олмушдур. Гызыл Орду назырны мүһарибе элминин толаб этдики ними, дүшмөнин зөиф ва күчлү чаһатларини нөзере длагла она сөрраст зәрбе эндирмәин өнрәмишдир.



В ходе войны Красная Армия стала надровой армией. Она научилась бить врага наверняка с учетом его слабых и сильных сторон, как этого требует современная военная наука.



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The second component of narcissism is its effect on interpersonal relationships, which often contain “low levels of empathy and emotional intimacy”, narcissists often have many shallow relationships which can become “manipulative and exploitative” (Campbell et al., 2011, p. 269). Stalin’s personal relationships were defined by low empathy. In his early years in Georgia he had many relationships with women and “had no compunction in abandoning fiancées, wives and children” (Montefiore, 2008, p. 110). His constant need for dominance over his wife and lack of care for her led to her suicide in 1932 (Montefiore, 2010).

According to Stalin’s daughter, after his wife’s death, Stalin never visited her grave once (Alliluyeva, 1967). This was in part because she had disagreed with his policies. This almost total lack of empathy towards people so close to him is indicative of his wider lack of empathy. Stalin was also adept at using people purely instrumentally in order to achieve his goals, and the disposing of them when he saw fit. For example, during the great purge Stalin executed 2 different NKVD (secret police) chiefs, Yagoda and Yezhov. Yezhov was executed near the end of the purge because Stalin wanted “shift the blame” of the excesses of the purge onto him (Jansen & Petrov, 2002, p. 161). This shows how shallow Stalin’s relationships with even his closest allies were.

The third component of narcissism, self-regulatory strategies, entails the maintenance of strategies for maintaining their inflated views of themselves. These strategies often involve seeking opportunities for attention and admiration, bragging, taking credit from other’s work and playing games in relationships (Campbell et al., 2011, p. 269). This is clear to see in Stalin. Tucker relates how Stalin’s difficult childhood, growing up in a household where his drunken father regularly beat him and his mother, meant Stalin found a “rock of inner security by forming an idealized image of himself” (Tucker, 1992, p. 18). Later in life Stalin fully took on this identity, for example by discarding his surname Djughashvili, and adopting the Russified “Stalin” in the mold of Lenin, a man who he looked up to. From this point Stalin’s energy was “invested in the unceasing effort to prove the ideal self in action and gain others’ affirmation of it” (1992, pp. 18–19). This description correlates with his actions. For example, after his disastrous collectivisation campaign in the early 1930s, he wrote an article “Dizzy with Success” where he claimed the campaign was a success and blamed lower level officials for his own failures (Montefiore, 2010, p. 54). Another example lies after

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the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, where his policies were partly responsible for the destruction of large parts of the Red Army. Instead of taking responsibility for his mistakes, he blamed his Generals and shot many of them. The practice of blaming others for his own mistakes was one of the characteristics of his rule, a fact well explained by the narcissist self-regulatory strategy which requires a maintenance of the view of one's inflated self-worth.

Machiavellianism

The trait of Machiavellianism is derived from Machiavelli's book *The Prince*, concerning advice on how a prince should go about politics (Christie & Geis, 1970). The trait is well summed up by the following quote from the book. A prince should aim to "appear merciful, faithful, humane, religious, upright, and to be so, but with a mind so framed that should you require not to be so, you may be able and know how to change to the opposite"

(Machiavelli, 1515, p. 85). In short the personality trait is defined by the "use of strategic manipulation flexibly in order to achieve one's own goals" (Lyons, 2019, p. 9).

Machiavellians switch between cooperation and competition depending on the social context and are not averse to using emotional manipulation to achieve their goals.

Monaghan et al. propose that Machiavellianism consists of two main facets: the views dimension and the tactics dimension (2018). Altogether Machiavellianism is "the higher-order aggregate of these two dimensions" (2018, p. 162). These two facets will be used in the analysis of Stalin's personality.

The first dimension is the views dimension, which incorporates negative ideas about human nature, primarily the idea that "humanity is untrustworthy and selfish" (Monaghan et al., 2018, p. 162). Stalin did indeed have this view of people, his "view of humanity was cynical" (Conquest, 2018, p. 64). For example, in response to Yugoslav complainants of rape and theft by the Red Army, he asked whether it was not understandable that a soldier "has fun with a woman or takes some trifle" at the end of a long campaign (Djilas, 1962, p. 78).

Concurrently, Stalin constantly assumed that people and states were scheming against him and the Soviet Union. This was perhaps influenced by the fact that Stalin was "said to have been a constant reader of Machiavelli" (Conquest, 2018, p. 63).

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The second dimension is the tactics dimension, which is the use of “immoral behaviour to achieve a goal” (Monaghan et al., 2018, p. 162). Stalin was Montefiore directly calls Stalin’s methods Machiavellian and Stalin’s methods in international statecraft have been directly recognised as “Machiavellian” by Birt in his analysis of Stalin’s personality (Birt, 1993, p. 621; Montefiore, 2008). Bukharin, one of his political opponents described him as “an unprincipled intriguer who subordinates everything to the preservation of his power. He changes theories depending on whom he wants to get rid of at the moment.” (Cohen, 1980, p. 286). This shows his subordination of all else to the attainment and maintenance of power, in the purest Machiavellian sense. His use of Machiavellian tactics also extended to international politics. For example, in the post-war spirit of cooperation, Stalin promised the US and the UK that Eastern European countries captured by the Red Army would have free elections once the war was over (Gaddis, 1997). However, in reality he set up loyal communist proxy governments instead and by 1948 most of Eastern Europe was under Soviet control.

Assessment

As can be seen, Stalin’s behaviour correlates strongly with the behavioural markings of psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism, and therefore those of a dark triad individual. The question naturally arises exactly how indicative this correlation is of his personality. It is possible that the examples used in this section are not representative of his wider behaviour. However, evidence from multiple historians supports the assertion that Stalin was a dark triad individual. For example, Birt directly notes that Stalin was a narcissist and a Machiavellian (1993). Additionally, Service directly calls him a psychopath (2004). Many other experts draw attention to a swathe of dysfunctional traits Stalin had. These range from paranoia to inferiority complexes, which both for example can suggest narcissism (Montefiore, 2008; Tucker, 1992). Therefore, it can be seen that the evidence used in this assessment is representative of Stalin’s personality.

Chapter V - Stalin's Rise to Power

In order to analyse the mediating effect of domestic political institutions on Stalin's employment of dark triad behavioural traits to rise to power this section will analyse the process through which Stalin came closer to absolute power over the Soviet Union. This process occurred at two different periods, firstly during the Tsarist era, then during the early Soviet Union. During the first period, Stalin joined the Bolshevik faction of Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) and rose to a position of prominence. During the second period, Stalin was a member of the nascent government of the Soviet Union and gradually gained and then consolidated his power. After tracing Stalin's gain of power in each period, the degree to which the domestic political institutions match the description of having latitude for improvisation in manipulation, poorly defined rules and regulations and loose political structure will be assessed. Then the interaction of Stalin's behavioural traits with these institutions will be analysed.

Part 1 – Imperial Russia

Early Years: The Empire in Turmoil

The first stage of the process in Stalin's rise to power was his joining of the SDLP and gain in importance within the Bolshevik wing of the party in the last days of the Russian Empire.

First a brief historical overview will be necessary. The last years of the Russian Empire were marked by rapid changes and rising discontent against the autocratic regime of the Tsar. After the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, feudalism came to an end and industrialisation picked up rapidly leading to the Empire's largest cities booming in population (Waldron, 1997). Very poor conditions among industrial workers and peasants led to a rising number of strikes in the cities and a few peasant uprisings.

This ferment was already being felt in Georgia, then a part of the Russian empire, at the turn of the 20th century. Stalin, real name Joseph Djugashvili, was the son of a Georgian shoe cobbler. He became interested in Marxism while he was studying at a seminary in Tiflis (Montefiore, 2008). After his expulsion from the seminary (either for Marxist propaganda,

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or for his fathering and abandonment of a child) he began to get involved with socialist movements in Georgia around this time, especially the SDLP and began to organise strikes and protests in Tiflis. After reading the works of Lenin and his first encounters with the Tsarist secret police, the Okhrana, he became increasingly radicalised. Eventually, his group of socialists assassinated the railways director at the local railway works, who had fought against the strikes he organised. This marked his entry into the “world apart”, the so called *konspiratsia*, the underworld where secret policemen and revolutionary terrorists engaged in a “duel for the Russian Empire” (Montefiore, 2008, p. 123). It was a world with no rules, without morality and defined by assassinations and conspiracy. This marked a distinct change in Stalin’s life, he was forced to abandon his job and as he was constantly pursued by secret police, changed identity multiple times and always carried a firearm. It was in this context that Stalin was elected to the Tiflis Marxist Committee, on the basis of his “competence and ruthlessness” (Montefiore, 2008, p. 129). Pursued by the secret police, he left for Batumi and conducted several violent actions, killing informers, setting fire to warehouses and staging riots.

All in all, Stalin continued to act in the underground *konspiratsia* virtually up until 1917, gradually gaining power and influence within the Bolshevik faction of the SDLP (Montefiore, 2008). The Bolshevik faction within the SDLP was generally more hard-line than their opposition the Mensheviks. This ascent in the Bolshevik leadership owed as much to his success against the government as his success in intrigues against the Mensheviks within the socialist opposition. In any case, his manoeuvring for Bolshevik control of the Socialist movement in the Caucasus came to fruition, often by underhanded means, and Lenin took him under his wing. Lenin particularly valued Stalin’s more unconventional skills. A major example of this was the Tiflis bank robbery organised by Stalin in 1907, which gained 250,000 roubles (more than 3.4 million US dollars in today’s money) for the party (Montefiore, 2008). Stalin was elected to the Bolshevik Central Committee in 1912, a position he held for the rest of his life.

The Domestic Political Institutions in Tsarist Russia and during the Civil War

Pre 1905 Russia was a deeply autocratic society, and the reforms following the 1905 revolution made little difference to this (Waldron, 1997). The Okhrana, the Tsarist secret police, were very effective and maintained a huge network of spies and informers to keep the ruling aristocracy in power. Any challenges to Tsarist authority were thus bound to meet violent resistance. An illustrative example is the Lena Massacre of 1912, where 270 gold miners were killed by government troops after going on strike. Therefore, any resistance to the government had to come in the form of underground action. Participation in the underground world of the *konspiratsia* was the only way that dissidents were able to function. In order to be successful, it was necessary to adhere closely to the “amoral” rules of this world and be sufficiently brutal to survive (Montefiore, 2008, p. 123). Paranoia was also necessary as one of the Okhrana’s favoured methods was the insertion of informers into dissident networks.

This stage of Stalin’s rise to power concerned itself not with working through the existing political institutions but instead using violence and conspiracy to attain his goals. By the very nature of this work there were no rules and a loose political organisation at the lower levels of the Bolshevik party. This fits with the conditions outlined in the literature review that allow dark triad individuals to succeed.

Stalin’s dark triad traits equipped him perfectly to deal with this underground world of evasion and terror. He was mostly able to succeed in evading the Okhrana due to his paranoia and generally dim view of humanity, seldom extending trust towards anyone and happily executing suspected informers (Montefiore, 2008). His almost non-existent empathy from an early age meant that he was happy to cause or sustain casualties in order to advance his cause. For example, after 13 of his Marxists were killed in the Batumi massacre of 1902, he was delighted, saying “we lost comrades, but we won!... the whiplash and sabre render us a great service, hastening to revolutionize any innocent bystanders” (Montefiore, 2008, p. 138). He was also more than happy to kill many innocent civilians in the Tiflis heist which gained money for the Bolshevik cause. During the Tsarist period it became clear to some of his revolutionary allies that “people mattered to him only in so far as he could use them for the good of the cause or for his own political advancement and private comfort

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and pleasure” (Service, 2004, p. 95). His instrumental use of others and disregard for their lives corresponds well with the actions of a Machiavellian psychopath.

His manipulateness and Machiavellian tactics were also a large factor in his rise to the upper echelons of the Bolshevik party. In Georgia he often spread lies about political opponents and undermined his fellow socialists, whilst simultaneously presenting himself as a devoted advocate of the working class. Indeed, one of his Menshevik contemporaries complained “he’ll use any means if the ends justify them”, which is perhaps one of the clearest indications of a Machiavellian mindset (Montefiore, 2008, p. 173). On the other hand, he was able to leverage a magnetic charm to gain allies and supporters when the occasion demanded. Furthermore, his narcissism furnished him with a “self-image as a man on a sacred mission” providing him with almost superhuman confidence in his own abilities (Montefiore, 2008, p. 365). Altogether this constellation of dark triad traits set him up well to succeed in the political institutions of the *konspiratsia* and by extension the Bolshevik party.

Part 2 - Post-revolutionary Soviet Union

The October Revolution and the Civil War

The Russian Empire's disastrous losses in the first world war and the growing dissatisfaction of the working class were among the factors that led to the February revolution of 1917, leading a provisional government. This turmoil provided Stalin with further opportunity to ascend the rungs of the party ladder. He was able to get himself elected as one of the members of the party's decision-making bureau. This time period was "Stalin's only experience of open democratic politics" (Montefiore, 2008, p. 397). However, Stalin was one of the party's strongest advocates for a violent revolution against the government, which was successful in October, establishing the Bolsheviks as the new government. The subsequent civil war lasted until 1923 and ended in a Bolshevik victory. Because of Stalin's "enthusiasm for virtually indiscriminate violence" and utter lack of care about Red Army personnel losses, his brief career as a military commander was unsuccessful (Service, 2004, p. 194). After his return to Moscow, he was able to rise to the position of General Secretary of the Russian Communist Party, with his ally Lenin's blessing. Lenin "knew that Stalin, whom he teased as a 'wild factionalist', would do whatever was necessary for victory" in the factional infighting that was rife in the party at that time (Service, 2004, p. 211).

The End of the Civil War and the Death of Lenin

Although most Bolsheviks got their hands dirty during the civil war, it was once the civil war was over that Stalin's "maladjusted personality" really began to stand out as he turned against his comrades in an effort to solidify his power (Service, 2004, p. 198).

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was formally established in 1922, the same year that Lenin suffered a debilitating stroke (Kotkin, 2014). Stalin spent the early 1920s building up a patronage network with junior and regional party functionaries, ensuring a base of support. The next years would demonstrate his mastery of Machiavellian power politics.

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Lenin died in early 1924, meaning the party no longer had a leader (Service, 2004). A power struggle developed in the Central Committee of the party. During Lenin's illness, Stalin had already developed an alliance with Kamenev and Zinoviev, the so-called triumvirate, against Trotsky who now led a faction of the party called the left opposition. Kamenev and Zinoviev feared that Trotsky would try to establish complete control over the government and allied with Stalin to prevent this (Service, 2004). However, after Trotsky had been side lined, Stalin moved towards the right of the party and sided with Bukharin against Kamenev and Zinoviev. Using his position as General Secretary of the party, he was able to, with help from allies, continually demote opposition politicians. This meant that by the late 1920s, members of the "United Opposition", consisting of Trotsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev had been expelled from the party or demoted to minor positions (Service, 2004). After demoting Kamenev from the Politburo in 1926, Stalin was able to add three members who were completely loyal to him: Voroshilov, Kalinin and Molotov. After dealing with the united opposition, Stalin was able to move against Bukharin and the right in 1929 by beginning a programme of agriculture collectivisation, which the right avidly opposed. Bukharin was expelled from the Politburo in 1929 (Cohen, 1980). In this fashion, Stalin was slowly able to build his power until the end of the 1920s by systematically removing the opposition to him and replacing them with stooges like Molotov and Voroshilov. The loyalty of Voroshilov and many of Stalin's other allies was maintained by blackmail (Conquest, 2018). For example, Kalinin, who vocally opposed Stalin's disastrous agricultural reforms, was exposed by Stalin to have spent state funds on his mistress, a ballerina (Montefiore, 2010). Despite the allegations being false, Kalinin was forced to submit and toe Stalin's line.

Consolidation and The Great Purge 1930 - 1953

For much of the 1920s there was "significant social pluralism within the authoritarian framework of the one-party dictatorship" in the USSR (Cohen, 1980, p. 270). Genuine debate was still happening within the decision-making bodies of the USSR and there was still a small degree of economic, academic and bureaucratic freedom. However, Rykov, Bukharin and Tomsky's speeches at a Politburo meeting in 1929 where they stated "we are against

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questions of party leadership being decided by one person” amounted to a “defiant last stand” against Stalin (Tucker, 1992, p. 138). By this point “Stalin’s dominance of policy making was indisputable” (1992, p. 138). Nonetheless, factions still formed in the party leadership and often had the goal of ousting Stalin as the leader of the Soviet Union. This was mainly because of Stalin’s role in the disastrous collectivisation programme which had driven much of the country to famine and economic ruin. These factions were dealt with in turn. A very prominent and one of the last major attempts to openly oppose what was becoming Stalin’s dictatorship came in the Ryutin affair. Ryutin was a party secretary in Moscow. In 1932 he authored an “Appeal to All Party Members”, which contained a damning indictment of Stalin for the economic and social disasters inflicted on the country, criticised Stalin’s dictatorship and the lack of free speech and argued for an end to Stalin’s leadership. As soon as he and his group of allies was informed on, he was sentenced to 10 years in jail, and politicians Zinoviev and Kamenev, who were found with copies of the appeal were expelled from the party and sentenced to exile. It is worth noting that an infuriated Stalin had demanded his execution, but the rest of the politburo was against such extreme measures, forcing a compromise. This shows that Stalin had not yet achieved complete dictatorship over the USSR, a goal that he was to pursue in the years to come.

With visible opposition to Stalin unsuccessful, Stalin’s opponents were forced to move underground. By this stage, most old Bolsheviks (those who had been party members before the revolution) opposed Stalin’s rule and his project of “socialist construction” which entailed state centralisation and poor living conditions for most of society as the USSR industrialised (Tucker, 1992). One old Bolshevik noted they were “living with fear and horror in our hearts” in the state they had “created with our own hands” (Tucker, 1992, p. 242). Old Bolsheviks and others formed opposition blocs which were monitored by the NKVD, who reported directly to Stalin (Kotkin, 2014). Even though any dissention against Stalin amongst non-elites resulted in prison time (or worse) by the early 1930s, Stalin was still disappointed that the Politburo was not totally subservient to his demands. Furthermore, the power of the opposition blocs was not to be underestimated – most of what they said about Stalin’s horrific mismanagement of the economy was true, as were their concerns of Stalin’s power and brutality. These concerns were shared by many ordinary members of the Soviet Union. The dire conditions in the Soviet Union, including famine, led to desperate

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individuals going as far as assassinating party officials. Stalin began carefully preparing his coup de grâce to finally achieve total power – the great purge.

The Ryutin affair had already sparked a purge in the party, with over 800,000 members expelled in 1934 (Conquest, 2018). But Stalin wanted to destroy all opposition to his rule, not just expel members from the party. Kirov was a powerful ally of Stalin who nonetheless had vocally opposed the execution of Ryutin and was not afraid to stand up to Stalin on occasion. When Kirov was assassinated in 1934, this resulted in “an atmosphere of violence” where those deemed responsible for the murder “could be wiped out without the sort of arguments he had encountered over Ryutin” (Conquest, 2018, p. 46). Additionally, Kirov, one of Stalin’s remaining barriers to absolute power had been removed. Although it has never been conclusively proven, strong evidence suggests Kirov was assassinated on Stalin’s orders, possibly using blackmail to force the NKVD chief, Yagoda, to carry it out clandestinely. Stalin pinned the murder on those remaining who still resisted his power, and anyone seen to possibly be against his regime. Almost immediately after the murder of Kirov, Stalin tabled a motion of emergency, speeding up trials of political prisoners and mandating instantaneous death penalties in many cases. Thousands were arrested around the country and often summarily executed. In order to remove his political rivals Stalin set up a series of show trials in Moscow where his political opponents effectively had confessions beaten out of them and were executed. This included almost all of his political opponents remaining. Zinoviev, Kamenev and Bukharin were among those found guilty and shot. Equally important to the removal of all those Stalin perceived as threats was the creation of an atmosphere where everyone perceived as not totally subservient to Stalin was persecuted. The millions of deaths and millions more imprisoned in labour camps over the course of the decade created a pervasive culture of fear. After the great purge Stalin held onto absolute power for the rest of his life and scarcely anyone dared to challenge his grip on the party apparatus.

The Domestic Political Institutions in the USSR 1920-1953

After the revolution, there was significant pluralism and room for debate within the communist party (Cohen, 1980). However, political power was still subordinate to the

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communist party and significant debate was not tolerated outside of it. This meant that political power depended on the small clique of individuals within these bodies and gaining power meant gaining their favour. However, Stalin had no interest in even this small power sharing arrangement and did his best to centralise power in his hands.

The domestic political institutions of the time greatly helped Stalin's deployment of dark triad behavioural traits. The party's Leninist philosophy of revolutionary vanguardism meant that only a small group of people were entrusted with first achieving the revolution and then running the Soviet Union after the revolution. Tucker explains the downsides of this system well:

"While the Bolshevik oligarchical tradition militated against a leader's dictatorial rule over the party elite, Lenin and his fellow founders of the party-state had created no institutional safeguards against a dictatorship. Lenin, although a lawyer by training, did not—especially in the formative first period after the Revolution—uphold the rule of law either in practice or as an ideal" (1992, p. 140)

Most of the revolutionaries had no experience of governance and were very suddenly entrusted with the building of a communist state. Positions like Stalin's role of General Secretary of the Central Committee were poorly defined and grew in power as the individual who held the title grew in power (Montefiore, 2010). Additionally, many members of the important decision-making bodies in the Soviet Union held multiple roles across different departments, leading to large amounts of power being concentrated in the hands of very few individuals.

This partly arose because the Bolsheviks were prepared to accept "any practical short-cut in the interest of the immediate success and security of the movement" (Daniels, 1988, p. 410). Ironically, the devotion to this form of Leninism was even declared by those who would later abhor the moral realities it would create. Even Ryutin, who later lost his life in an attempt to depose Stalin over the suffering of ordinary people stated in the early 1920s that in contrast to the Mensheviks the Bolsheviks "always subordinated the principles of democracy to revolutionary expediency" and would "continue to do this in the future" (Daniels, 1988, p. 196). Tragically, those who comprised the "conscience of the revolution" resolved to play by Stalin's Machiavellian playbook, paying no mind to checks and balances

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(Daniels, 1988, p. 411). Most believed they could maintain pluralism within the leadership through agreement and negotiation. It is no surprise that the more moderate, humanist Bolsheviks lost out to Stalin's barbarism.

This description of domestic political institutions is a much more extreme version of the Darwinist environment described by Kets de Vries and Mathieu in respect to companies which seek profit above all else (Kets de Vries, 2012; Mathieu, 2021). It is also well described by the earlier outline of domestic political institutions with latitude for improvisation in manipulation, poorly defined rules and regulations and loose political structure. The post-revolutionary Soviet Union had all of these features. The poorly defined rules and regulations are reflected in the almost non-existent safeguards to dictatorship and lack of rule of law and independent judiciary. The loose political structure is evidenced by the fact that the power of positions grew as their holders grew in power and not vice versa. These two factors combined gave Stalin great room for improvisation in Machiavellian actions.

Stalin was perfectly placed to exploit the domestic political institutions and was not shy of using every tool in the Machiavellian toolbox. For example, he had a device installed on Kremlin telephones which gave the "facility to eavesdrop on the conversations of dozens of the most influential communist leaders" allowing him to gain advance knowledge of any plots against him (Service, 2004, p. 253). His unscrupulous use of blackmail gained him puppets in the party, and led to the suicide of those with a heavy conscience, as in the case of Trotsky's secretary (Tucker, 1992). Utterly unscrupulous, he was happy to murder his old Bolshevik comrades and millions of others in his consolidation of power. At the same time, he utilised his charisma to charm lower cadres and built a pervasive cult of personality which ensured his association with the Soviet State and ensured treason and anti-Stalinism were one and the same thing. Crucially, the domestic political institutions allowed him to deploy all his Machiavellian skills through the large amount of power in his hands, giving him a considerable advantage in the struggle for power.

Part 3 - Summary

This case study sought to answer the question “To what degree do domestic political institutions facilitate the rise to and consolidation of power by dark triad personality trait individuals?”. For domestic political institutions to play a significant role in the rise to power of dark triad individuals in this case study two premises have to hold true. The first is that Stalin’s dark triad personality made a significant positive impact on his rise to power. The second is that the prevailing political institutions were a significant factor in facilitating Stalin’s use of dark triad behaviour to attain power. Both of these premises hold true, as is explained below.

With regards to the first premise, that Stalin’s dark triad personality made a significant positive impact on his rise to power, it was shown in the literature review how dark triad behaviour can aid an individual’s rise to power. More generally, Birt describes the conditions in which personality is a good explanatory variable in a political event (1993). There are two main questions. The first is actor dispensability, would the same decision have been made by any other actor in the same position? Stalin was the most devious and Machiavellian personality in the whole Bolshevik leadership. For example, because Trotsky and other oppositionists were “attached to theory for its own sake and not just as a device for political manipulation” they often argued among themselves (1988, p. 410). In contrast, Stalin flipped positions on theory many times in order to form alliances to outmanoeuvre his opponents. Perhaps the most extreme example of his Machiavellian uniqueness was his murder of his old comrades in arms through assassination and execution. Indeed, within the party, “the only notable Old Bolshevik capable of “individual terror” [the murder or assassination of individuals] as a political act was Stalin” (Tucker, 1992, p. 413). This reluctance of Old Bolsheviks to kill their own was also reflected in their decision to spare Ryutin. Stalin was alone among the Bolsheviks in being prepared to take the most extreme measures possible under the domestic political institutions to maintain and consolidate his power. In the case of Stalin, given the prevailing institutions, Service even concludes that none of Stalin’s opponents “had much chance against him” (2004, p. 29). Stalin’s Machiavellian deviousness and psychopathic “lack of moral or other inhibitions” placed him at an extreme not matched by other members of the party, making him an indispensable actor (Conquest, 2018, p. 46).

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The second question is action dispensability, were the actions of the person involved in altering the outcome or was the outcome the result of other forces? It is abundantly clear that the actions of Stalin were a major cause in his rise to power. Although several macro historical processes created some of the conditions for Stalin's rise to power, these processes could easily have resulted in another leader. Individual action was the difference maker in who rose to lead the Soviet Union. Stalin's prowess in the underground *konspiratsia* guaranteed him a top spot in the Bolshevik leadership. Furthermore, Stalin's exploitation of the Leninist post-civil war political institutions in the USSR was shown to have given him a decisive edge in the contest for leadership. Indeed, Daniels alleges that Stalin's ruthless personality "played a decisive role" in the transformation of the Soviet Union into a dictatorship (1988, p. 411).

With regards to personality, a minor point that must additionally be addressed is the idea that "power corrupts". If this were true, then Stalin's personality would no longer be relevant as anyone in a position of power would become corrupted. This is in no way proven, and some research suggests that behaviour in power is linked to dispositions evident before gaining power (Magee & Langner, 2008). In any case, this paper has shown that Stalin's dark triad behaviour began far before he gained power, in the Caucasus. Therefore, even if power corrupts, Stalin was a thoroughly corrupted individual to begin with.

Therefore, Stalin was an indispensable actor and carried out indispensable actions during the establishment of a dictatorship in the Soviet Union, so we can conclude that Stalin's dark triad personality made a significant positive impact on his rise to power.

The second premise, that the prevailing political institutions were a significant factor in facilitating Stalin's use of dark triad behaviour to attain power, is best answered using a counterfactual. Given different political institutions, perhaps with a robust rule of law, would another leader have gained power in the Soviet Union instead of Stalin? Many historians single out Trotsky as Stalin's main contender for the leadership of the party after Lenin's death (Service, 2004; Tucker, 1992). Trotsky, and indeed other politicians like Kamenev and Zinoviev were more popular than Stalin was. A fascinating glimpse of what might have been was shown by the more open democracy in the brief period after the February revolution where Trotsky marshalled huge popular support with the Soviets. Open

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democracy was for Stalin, according to Montefiore, “hardly the ideal environment for someone trained in the cutthroat clan intrigues of the Caucasus”, perhaps explaining why Trotsky was seen as the rising star of the party, rather than him (2008, p. 397). If this period of open democracy had lasted and been supported by strong rules and regulations it is likely that Trotsky or another politician would have gained control of the Soviet Union. For example, if Lenin had implemented a system of rule of law, judicial supervision may have rendered many of the tactics Stalin used like blackmail, eavesdropping and assassination as unfeasible. This shows the importance of the prevailing political institutions in Stalin’s rise to power.

Therefore, because Stalin’s dark triad personality made a significant difference in his rise to power, and because the prevailing domestic political institutions played a significant role in facilitating his use of dark triad behaviour, we can conclude from this case study that domestic political institutions played a significant role in facilitating Stalin’s rise to and consolidation of power.

Chapter VI - Discussion

The case study of Stalin's rise to power in the Soviet Union corresponded very well with many existing findings and assumptions in the literature review. Firstly, the crucial impact of Stalin's psychopathology has been shown on his rise to power, vindicating the use of psychological methods in political science. Secondly, the dark triad construct has been shown to correlate well with Stalin's actions and therefore possibly his psychological profile. Thirdly, his both his will and ability to rise to power have been shown to be correlated to his personality traits. Lastly, the hypothesis that domestic political institutions with latitude for improvisation in manipulation, poorly defined rules and regulations and loose political structure will facilitate the rise to power of dark triad individuals has been given preliminary backing by the case study. This provides ground for further analysis in how political institutions interact with dark triad trait individuals.

One question that remains is the degree to which the findings of this paper are more widely applicable. One major limitation of this paper is that it is based on only a single case study. Nonetheless, some factors already point to the suggestion that at least some of the findings from this paper will be applicable to other cases. The first is that the findings from this case correlate with the findings of institutions that result in dark triad leadership in the business literature presented in the literature review. The second is the support of historians for parallel assertions that "in a setting of a one-party rule, power struggles will be won by the most ruthless contender" (Carroll, 2010, p. 1). This lends credence to the argument that certain domestic political institutions facilitate the rise to power of leaders with dark triad personality traits.

In order to refine this assertion a negative case where the aforementioned domestic political institutions existed but a dark triad individual did not rise to power will be presented. In the case of the Finnish Civil war democracy established itself after an extraordinarily brutal war which killed 1% of the country's population (Tepora & Roselius, 2014). During and immediately after the war, the political system had all but broken down and there was large latitude for Machiavellian improvisation. Nonetheless, there are a few reasons why a dark triad leader did not take control. The first is that the extremists on both sides ceased receiving foreign support after the end of World War 1 and the start of the

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Russian Civil War. The second is that the main other contenders for leadership were working within the established Finnish parliament and trying to establish a democracy. From this, a few main lessons can be gleaned. The first is that unforeseen circumstances can easily waylay any attempt at leadership, as in the case of the foreign withdrawal from Finland. The second is that there is not always a well-positioned dark triad individual to take advantage of circumstances. For example, during this period, Mannerheim could likely have established a dictatorship with relative ease but chose not to. These two factors are equally present in Stalin's case, but he was fortunate to prevail in matters of luck and to be in the right position at the right time owing to his climb within the ranks of Bolshevik leadership pre-revolution.

Therefore, given good luck and the existence of a dark triad leader to seize the initiative, it could be that the findings of this case are more widely applicable. This is not to attempt to establish a determinist rule, rather to say that domestic political institutions with latitude for improvisation in manipulation, poorly defined rules and regulations and loose political structure give dark triad politicians a comparative advantage in rising to power when compared with their opponents. Many other factors can and do come into play, meaning that the findings of this paper must always be applied paying special care to individual context. More research is, however, needed in order to supplement the findings of the case study.

The findings of this paper have a number of implications. Firstly, as discussed above, it is unlikely that Stalin would have come to power in the Soviet Union had he not been able to use Machiavellian means. More popular and ideologically coherent politicians like Trotsky would have won out. Nonetheless, this is not necessarily because Stalin was unable to operate in more open systems. As discussed above he was able to gain in power and popularity during the party democracy of 1917. This was largely due to his charm and narcissistic ability to radiate "an image of a prototypically effective leader" (Nevicka et al., 2011, p. 1). This, along with much of the research surveyed in the literature review, suggests that dark triad leaders are often able to gain positions of power in democracies and circumstances where they are unable to exercise their more violent proclivities. Instead, they rely on their softer skills like social ability and self-serving confidence. This is an important corollary to the main finding of the paper. Although Machiavellian conditions

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advantage dark triad individuals more than, for example, democracies with checks and balances on power, an important implication of this paper is that dark triad skills like charm, social ability and self-confidence also give dark triad individuals an advantage in seeking leadership in other situations.

Secondly, although it was not a focus of this paper, the findings nonetheless imply that dark triad individuals lead in a fashion which often results in widespread negative outcomes. From only the material reviewed in this paper it was seen that Stalin suppressed science, caused damage to agriculture which lasted decades and almost caused the Soviet Union to be overrun by the Nazis through his incompetence and preoccupation with his self-image. One very important implication lies in the connection of it to research which suggests that post-revolutionary countries and countries with dictatorships are more likely to become involved in international conflict (Colgan & Weeks, 2015). It seems plausible that dark triad leaders, comfortable with brutal and domineering domestic policies, would carry these traits forward to a militarily aggressive foreign policy. In this case of Stalin, who invaded nations like Finland and the Baltic states before World War 2, installed proxy governments in Eastern Europe and engaged in sabre-rattling with the west like the Berlin Blockade in the post war period, this was indeed the case. This implies that domestic political institutions with latitude for improvisation in manipulation, poorly defined rules and regulations and loose political structure could be a driver of international conflict by providing the ground for dark triad individuals to rise to power. Overall, the implications of this research give credence to a reassessment of other theories of international conflict in the light of dark triad behaviour in leadership.

Chapter VII - Conclusion

Hunter-gatherer societies often have a “reverse dominance hierarchy” (Turchin, 2016, p. 127). This means mechanisms are maintained to prevent “powerful and aggressive men” from gaining “too much power and control over resources, to the detriment of everybody else in the band” (2016, p. 127). At first these mechanisms are mild, including gossip, ridicule and criticism, however, if the upstart persists, ostracism and even homicide can result. These measures, which have been around for the majority of human history, were practiced independently by groups across time and space. The complexities of modern life have rendered these measures less feasible. Nonetheless, Tucker laments that the “history of Soviet Russia, and of Europe and the whole world” would have changed for the better if Tomsy had shot Stalin rather than himself after their meeting on a summer evening in 1936 (1992, p. 413). In summary, the exclusion of dark triad individuals from power has been a goal for almost as long as humans have gathered in groups. Understanding how dark triad individuals rise to power, and crucially, how to prevent them from doing so², could help to usher in a kinder, less Hobbesian, political order.

This essay has attempted to provide evidence towards answering the question “To what degree do domestic political institutions facilitate the rise to and consolidation of power by dark triad personality trait individuals?” using the example of Joseph Stalin’s rise to power in the Soviet Union. It hypothesised that domestic political institutions with latitude for improvisation in manipulation, poorly defined rules and regulations and loose political structure would give an advantage in rising to power to an individual with dark triad personality traits.

This paper has provided evidence towards this hypothesis being true in the case of Stalin. After showing that Stalin’s behaviour matches the profile of dark triad trait behaviour, it was shown that his behaviour gave him an advantage first in the amoral *konspiratsia* and then the oligarchic conditions in the post-revolutionary leadership. In an even more extreme fashion than in business leadership structures, Stalin was able to use these circumstances to deploy every Machiavellian tool at his disposal including blackmail, surveillance and assassination to gain and consolidate power in a fashion that eclipsed the efforts of his non

² The ethics of this are of course questionable, but an entirely different paper could be written on this matter

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dark triad opposition. Additionally, the material in the business literature, support from historians and the negative case presented in the discussion section suggest that the finding that domestic political institutions with latitude for improvisation in manipulation, poorly defined rules and regulations and loose political structure facilitate the rise to power of dark triad individuals is more widely applicable.

This paper opens up several avenues for further research. Firstly, this paper has only analysed one case study of a dark triad rise to power in one political system. In order for the findings of this paper to be given further credibility it will be necessary to undertake research on different situations in which dark triad leaders rose to power. Secondly, the implications of this study outlined in the discussion represent fertile ground for future study. The implication that dark triad leaders could also be advantaged in systems with stronger rules and regulations is not far-fetched, indeed Nai and Martinez i Coma show they are widespread worldwide in democracies (2019). Furthermore, the implication that dark triad individuals lead in a more self-serving and domineering manner both domestically and internationally than non-dark triad leaders is already implied by the research of Colgan and Weeks and deserves further investigation (2015). If both of these implications are supported by research, and dark triad leaders were overrepresented in all systems while presiding over negative outcomes, it would raise important, and worrying, questions about the nature of the political structures which govern our societies.

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