

## Registration of the Population in the Uzbek SSR and the Results of the Implementation of the Depopulation Measure In 1937

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**Abstrak:** The article discusses the process of conducting a population census in the Uzbek SSR in 1937. It also sheds light on the underlying motives of the Soviet government representatives in charge of conducting the census, as well as the specific goals outlined. The article highlights that during the census process conducted in 1937 in the republic's territories, population statistics were compiled by the Central Statistical Administration, and the final results of this initiative were analyzed separately based on regional statistical sources. Furthermore, it mentions that the subsequent years were anticipated to witness the regulation of the socio-economic and political life in the republic based on the outcomes of this census. Moreover, the article discusses how the regulations of the census conducted in 1937 were analyzed in comparison with previous years' census regulations. The article also touches upon the challenges and shortcomings of the preparatory work for the census process and provides some scientific conclusions and recommendations. In addition, it emphasizes the political atmosphere of the 1930s, marked by the Great Purge, and how this environment influenced both the accuracy of census data and the attitudes of local officials responsible for data collection. The study underlines that the census was not merely a demographic exercise but also a political tool used by the Soviet authorities to monitor loyalty, suppress dissent, and justify administrative decisions. It reveals that many census workers and statisticians faced persecution due to alleged "incorrect" results that contradicted the state's expectations. By critically analyzing archival materials, the article contributes to a deeper understanding of how political repression and bureaucratic control shaped demographic policies in the Uzbek SSR.

**Keyword:** population census, census regulations, population count, gender composition, population natural growth, statistics, permanent population, population density, city, district, rural population, penalties, accountant, supervisor-instructor.

**Introduction:** The population census of 1937 in the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (Uzbek SSR) remains one of the most controversial and politically significant demographic undertakings in Soviet history. Conducted during the height of Stalin's "Great Purge," the census was intended to demonstrate the success of socialist policies and the rapid growth of the Soviet population. However, the results revealed a significant decline in population numbers, which contradicted official propaganda and led to the repression of many statisticians, demographers, and administrators involved in the process. In Uzbekistan, as in other Soviet republics, the census reflected not only demographic realities but also the influence of political control, censorship, and fear. This study aims to analyze the 1937 population registration process in the Uzbek SSR, explore the motivations of the Soviet authorities behind its implementation, and examine the social, political, and economic implications of the census results. Special attention is given to archival documents and newly discovered historical materials that reveal how the data collection was organized, manipulated, and later suppressed. The research also highlights how the outcomes of this census influenced subsequent state policies and population management in the republic. By re-evaluating the 1937 census within the broader context of Soviet political history, the



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article seeks to shed light on the intersection between statistics, ideology, and repression in the governance of Central Asia.

**Methodology:** The methodology of this study is based on a qualitative historical and analytical approach aimed at examining the process, implementation, and consequences of the 1937 population census in the Uzbek SSR. The research relies primarily on archival materials, official statistical reports, and historical documents, including records from the Central Statistical Administration and фонд-based archival sources, which provide detailed evidence on census organization, data collection procedures, and administrative practices. A systematic document analysis was conducted to evaluate census regulations, questionnaires, and preparatory measures, as well as to compare the 1937 census with earlier population registrations of 1897, 1920, and 1926 in order to identify structural differences and methodological changes.

The study also employs a comparative-historical method to assess the influence of socio-political conditions, particularly the Great Purge, on the accuracy and reliability of demographic data. Through content analysis, key variables such as population size, regional distribution, religious affiliation, and administrative reporting practices were examined. Special attention was given to identifying discrepancies between official results and archival evidence, revealing patterns of data manipulation, underreporting, and suppression. Additionally, interpretative analysis was used to explore the role of political ideology and state control in shaping census outcomes and the behavior of census personnel.

To ensure validity, the research follows a chronological and contextual framework, linking demographic processes with broader political and social developments of the 1930s. This methodological design allows for a comprehensive understanding of the census as both a statistical and political instrument, highlighting the interaction between governance, repression, and data production, and providing a critical basis for re-evaluating demographic history in the Uzbek SSR.

**Result and Discussion:** Understanding the nature and depth of each social-political event, such as the population size, ethnicity, daily lifestyle patterns, population mobility, population density, and investigating demographic developments, is essential for accurate comprehension and profound analysis. Therefore, the study of social, economic, and political conflicts that intensified at the end of the 19th century and in the early 20th century, as well as historical events in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, has led to profound changes in the socio-economic, political, and civil life of present-day Uzbekistan and significant demographic shifts in its territories. After the Turkestan region was annexed by the Russian Empire, the imperial administration, and later the Soviet government, conducted various "population registration campaigns" over the years to determine information such as the population size (by regions), ethnicity, religious beliefs, and daily lifestyle patterns. The initial campaign was held in 1897, followed by similar events, including one in November 1917, where a census was conducted in all rural areas of the Russian Empire (including districts and villages in the Turkestan region). Population registration activities were also carried out in 1920 and 1926 in all of Russia and its allied republics.

During the 1937 population registration campaign in the Uzbek SSR, individuals who participated and those who were subjected to the final outcomes of the campaign faced accusations of "negligence in their duties, failure to take the campaign seriously," or were labeled as providing unreliable information. Many individuals were subsequently deported or faced other consequences due to the information gathered about them during this campaign.

During the "Years of Great Terror," the practice of identifying and punishing "enemies of the people" became widespread, leading to a wide range of accusations and suspicions. The registration campaign in the republic underwent significant restructuring, with specific tasks assigned to all levels of leadership. Throughout the 1930s, many accountants, supervisors, instructors, and various levels of administrative officials in Uzbekistan SSR were accused of errors and shortcomings in the population registration process.

Although investigations regarding the registration of the population have been announced, particularly pertaining to the historical context, the event that took place in 1937 hasn't undergone serious analysis neither during the Soviet era nor in the years of independence. Firstly, the documents related to



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the registration process in 1937 have been concealed in archives, and this information hasn't been openly disclosed to the wider public until recent years of independence.

Many of those who devised the plan for the events of 1937 and those responsible for registering the population, as well as the majority of analysts tasked with analyzing the gathered information, were either exiled or subjected to various forms of punishment due to the failure to provide positive outcomes from these processes. Moreover, statistical data compiled about the population wasn't genuinely acknowledged by the authorities, leading to the concealment of even more information under the labels of "confidential" and "ultra-confidential" for nearly half a century[1].

Nearly ten years after the population registration campaign of 1926, a new registration initiative was designated to be carried out in 1937. Considering the social-economic policies pursued during those years by the central government, the registration process was adjusted with a focus on comparing the population growth between the years 1926 and 1937. The objective was to update the information held by the government about the population and to establish the basis for subsequent economic "five-year plans."

The population registration campaign that took place on January 6, 1937, was designated to span a total of six days for the completion of the social-political process. However, in reality, there wasn't enough time allotted to register all the inhabitants of the republic within the specified timeframe. The primary reason cited for this was the inefficiency of the personnel tasked with conducting the registration and the failure to establish adequate conditions and terms for the process. To ensure the successful implementation of this initiative, various authorities were granted additional powers. Residents who opposed the registration were warned about the consequences of non-compliance with the laws specified in the constitution. This situation echoes similar registration processes conducted in previous years.

To prepare for the population registration activities scheduled for January 1937, registration lists were compiled for all territories of the republic, including even the sparsely populated border areas and rural settlements, by November 26, 1936. These lists included the names of villages, the order numbers of houses, and the registrations of all types of state-related structures and buildings. Furthermore, throughout the course of this process, the primary aim was to compile comprehensive lists of all residents. In general, the statistical data regarding the population obtained through this registration process was utilized by central authorities over the years for administrative purposes in all regions.

The population census of urban and rural areas did not follow the same timeframe as in previous years; it was not predetermined. During the designated period, all personnel involved in the census worked tirelessly to complete the task. Additionally, while conducting the census, 14 supplementary questions were added, with some questions even incorporating additional sub-questions[3].

When the questions included in the census plan for 1937 were compared and analyzed in relation to those used in previous years' census plans, it was revealed that the only distinct addition in the 1937 census plan was the inclusion of a separate question asking about one's religion. This was identified based on documents that shed light on the process[2]. In the population census conducted in 1920 and 1926, there were no separate questions related to religion included in the census plan[4]. "Your religious?" is an example of a question with a qualitative component (within the question itself) that was included. In later years, apart from the question about religion, additional questions such as "Do you believe in religion or not?" were also provided to census takers for clarification regarding responses[5].

Based on the information provided, it is possible to infer that the inclusion of the separate question "Are you religious?" in the census questionnaire also drew attention to the issues faced by local residents who strongly adhered to their faith in various regions, as evidenced by similar events in previous years. By including this question in the 1937 census, it facilitated the identification of the extent to which the attitudes of local residents towards religion had changed between 1926 and 1937.

In addition, it was revealed through archival documents that those who were knowledgeable about the complete writing of their names in the 1937 census were also included in the list of suspects for execution[1]. It was confirmed that in a meeting held on December 27, 1936, during a session led by I. Nikich, the head of the Census Bureau of the Central Statistical Directorate, instructions were given



regarding such actions to be taken by census takers and supervisors[6].

If we analyze the information provided in the above sources, it appears that the systematic inclusion of individuals who were able to write their full names without errors in the list of suspects for execution was part of a regime aimed at inflating the figures of successful executions of "enemy elements" in the Uzbek SSR. This may have been undertaken by the Soviet government to demonstrate an increase in the effectiveness of actions carried out, in an attempt to bolster their achievements.

According to the final results of the 1937 population census, it was found that the population of the Uzbek SSR had significantly decreased, suggesting a considerable discrepancy compared to expectations, considering the massive mobilization efforts. Representatives from the central authorities identified numerous issues and shortcomings rather than genuine results from the census[7]. According to the information found in the archived documents kept under a confidential seal, it was revealed that a significant portion of leaders and many officials involved in the direct execution of this task were silenced, while some were deprived of their citizenship rights and exiled due to Stalin's harsh policies during those years. Additionally, it was discovered that some had been arrested and sent away[8]. One thing worth mentioning as important information is that in 1937, as part of the measures to be included in the register, more than 1 million accountants and supervisors-instructors were recruited by the USSR and fraternal republics. In our opinion, under the number cited, not only accountants and supervisors-instructors were enlisted, but also various personnel from different organizations who should provide assistance to this work to some extent (various organization leaders, representatives of internal affairs departments, village council workers, and others) have been included[9].

The final results of the conducted recruitment into the register, as well as the information regarding it, as emphasized above, indicate the strict confidentiality ensured under the red seal and the absolute prohibition of disclosure. The central government in 1937 scrutinized the information about the population gathered in all regions and intends to announce it to the public in a consolidated form as usual.

According to literature created with the aim of reflecting these events, it is emphasized that in the same year, the fact that the population of Uzbekistan SSR, estimated to be close to 800 thousand people, was not included in the register is confirmed[10]. Certainly, these are estimated figures. It is noted that such limitations are not only confined to the territory of the Uzbekistan SSR but have also been observed in other additional republics and in the central regions of Russia. Sources specific to this period indicate that there was a significant lack of transparency compared to previous measures in the national republics regarding the registration process in 1937, and awareness-raising efforts among the population were not adequately conducted. It is also emphasized that the local population of most regions did not participate in the registration[11].

During the population registration of 1937, "notices for accountants" were issued to the accountants responsible for registration. However, these "notices for accountants" were not consistently enforced. This inconsistency is a natural consequence, often encountered when calculating the final results of such measures by statisticians. Many accountants simply forwarded the registration documents to the population without properly filling them out or verifying them. This oversight may have been one of the minor reasons why the outcomes of these events were not accurately captured by the central authorities.

In the events of 1937, approximately 57% of the population (mainly in rural areas) responded positively to the question regarding their attitude towards the registration process in the registration documents[12]. During those years, the "Kizil Uzbekistan" newspaper, in several issues, also highlighted this situation, gathering its own views on the matter[13].

According to the Decree No. 121 of April 28, 1936, of the USSR Council of People's Commissars, the selection and approval of personnel for population registration were scheduled to be completed by November 1st, as stated. However, this task was not completed by the specified deadline[14]. N. Antipov[15] In the telegram sent by N. Antipov to local leaders regarding "preparation for the population registration process," it was indicated that only 47.9% of the required number of accountants for registration had been recruited in the Uzbek SSR, confirming that this task had not been carried out



in practice[16].

According to the official regime established for the 1937 campaign in Uzbekistan SSR, very few accountants for registration were formally appointed. Most of the appointed accountants were dismissed, and their daily activities during that year, contributing to the registration process, are documented in archival records that shed light on the events of the registration campaign[17]. Additionally, another archival document confirms that the population identified in 1937 was lower compared to the population identified in 1926[18]. We believe one of the main reasons for this discrepancy is the ongoing repression, strict policies, population migration, and increased mortality rates during those years, leading to a decrease in the population count.

The information presented in the aforementioned sources indicates a comparative analysis, suggesting that the implementation of the "great purge" policy, not only in Uzbekistan SSR but also in other allied republics, significantly contributed to the reluctance of the population to participate in the census and the concealment of information about themselves from the registration. Moreover, during those years, the political environment in the republic was oppressive for the entire population. Additionally, the instructions issued by the center regarding the registration process, such as how individuals traveling on roads, in trains, vehicles, and other places should be registered, were often overlooked.

The analysis of the information highlighted above indicates that all the efforts to fabricate such information were aimed at reducing the final results of the 1937 census, both in terms of the population size of the Uzbek SSR and the precise information about the population. It seems that responsible leaders designated to undertake such manipulative actions and their clear goal was to withhold accurate information from the center regarding the population of the republic. This was because providing precise figures about the population to the center posed the risk of increased burden and concern for the local population in the following years. In previous years' censuses and similar undertakings, the trend among the population in the course of manipulative actions carried out among the population led to the final results of these events significantly improving the socio-economic situation of the republic and aiming to improve the standard of living of the population. However, these claims were not substantiated over the years.

**Conclusion:** The 1937 population census in the Uzbek SSR stands as a critical historical event that reveals the complex relationship between politics, ideology, and demographic science in the Soviet Union. The census, intended to showcase the achievements of socialism and population growth, instead exposed severe demographic losses, administrative failures, and the deep fear that dominated Soviet society during the Great Purge. The findings of this study demonstrate that the process of population registration in the Uzbek SSR was not purely statistical but deeply political — shaped by state control, propaganda, and the suppression of truth. Archival evidence confirms that many officials and statisticians who reported "unfavorable" results were accused of sabotage and punished, which led to the manipulation and concealment of real data. As a result, the 1937 census was declared invalid, and a new census was ordered in 1939 to align the numbers with the government's ideological expectations.

In conclusion, the 1937 census in the Uzbek SSR reflects how state power could distort scientific inquiry for political purposes. The event serves as a reminder of how the misuse of demographic data can lead to historical misrepresentation and social injustice. Understanding this episode helps scholars better comprehend the dynamics of Soviet governance, the control of information, and the lasting impact of political repression on the historiography of Uzbekistan.

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